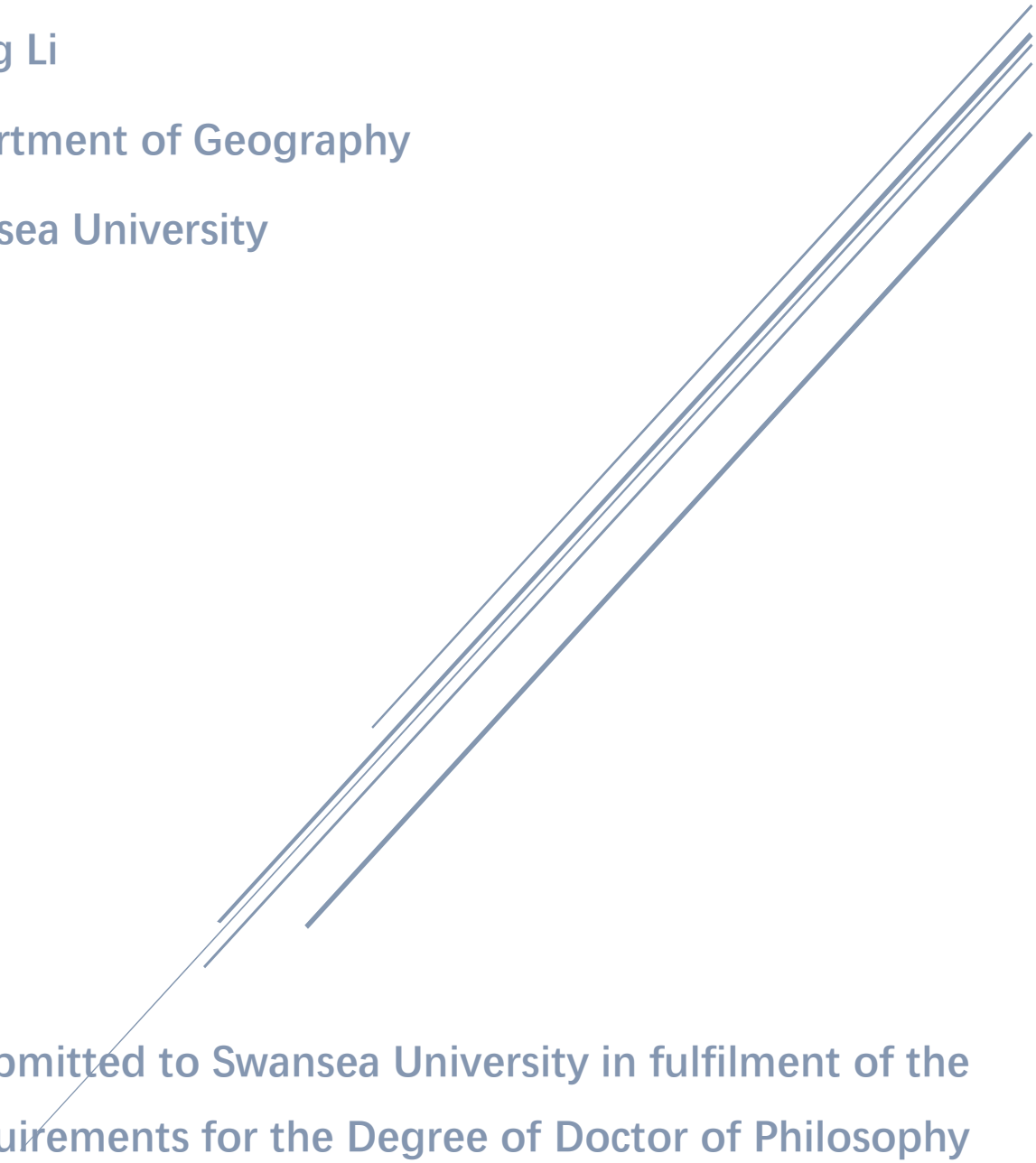
REORIENTING HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL MATERIALISM:

A Critique of Geopolitical Economy

Shang Li

Department of Geography

Swansea University



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Declarations

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

Despite the impact of David Harvey's Marxist thought, his concept of historical-geographical materialism has attracted limited attention. Standing with Harvey, this dissertation argues that Marxism and geography need to maintain a symbiotic relationship in the shape of historical- geographical materialism, which gives processes that internalize time and space ontological priority, eschewing both historical determinism and spatial fetishism. Departing from Harvey, the thesis constructs historical-geographical materialism by means of Marx's materialist conception of history, through a reinterpreted historical geography of modes of production. With the discovery of Marx's anthropological notebooks on Asiatic society, and the re-emergence of Asian studies after the Asian economic "miracles" of the 1970s, a more systematic elaboration of the Asiatic mode of production (AMP) has become possible. Starting by scrutinizing the patterns of ownership and mode of surplus extraction peculiar to the Asiatic mode of production, the present work demonstrates the geographical dimension of historical materialism by illustrating and defending the particularity and reasonability of the AMP in the panorama of Marx's historical geography of modes of production. By comparing the AMP in late imperial China and feudal Europe, and incorporating the concept of relation of intercourse into the traditional two-aspect formulation of modes of production with the aid of Marx's underutilized *Chronological Extracts*, the thesis depicts the transformative dynamics of pre-capitalism as it transitions into capitalism. This leads to an analysis of theories of crisis and revolution in relation to Covid-19 and social movements such as Black Lives Matter. The thesis points out the necessity of crisis under the capitalist mode of production and its relation to revolution, which cannot succeed unless the heterogeneous multitude unites to organize mass action under the identity of the labourer. Moreover, it demonstrates that historical-geographical materialism concerns not only the past but the present and future prospects of global society.

Contents

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I am much indebted to my parents, before and during my PhD studies. Their love reaching over the Eurasian landmass is the spiritual prop that backed me up when I feel sad

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Finally, as Engels said in 1883 and I subvocalized in 2019 at Highgate Cemetery, Marx’s name will endure through the ages, and so also will his work. I pay my respects to his thoughts, which form the very foundation of the thesis.

Tables and Figures

Introduction

Despite the recent resurgence of interest in Marxism after the 2008 financial crisis, Marxist geography had previously been pushed from centre stage, after twenty years of critical disciplinary preeminence. “Where, in the 1970s, Marxism was the dominant critical approach in human geography, today, feminist, anti-racist, queer and green geographies (among others) have extended, complicated and enriched the critical geographical imagination” (Castree, 1999, p. 138). Marxist geography, during its two decades of prominence from approximately 1970 to 1990, not only “offered a breathtaking global vista of the geographies of exploitation, oppression and injustice – and their causes – but laid out the ways in which geography was molded in the image of capital while simultaneously providing a non-neutral spatial and environmental framework for its reproduction” (Smith, 2001, p. 9). Nevertheless, despite some minor revivals during capitalist economic crises, Marx is too frequently deemed to be an outdated figure whose thoughts could no longer provide inspiration for analysing social-spatial phenomena. In this context, this dissertation might seem incorrigibly obstinate and nostalgic.

On the one hand, the author is aware of the criticism from post-structuralism and post-modernism. For postmodernist thinkers, “[e]ven emancipatory projects, such as historical materialism, occluded the possibility of sensing the many other injustices that were simply not permitted to appear within a given frame of reference (Clarke, 2015, p. 671). Thus, historical-geographical materialism embraces diversity, interrelation, and events, not by means of deconstruction but by incorporating process philosophy into historical materialism and undertaking a Spinozist revision of Marx’s concept of dialectics. On the other hand, by so doing, historical-geographical materialism revitalises

Marx's dialectical conception of totality, which "endeavour[s] to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 3). In this way, the reason why the author dons Marxian spectacles is not idolatry but the acknowledgement of the totality of capitalist mode of production; a concern with the contradictions within the process of capital accumulation; and ultimately with the aim of revolutionizing the immiserated proletariats and changing uneven geographical development across the globe.

At the time of the birth of modern geography, this discipline mainly served the purpose of imperialist global expansion and exploitation (Peet, 1977, p. 243). Although anarchist geographers such as Peter Kropotkin and Élisée Réclus emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they are "treated largely as a curiosity and any implied connections between politics and intellectual pursuits were studiously ignored" (Smith, 2001, p. 6). It was not until the 1960s, when there was a broader anti-establishment and counter-cultural mood in the social sciences that capitalist geography gave birth to its 'traitorous' child, Marxist geography. "[T]he world-wide social movements, strikes, and uprisings of the late 1960s fundamentally redefined social relevance: the new sophisticated mathematical methodologies were widely overtaken as their technocratic intent proved impotent to deal with the geographical aspects of the most pressing problems of the period" (Ibid., p. 8). In this sense, the birth of Marxist geography embodies the eruption of contradictions embedded in the rapid recovery of the capitalist mode of production after the Great Recession and the Second World War as an adjustment to a systematic crisis of capitalism, understood from a Marxist perspective. Consequently, "social scientists in the capitalist countries … were forced to recognize at least a state of crisis and to change the direction of their research towards an analysis of the resulting social problems" (Peet, 1977, p. 248).

Within the constellation of Marxist geographical scholars in the late 1960s and the 1970s, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey represent the two distinct, archetypical academic paths towards the historical-geographical materialist: respectively, Marxist assimilating geography and geographer assimilating Marxism. Lefebvre's major writings in his early years "were mainly philosophical in character" (Anderson, 1976/1989, p. 36). However, much of the reception of Lefebvre's work "has been in fields such as geography and urban studies, while the reception in the fields of political science and philosophy has been somewhat muted" (Elden, 2007, p. 102). Reflecting on May 68, Lefebvre "put the urban on the agenda as an explicit locus and target of political organizing" (Smith, 2003, p. vii). From The Right to the City (1968) to The Production of Space (1974), Lefebvre (1973/1976, p. 21; 1974/1991, p. 343) develops "[t]he reconsideration of Marxist concepts … optimally by taking account fully of space" as "capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and consequently … it has succeeded in achieving 'growth' … by occupying space, by producing a space". "As a consequence, Marx's analysis of the commodity-form must be supplemented by an account of the space it inhabits" (O'Kane, 2018, p. 265). More generally, Lefebvre's "central idea" is that "the mode of production organizes – produces – at the same time as certain kinds of social relations, its space (and its time)" (Lefebvre, 1986/2017, p. 238). "The new mode of production (the new society) appropriates, that is to say, adapts to its own ends, pre-existing space, whose patterns had been previously formed" (ibid.). In this sense, it is justifiable that Edward Soja (1989, p. 42) calls Lefebvre "the original and foremost historical and geographical materialist".

"For Harvey, despite the broad commonality of effort with Lefebvre, it was simply unrealistic that the contradictions between urbanism and industrial

capitalism are now resolved in favour of the urban" (Smith, 2003, p. xvii). Harvey's attention to Marxism began in 1969, after he moved to Baltimore, where he studied urban riots in black districts and urban black housing issues (Harvey, 2016, Ch1). His first systematic attempt at assimilating Marxism into geography is Social Justice and the City (1973). In this book, Harvey (1973/1988, pp. 302–303) acknowledged Lefebvre's pioneering efforts to use "Marx's method in the investigation of urban phenomena", though he stated that he had not "had the opportunity to read Lefebvre's La Pensée Marxiste et La Ville (1972) and La Revolution Urbaine (1970)" before he completed the book. But Harvey's analysis is closer to orthodox Marxist political economy than urban and spatial philosophy. In his Retrospect on The Limits to Capital, Harvey (2004, p. 544) stated that he "wanted to see how far [he] could get in understanding urbanization and geographical transformations from within the frame laid out in Marx's Capital, Theories of Surplus Value, the Grundrisse and some of the ancillary writings on political economy". Based on a critical analysis of the urban theories from the Chicago School to von Thünen, Muth, Alonso and the rediscovery of Engels, Harvey realized that the explanation of and solution to urban problems needs to be found in the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production. Harvey held positivist geography, popular in the 50s and 60s, and still in some circles today, to be counter-revolutionary. "Our task does not … lie in … the masochistic assemblage of some huge dossier on the daily injustices to the populace of the ghetto, over which we beat our breasts and commiserate with each other before retiring to our fireside comforts" (Harvey, 2016, Ch1). He maintained that Marxism could bring a new revolutionary paradigm to geography, and critically looked at the research methods at the time and the "capitalist market system and all its concomitant institutions" (ibid.). But Harvey did not intend to just rehearse and explain Marx's economic works. Rather, he "applied a radical political economy to the themes of modern geography" (Elden, 2001, p. 813). Thus, Harvey not only revivified the vitality of Marx's writings

through a day-to-day reading and interpretation of Capital and other economic works, but also conceived or revived various Marxist spatial theories such as uneven geographical development, accumulation by dispossession, the ‘spatial fix’ and time-space compression.

Although the analysis of spatial and urban issues by Marxist political economy occupied the predominant portion of Harvey’s oeuvre, the “candid introductions to Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference (1996) and Spaces of Hope (2001) make it crystal clear that he is absolutely committed to ‘foundationalism’ and ‘meta-theory’” (Doel, 2006, p. 57). Harvey stated that his concern is “with trying to rebuild Marxian meta-theory in such a way as to incorporate an understanding of spatio-temporality (and social-ecological issues) within its frame” (Harvey, 1996, p. 9). This is potentially an interminable project.

There is some controversy as to whether the early philosophers of dialectics and historical materialism considered space. Marian Sawer (1974, p. 63) concluded that, for Marx, the “geographical environment not only provided the necessary conditions of production, but also played an important and sometimes a crucial role in determining forms of production and social organisation”. Edward Soja (1989, p. 59), in contrast, maintained that “[t]he inherited orthodoxies of historical materialism left almost as little room for space as the rigid cocoons of bourgeois social science”. Defying the English sentiment that ‘one can’t both have one’s cake *and* eat it’, Harvey somehow combines these two poles. Harvey (1985, pp. 142–143) submits that Marx, on the one hand, “frequently admits of the significance of space and place in his writings”, yet, on the other hand, failed “to build a systematic and distinctively geographical and spatial dimension into his thought”. Harvey‘s project of repairing the wormhole of Marx’s meta-theory is called historical-geographical materialism. For Harvey (1989/1990, p. 355; 1996, pp. 7–8; pp. 111–112),

historical-geographical materialism is “an open-ended and dialectical mode of enquiry” which is premised on the understanding of process and relation. The dialectical process is not “outside of the concrete material conditions of the world in which we find ourselves”, and is inherently spatial. For this thesis, the starting point of historical-geographical materialism coincides with Engels. “[T]he production of the means to support human life and … the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in man’s better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange” (Engels, 1880/1989, p. 306). Standing with David Harvey, this dissertation argues that Marxism and geography need to maintain a symbiotic relationship in the shape of historical-geographical materialism, instead of either historical determinism or spatial fetishism. Differing from Harvey, however, this dissertation constructs historical-geographical materialism by means of Marx’s materialist conception of history, through a reinterpreted historical geography of modes of production, rather than political economy, although critical economic problems such as land rent and economic crisis are inevitably involved. When it comes to Harvey, in his hands, political economy becomes geopolitical economy. This thesis is a sympathetic critique, acknowledging the limitations of this notion and transcending it.

“Historical-geographical materialism starts from the premise that things (as objects and phenomena) exist, but that these objects or phenomena are the embodiment of (they interiorize) relationships; things become the outcome of processes that have themselves ontological priority” (Swyngedouw, 2000/2003, p. 45). For Marx and Engels, process and relation are two critical ways of observing the world, embodying in their critical concepts. The human is both “the ensemble of the social relations” (Marx, 1845/1975, p. 4) and the subject of sensuous activities that create history (Marx & Engels, 1845b/1975 p. 93).

Meanwhile, value as the key concept of Marx's political economy, is both the social relation of commodities (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 141) and an active factor whose changing and expanding form manifests the process of capital reproduction. (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 165). Seeing the world through the dual filters of process and relation, not only is the world seen as a flowing unity but one made up of countless mutually related fluids. As for relation in particular, "every stage in its emergence each part" is required to "be viewable as a relational microcosm of the whole, including its real history and potential for future development" (Ollman, 2003, p. 72). As for process in particular, it is the kernel of dialectics. In Engels' (1886/1990, p. 384) summary: "the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes". Therefore, Bertell Ollman (1993, cited in Harvey, 1996, p. 48) is right to say that "[d]ialectics restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common sense notion of 'thing' … with notions of 'process' … and 'relation'".

Thoughts of relation and process allowed Harvey to forge space into dialectics by referring to Alfred North Whitehead. In this view, "[s]pace and time are not … independent realities, but relations derived from processes and events" (Harvey, 1996, p. 256). However, in an article on space, Harvey (2006, p. 271) retraced his steps back to Social, Justice and the City (1973), arguing for the coexistence of three notions of space: absolute, relative and relational. "Absolute space is fixed and we record or plan events within its frame" (ibid., p. 272). Relative space may "be understood as a relationship between objects which exists only because objects exist and relate to each other (Harvey, 1973, cited in ibid., p. 271). Only relational space is "embedded in or internal to process" (ibid., p. 273). Whitehead firmly rejected the first two notions of space ontologically. Indeed, Whitehead (1920/2015, p. 11) maintains that, under the influence of ancient Greek philosophy, the natural entity has become the substratum for the factor, and the factor has been degraded into an attribute of the entity. Thus, in Greek

philosophy, entity is thus explained as matter whereas the attribute as the characteristic of the matter as perceived by the human subject. The possession of space by entities also makes space an attribute of the entity. The consequence of nature being regarded as a collection of things carrying various attributes is that the world is the continuity of the instantaneous position and shape of things. The relative concept of space is a significant improvement, compared to the absolute concept of space, because time and space are linked together ontologically for the first time. However, the relativity of time and space achieved by the switching of perspective, scenes, and measurements is constructed through human thought. When people perceive the relativity of time-space through contrasting metrics, they "are thinking 'heterogeneously' about nature" (ibid., p. 2). Whitehead insists that "nature is independent of thought" (ibid.). Therefore, this correlation is still external to nature. At the same time, this relative concept of time and space is discontinuous. In Whitehead's opinion, nature presents itself as the event (ibid., p. 10). Or in his later words, "the actual world is a process, and … the process is the becoming of actual entities" (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 22). Whitehead substituted "actual entity" or "event" for the traditional concept of substance. Moreover, Whitehead (1925/1948, p. 121) held that "[t]he effectiveness of an event beyond itself arises from the aspects of itself which go to form the prehended unities of other events". Therefore, "[a]ctual entities involve each other by reason of their prehensions of each other" and produce novelty (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 19; p. 21). Meanwhile, "[t]he continuity of nature arises from extension". Every event, or actual entity "extends over other events, and every event is extended over by other events" (Whitehead, 1920/2015, p. 39). As a result, narrowing the extension of events can only obtain smaller events. The smallest limit of the event, which is abstract rather than real, is called the event-particle by Whitehead. "The totality of event-particles will form a four-dimensional manifold, the extra dimension arising from time" (ibid., p. 57). In this light, the absolute

and relative concepts of time and space only exist in the epistemological sense, not the ontological sense. In this way, the essential fluidity, generativeness, complexity and relativity of the world dispel the simple concepts of moments and locations. Time and space are explained as “abstractions from the totality of prehensive unifications as mutually patterned in each other” (Whitehead, 1925/1948, p. 73).

Although Harvey kept the absolute and relative concepts of space somewhat conservative, it is undoubtedly of great significance to incorporate the process-relational concept of time and space into Marx’s historical materialism (cf. Pomeroy, 2004), and thus into geographical thought. First, this ensures the rejection of spatial fetishism. Soja (1989, p. 71) upholds the postmodern proclamation that it is now space more than time, geography more than history, that hides consequences from us. However, “[s]pace and time are never completely separable. So it’s far more likely that we’ll be able to speak of ‘modern space-time’ and ‘postmodern space-time’ than to suggest some linear historical narrative whereby ‘time and history’ give way to ‘space and geography’” (Clarke, 2006, 109; cf. Clarke, 2003). Secondly, Marx’s endorsement of the concepts of process and relation ensures that historical materialism naturally implies the dimension of space. Like Whitehead, Marx also opposed a commonsensical and mechanical concept of substance or matter. Unlike Whitehead, the core concept that runs through Marx’s oeuvre from beginning to end is labour. Marx (1844b/1975, p. 305) stated that “the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labour, nothing but the emergence of nature for man, so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his birth through himself, of his genesis”. Focusing on labour, the essential human activity, which is inherently accompanied by the extension of space, historical materialism believes that human material production and the reproduction of human themselves create history and

geography of human lives. At the same time, Marx abstracted and identified the metabolism of humans and nature within a duration of time and extension of space as a specific mode of production and linked modes of production in geographic space through concepts and theories such as the relation of intercourse and the global expedition of capital. Therefore, the process leading from pre-capitalist modes of production to the capitalist mode of production and then to the communist mode of production is also a process moving from the natural state of human labour to the state of alienation and then to total liberation and unalienated labour. This is both historical and dialectical. From a dialectical perspective, “only a change in the mode of production recovers for the worker his sense of self and its fulfilment” (Arthur, 1983, p. 70). Marx (1844b/1975, pp. 332–333) also argued that “[t]he outstanding achievement of Hegel's Phänomenologie and its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generative principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man … as the outcome of man’s own labour”. Therefore, historical materialism neither introduces dialectics to an earlier materialism, nor does it graft idealist dialectics onto an earlier materialism, but rather constitutes the unity of dialectics and materialism through real people and their historical development (Sun, 2007/2017, p. 447). In this sense, historical materialism and dialectical materialism are unified. Meanwhile, historical materialism inherently contains the germ of historical-geographical materialism.

As Swyngedouw (1999, p. 94) puts it, “historical-geographical materialism turns all geography into a historical geography (but not just of the past, but also of the present and the future).” Whilst fully accepting this premise, the present thesis takes a somewhat different path to Harvey. Through the deep excavation

of Marx's gold mine, it taps into the rich vein of spatial factors and diversity hidden in historical materialism. Regarding the fundamental practical activity of human production as the fundamental concept of historical materialism, the thesis depicts the historical geography of what Marx insisted were modes of production: from diversified pre-capitalist modes of production to the domination of the capitalist mode of production; and from capitalist domination to diversified revolutionary strategies and an open future. Additionally, the function of the urban–rural relationship, colonialization, the increasing cooperation and division of international production, the corresponding accelerated global flow of labour, means of production and product are critical factors which could be included in the triad of force of production–relation of production–relation of intercourse that has driven the transformation of modes of production (cf. Cox, 2021, p. 4; pp. 9–10). Nonetheless, let us put such far-ranging issues to one side and begin with the historical geography of the mode of production. In this context, as the reader will rapidly come to appreciate, particular emphasis is to be placed on the Asiatic mode of production (AMP), which – as a pre-eminently 'geographical' concept persistently dogged by controversy – is ripe for sustained reconsideration.

The investigation of the AMP, the subject of Chapter 1,[1] arises from the author's doubt about the unilinear five-stage social history that I was taught from primary school to university, particularly after coming to Europe. I had an intuition that geographically and socially variegated societies might experience different modes of production historically, and that their distinctiveness may persist into the present, and on into the future. In other words, Marx's historical materialism may also be called historical-geographical materialism. This intuition was soon backed up when I read Marx's *Preface* to *A Contribution to Critique of Political*

[1] A previous version of this work appeared as the article published in *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*. See Li (2020).

Economy, in which Marx put forward the AMP. Although both forces of production and relations of production disclose the particular historical stage of mode of production in any particular context and "[i]n acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production" (Marx, 1847/1976, p. 166), a contrastive reading of key works, mainly The German Ideology and the pre-capitalist chapter in the Grundrisse, reveals that Marx used the same historical prefix to refer to ownership and mode of production respectively, rather than productive forces and mode of production – i.e. there are the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeoise forms of ownership and modes of production in Marx's terminology, whereas productive forces often refer to the instruments of production and occur before the formation of a certain mode of production and particular relations of production. Accordingly, Chapter 1 analyses the distinctive position, within the historical geography of modes of production, of the AMP, specifically through its distinctive form of ownership. However, it should be noted that relations of production embrace not only forms of ownership but also, importantly, the mode of surplus extraction. Therefore, considering the extraction of rent as the general form of surplus extraction in the pre-capitalist era, distinctions between modes of rent extraction in different contexts will show clearer distinctions between modes of production (Chapter 2).

Although each chapter contains copious clarification and analysis of theories and concepts, the overall structure of the thesis is deliberately arranged to mirror the flow of history. In the light of dialectics and process philosophy, the social formation at a given location in space or during a certain period of history is not isolated but relational and transitory. The dynamics of the transformation between modes of production must be held to account for the fact that capitalism was born from feudalism in Europe, rather than the AMP in Asia. Chapter 3 adds a critical concept, relations of intercourse, to the traditional, two-

fold distinction between forces of production and relations of production, to tackle this issue. Thus, on the basis of the previous two chapters, the even more controversial question of the transition from pre-capitalist modes of production – basically the AMP and the feudal mode of production – to the capitalist mode of production, and correspondingly the divergence of East and West, is placed under scrutiny, setting these modes of production in process and considering matters relationally. Whilst acknowledging the revolutionary characteristics of capitalism compared to pre-capitalism, yet foregoing an analysis of the capitalist mode of production as comprehensive as that afforded to pre-capitalist modes of production previously, Chapter 4 focuses specifically on capitalism's inherent crisis tendencies within the broad sweep of world history discerned by historical-geographical materialism. In other words, it focuses on crisis in an attempt to map out the present conjuncture vis-à-vis the ultimate destruction of the capitalism mode of production.' The final chapter, Chapter 5, could have returned to Asia to conclude with an analysis of socialism with Chinese characteristics or to explore possible revolutionary tactics with Asiatic characteristics. However, incorporating race, which embodies the miserable but important position of Africa in the world historical geography, into the historical geography of modes of production, expands the scope of the thesis from Eurasia to the globe and will illustrate the unity of universality (the labourer) and particularity in historical-geographical materialism. In this way, the overall sense of purpose and specific focus of the thesis promises a broadening and enriching of historical-geographical materialism, which is a concept proposed by David Harvey and a theory already existing in Marx's works.

Chapter 1: Marx's Concept of The Asiatic Mode of Production and Its Historical Geography

1. Introduction

In the *Preface* to *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859, Marx (1859c/1987, p. 263) pointed out in summing up the progress of human history: "In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society." In the past one hundred and sixty years, scholars interested in summarizing Marx's "universal law" of human history have been arguing over this statement. The difficulty of securing a consensus is first and foremost because, conventionally, the mode of production is seen as the historical interaction of forces of production and relations of production, and is therefore considered an historical concept. As a result, Marx's invocation of geography in referring to the Asiatic mode of production (AMP) creates an inconsistency amongst this dialectically evolving historical mode of production – the ancient, medieval (feudal) and modern (capitalist) modes of production – making this statement seem contradictory and incoherent. Moreover, Marx never systematically elaborated on this concept in his published work, telling us how his so-called Asiatic mode of production was produced. Therefore, a vast space for understanding and misunderstanding is bequeathed by Marx's oeuvre.

The geographical dimension of this historical-geographical materialism, the AMP, is long buried by a Darwinian evolutionist and overly abstract universal interpretation of Marx's concept of the mode of production. Debate over the

validity of this concept has exhibited two periods of ascendency and two periods of decline since Marx first proposed it. The initial period of ascendency occurred in the Soviet Union during the late 1920s and declined after the 1930s (Sawer, 1977b, p. 335; Fogel, 1988, p. 56; Dunn, 1982/2011, p. 7), while a subsequent resurgence occurred in the 1960s, declining again after the 1970s (Sawer, 1977, p. 333; Dunn, 1982/2011, p. 121). Amidst these heated debates, opponents acknowledged that the statement on the AMP cannot be erased from Marx's writings (Godes, 1931, cited in Dunn, 1982/2011, p. 9): indeed, the errors of his writings "on the past should not be evaded or ignored, but identified and criticized" (Anderson, 1974b, p. 9). Nevertheless, most students of the Marxist history have written off the statement as an anomaly.

The most important reason why the first group of opponents refuse to view the AMP as an effective Marxist concept is that the characteristics of the concept that Marx described, such as the tax-rent form of surplus appropriation, was insufficiently unique to distinguish the Asiatic mode from other modes of production (Godes, 1931, cited in Blue, 1999, p. 104). Heinz Lubasz (1984, p. 479) argued that "the 'Asiatic mode of production' is simply the earliest variety of primitive communism". A. G. Prigozhin regarded the AMP as a "constant feudalism" that has existed since the "dissolution of the primitive communalism of 'prehistoric' times" (Prigozhin, 1934, cited in Blue, 1999, p. 106). V. V. Struve argued that the AMP, especially in the ancient Near East, should be subsumed under the slave-owning mode of production, because "the more important…form of exploitation in these societies…was the exploitation of slaves in the non-agricultural sector [such as irrigation works] by the state" (Struve, 1933, cited in Sawer, 1977b, p. 336; cf. Struve, 1965). Later on, he added that "the workers of the Umma royal estates were … slaves" since they had no field "to work on their own behalf to provide themselves" and salaried people-days, whose number is extremely small, is included as a subcategory

of man-days (Struve, 1934, cited in Krikh, 2016, p. 198). Guo Moruo (1930/1982, p. 30), in his *中国古代社会研究* (***Study of Ancient Chinese Society***) offers an analysis in accordance with the five stages that Marx characterized as the development sequence of Western history. He set the Zhou dynasty as the boundary, viewing the previous dynasties as primitive society. The Zhou dynasty before the Spring and Autumn Period is a slave society, and after this point a feudal society. These views of subsuming the AMP under other modes of production were finally recognized and approved by Stalin and the official Soviet textbooks. They transformed the historical evolution of ownership – tribal, ancient, and feudal – into the unilinear formulation of social formations, namely the evolution of primitive, slaveholding, feudal, capitalist, and socialist society.[2] The AMP was identified as Trotskyist ideology, as an anti-Marxist concept, contemptuously labelled "*Aziatchik*". It was thus excluded from the Soviet Union's official social-history formula (Tu, 2014, pp. 16–18). The exclusion of the AMP is, on the one hand, due to the fact that Marx's research on ancient Asiatic society came late in his life, and was not noticed by scholars in the Soviet Union until 1958, when Marx's excerpts on Kovalevski were first published. On the other hand, since the Soviet Union's official "line struggle", the Stalinist unilinear schema of social development has overwhelmed the geographical disparity theory that Plekhanov had already discovered and which long dominated Asian history research in both the Soviet Union and China.

The second group of opponents acknowledge that the AMP differs from the ancient and feudal modes of production, but they still refused to acknowledge it as an effective concept, since Marx's discourse on this concept is inconsistent with empirical facts. Perry Anderson stated that "attempts to build a developed theory of the 'Asiatic mode of production' from the scattered legacies left by

[2] Zhao Jiaxiang (2017) provided evidence that the five-stage theory was put forward not by Stalin but by Marx and Engels.

Marx and Engels…are essentially misguided" (Anderson, 1974a, p. 494). Anderson levelled the accusation of crude inadequacy towards Marx's comprehension of Asian history (ibid., p. 492). Despite the validity of Anderson's objections with respect to certain historical facts, particularly in relation to the Taiping Rebellion, if the AMP is a valid Marxist concept, whether it is effective depends not on whether it matches each and every empirical fact but on its internal coherence vis-à-vis Marx's own formulations of historical materialism, even if it indeed deviates from empirical facts (Hindess & Hirst, 1975, pp. 1–2). Sawer (1977a, p, 232) agreed that "the AMP concept legitimated the view that… pre-capitalist societies with widely divergent juridico-politico-religious complexions could not be said to share the same mode of production: hence even if the AMP concept is empirically false, it has had a much more profound effect on Marxist scholarship than Anderson acknowledges". Moreover, even if Marx's concept of the AMP in India does not conform to its characteristics in Russia, it cannot be concluded that the AMP concept is somehow not in line with empirical facts, because the concept contains rich historical-geographical differences, in the same way that capitalism varies from the 17th Century to the 21st, and from Britain to India.

Compared to its opponents, the voice of defenders of the concept of the AMP sounds relatively muted. Earlier defenders such as G.V. Plekhanov and Mad'iar conceive of the AMP being determined by its particular geographical conditions and deriving from primitive society. It is a "form of development parallel to slavery in the West" (ibid., p. 88; Blue, 1999, p. 103). However, their arguments were quickly suppressed by the Stalinist unilinear schema of social development, and were not rediscovered until 1960, when the "question of the AMP was included in the programme of the Oriental section" issued by the Communist Party of France (Mehdi, 1988, p. 214). Lichtheim, basing his reading on the *Grundrisse,* analysed "how tribal society was replaced by

Oriental, Graeco-Roman, and German-medieval forms of private and common ownership – with the Oriental form historically closer to tribal property", and argued that "Marx and Engels did not really resolve the problem of the origins of the Oriental state" (Jessop & Wheatley, 1999, p. 333). Contemporary defences can be found in Jun Li's (1995, pp. 335–352; 1996) work. He analysed Marx's work on the concept of the AMP chronologically, compared it with other pre-capitalist modes of production, and defined the concept as "a stratified society in which land is formally owned by the state, but in practice belongs to the small communities" (Li, 1995, p. 348). However, both Lichteim and Li discarded Plekhanov's geographical theory of the mode of production, and devoted themselves – entirely, in the case of Lichteim, and partially, in the case of Li – to the unilinear scheme of social development.

In fact, in Marx, history and geography are dialectically unified. The two are unified in human production and daily life, and their interaction with the unique geographical environment. In this kind of interaction, each state, ethnic group, commune, clan, and family has its own unique social process. When the uniqueness of this group meets the uniqueness of the other, it creates new forms of interaction, among humans and between humans and nature. From this perspective, Marx's historical materialism is essentially historical-geographical materialism. And the concept of the AMP is precisely an important tool for excavating the gold-mine of Marx's historical geography.

Based on a close reading of different translations of Marx' s texts, in English, Chinese, French, and German, which help to clarify the misunderstanding of Marx's concepts of mode of production, ownership, and property, and their contemporary interpretations, this chapter argues for the possibility of understanding the mode of production in terms of property relations by clarifying the two-fold character of property; demonstrating the validity of the concept of

the AMP by decomposing the historical modes of production into two camps; clarifying its implications and locating its historical geography by distinguishing it from other modes of production, pointing out its significance for anti-capitalism and anti-privatisation.

2. Property and Ownership: the Two-fold Character of *Eigentum*

Before turning to Marx's discussion of the AMP, we need to clarify a translation problem in *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*. The English version translates *Gemeineigentum* in the original German text as either 'communal property' or 'communal ownership', depending on context, and translates *Privateigentum* into 'private property' (Marx, 1859b/1961, p. 21; Marx, 1859c/1987, p. 275). In the French translation, the two German terms are translated as *propriété privée* and *propriété collective*. And in the Chinese version, they are rendered as *公有制* [communal ownership] and *私有制* [private ownership]. In both English and Chinese, ownership and property have different meanings in everyday understanding. Ownership refers to the act, state or right of possessing something. Property refers to the possession, the thing that is owned, the object of ownership, while *Eigentum* (in German) and *propriété* (in French) can, in each case, be used to mean ownership and property interchangeably. When Marx himself uses the term *Eigentum*, he often plays on a double meaning. Just as the commodity has a two-fold character for Marx, so too does *Eigentum*. Let us examine its twin aspects in turn.

One aspect of this two-fold character is the concrete property that exists in the production process. It embodies the specific possessive relationship formed during and after the specific labour process and its crystallisation in the matter produced. At one point in the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1857/1973, p. 493) points out that

> Property (*Eigentum*), in so far as it is only the conscious relation – and posited in regard to the individual by the community, and proclaimed and guaranteed as law – to the conditions of production as *his own,* so that the producer's being appears also in the objective conditions *belonging to him* – is only realized by production itself. The real appropriation takes place not in the mental but in the real, active relation to these conditions – in their real positing as the conditions of his subjective activity.

Here *Eigentum* obviously refers to the property being possessed and to the totality of the abstract possessive relationship crystalized in the property. Marx (1844b/1975, p. 279) maintains that "private property [*Privateigentum*] is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of *alienated labour*, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself". Therefore, investigating private property, in the sense Marx intends, must be based on the investigation of alienated labour. And the investigation of alienated labour entails examining the relationships between the labourer and nature (the worker and the means of production in the capitalist mode of production); the relationship of the owner of the means of production to nature; and of the owner of the means of production to the labourer. In the same way, the inspection of communal property must rely on the investigation of the labour form corresponding to the form of property, namely the investigation of the relationship between a member of the commune and the land, the commune and the land, as well as the commune and its members. Therefore, from Marx's perspective, property refers to the concrete reality of the crystalized relations of production during and after the production process.

The other aspect of *Eigentum* is the abstract but objective property relation, ownership, historically transformed by the generations of human historical

activities such as warfare, trade, revolution and reform, and sequentially affirmed by the development of juridical systems. The specific property relationship in the production process involves only the labourer, the owner of means of production, and nature while ownership entails other forms of property possession. Only when the other intrudes into the closed loop of the specific property relationship, will the original native property relationship be changed, forming an historical change of ownership. This historical change is a change of abstract relationship, because if we put a bunch of rice produced by communal labour and another bunch of rice produced by individual labour together, except for the nuances of the shape, colour and smell, we can't actually distinguish them. What identifies this bunch of rice as communal property and that bunch of rice as private property is the relationship of production crystalized in them, that is, the ownership of the land and the relationship between the commune and its members.

What is more, *Eigentum* is not only abstract but also objective, and its objectivity appears as its constant historical transformation. Marx stated in *The Communist Manifesto* that "Alle Eigentumsverhältnisse waren einem beständigen geschichtlichen Wechsel, einer beständigen geschichtlichen Veränderung unterworfen (Marx & Engels, 1848/1977, p. 475). [All property relations were subject to constant historical transformations and constant historical reforms.[3]]" At an early stage of history, these transformations are

[3] The sentence is translated by the author from the French and Chinese versions. In the English version of *The Communist Manifesto*, the sentence is written as "all property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions" (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976, p. 498). While in the Chinese version, it is written as *"一切所有制都经历了经常的历史更替、经常的历史变更"* (Marx & Engels, 1848/1997, p. 41), which may be translated into English as "all the ownership experienced constant historical substitutions and constant historical transformation." In the French version, it appears as "La propriété a subi de constants changements, de continuelles transformations historiques" (Marx & Engels, 1848/1982, p. 45), which may be translated into English as "the property regime has undergone constant changes and constant historical transformations." It seems that the French and Chinese versions are closer to the original German sentence while the English version

realised by warfare. Since property in the early stages of history is only the conscious possession of certain material that amounts to means of production, it is easy to understand that everyone who needs such to produce his material life tends to possess them. When two groups intending to claim possession of scarce resources encounter one another, warfare typically ensues. Marx (1857/1973, p. 491) stated that

> The only barrier which the community can encounter in relating to the natural conditions of production – the earth – as to *its own property* (if we jump ahead to the settled peoples) is *another community,* which already claims it as its own inorganic body. *Warfare* is therefore one of the earliest occupations of each of these naturally arisen communities, both for the defence of their property and for obtaining new property.

This kind of warfare not only plundered the land, but also captured members of the conquered commune attached to the land, turning those who freely occupied the communal land into serfs who were dominated to cultivate the land of other communes or lords, thus creating serfdom. In contrast, transforming the capitalist mode of production requires proletarian revolution: “The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations”, converting capital “into common property, into the property of all members of society” (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976, p. 499; p. 504). In this way, property relations form an historical process, which is manifested as the transformation of ownership, under the effect of the subject of historical activities.

However, Marx believes that this mode of transformation, by warfare, from

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overinterpreted it. So Marx here might mean that the ownership itself is on the one side constantly changing but the change is on the other side a subjective transformation by subjective human activities.

communal ownership to the ancient-classic and feudal ownership does not apply to the transformation from capitalism to communism. It is true that the communist revolution sometimes takes the form of armed uprising like the Paris Commune and the October Revolution. However, in late capitalism, as Engels stated (1895/1990, p. 519), “the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civilian fighters and far more favourable for the military”. Antonio Gramsci suggests that the war of maneuver should shift to the war of position, which aims not only to take the economic base but also shake in its entirity the superstructure constructed by the capitalist mode of production. In terms of property relations, in addition to the strengthened capitalist military force and the change of mode of exploitation from the production stage to the circulation stage, the reason why there is this discrepancy of revolutionary tactics between pre-capitalism and capitalism is largely because the capitalist property concept is no longer simply an economic concept but a legal concept. Since there is a dichotomy of economic base and superstructure in Marx’s historical materialism, the relationship at the base level, whether it is the concrete form of materialization or the abstract form of history, must be reflected in the superstructure. This projection from base to superstructure is embodied specifically by the process of juridification to confirm the economic relations. Thus, the possession of things by people obtains exclusivity against third parties, and the property relationship becomes not only the “will-based” possession of things by people, but also factual right relations among people. Jean Axelrad Cahan (1994, p. 395) pointed out that “Marx believed that there were at least two different types of property, one economic and one legal. The latter evolves out of the former and consists of an elaborate conceptual or ideological structure that is intend to consolidate and legitimate the former.” This conception of property in Marx is believed to be influenced by the historical school of jurisprudence, dating from his time studying for a law degree at the University of Berlin. Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1865, as cited in Cahan, 1994,

p. 398), one of the founders of the school, thinks that property “is the condition of detention; a person who has detention of a thing is in the condition of being able physically to act upon the thing, and at the same time being able to prevent or exclude anyone else from physically acting upon it.”

When we understand the two-fold character of Marx’s concept of *Eigentum*, the word ‘property’ in English translation, which is the materialization of the property relation and the ownership that is the historically and geographically transformed property relation, must be treated with caution. In Marx’s texts, it no longer refers solely to the object of possession, but also to the relations. Due to the loss of the two-fold character in translation, the historical meaning of the term ‘ownership’ may also be implied in the term ‘property.’ Thus, it becomes possible to explain the transformation of the mode of production by the historical change of property forms. At this point we can return to our discussion of the concept of mode of production. Indeed, the mode of production is determined by the historical interaction of the productive force and the relations of production. However, Marx (1885/1997, p. 42) thinks that “the specific manner in which this union [the union of labourer and means of production] is accomplished distinguishes the different economic epochs of the structure of society from one another”. Since we have argued that the concept of *Eigentum* expresses human possession of nature and contains its legal affirmation that excludes another person’s possession, it thus becomes possible to explain the transformation of the mode of production by historical changes of property because the concept of property and ownership can directly provide explanations of the “manner of union”.

3. European and Asiatic: Two Dimensions of Marx’s Concept of Mode of Production

Although Marx did not systematically discuss the concept of the AMP, we can

still find extensive clues in the body of the *Critique of Political Economy* to explain Marx's assertion in the *Preface.* He pointed out, in an inconspicuous comment:

> A careful study of Asiatic, particularly Indian, forms of communal property would indicate that the disintegration of different forms of primitive communal ownership gives rise to diverse forms of property. For instance, various prototypes of Roman and Germanic private property can be traced back to certain forms of Indian communal property (Marx, 1859c/1987, p. 275).

It seems that, from the second half of this paragraph, Marx believed that Roman (ancient) and Germanic (feudal) ownership were each born from Indian Asiatic communal ownership; this even provided purported proof for the Soviet five-stage theory of social formations. However, the veracity of this point of view is based on a premise containing a significant assumption: that Indian Asiatic communal ownership was identical to Roman or Germanic communal ownership. In this way, Roman and Germanic private ownership can be generated from Indian communal ownership. Though Marx (1870/1988, pp. 434–435) acknowledged that India is the origin of communal ownership and that such ownership can be seen in the early stages of social development in European countries, the Germanic Commune is not a duplication but a modification of the Indian Asiatic Rural Commune, just as the Russian rural commune in Marx's era is also such a modification. The reason is that when humans "finally do settle down, the extent to which this original community is modified will depend on various external, climatic, geographic, physical etc. conditions as well as on their particular natural predisposition – their clan character" (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 472).

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx specifically compared and contrasted Asiatic, Greco-Roman, and Germanic communal ownership. He believes that although all three are based on the existence of the rural commune, there is a difference in the way in which property is possessed. In the case of Asiatic ownership, property exists only as communal property. Each member of the commune is not an owner but an occupant of the land, because no part of the land belongs to any individual but to a person only to the extent that they are a member and therefore a representative of the commune. In other words, the occupation of the member is mediated through the existence of the commune. Marx's assertion is not a surmising of ancient history. He found relevant empirical evidence when he made excerpts of John Budd Phear's *The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon* in his later years. He noted that nowhere in the Laws of Manu is there any mention of land as a subject of property in the modern English sense. "*Private ownership of cultivated plots is recognized*, ist aber simply the *ownership of the cultivator*"[4] – that is, in terms of the stewardship (rather than the ownership) of the cultivator; "the *land itself belongs to the village*; [there is] no trace of rent; [such that] 'owner' is only another name for the cultivator" (Marx, in Krader, 1974, p. 282). However, in the Greco-Roman era, whilst the land still belonged to the commune, part of the land was divided into small parcels that were owned by individuals. And the emergence of such private property was caused by the expansion of social intercourse or the impact of migration and warfare. In this process, the formation of the communal structure was destroyed, and the commune appears as a passive unity of individuals. In comparison, in the Germanic commune, communal property gradually became a supplement to private property, the commune only existing during the assembly of members in the face of an external threat. It "figures as property only to the extent that it is defended militarily as the common property of one tribe against a hostile tribe." "In the Germanic world, the totality is the individual residence, which itself

[4] The German appears in the original.

appears as only a small dot on the land belonging to it, and which is not a concentration of many proprietors, but the family as independent unit" (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 484). Therefore, the Germanic commune manifested itself as a union of individual landowners rather than a unity of commune members as a whole.

In this way, unilinear schema of social development can be divided into two camps. One evolves in eastern society, namely the persistence of the AMP from ancient times to Marx's era. The other occurred in western society, generally along the trajectory outlined in the *Preface* to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.* Marx confirmed this point of view in his letter to the Editor of the *Otecestvenniye Zapisky.* In this letter, Marx (1877/1989, p. 200) responds to a Russian who seemingly found it valid to metamorphose Marx's modest historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general development, imposed by fate upon all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they are placed, in order to eventually attain this economic formation which, with a tremendous leap of the productive forces of social labour, assures the most integral development of every individual producer.

Marx wryly observes that his Russian critic both honours and shames him too much. There is still a problem that needs to be tackled, however. The trajectory of ownership in *The German Ideology* and the trajectory of the mode of production in the *Preface* differ in their early stages. In other words, we need to deal with the ordinal relation between tribal ownership and the AMP. Marx stated in the *Grundrisse* that "the *clan community,* the natural community, appears not as a *result* of, but as a *presupposition for the communal appropriation* (temporary) *and utilization of the land.*" From Marx's perspective, in the era of tribal ownership, people's mode of making a living is mainly hunting

and fishing. Farming is still an underdeveloped means of livelihood. James Scott's (2017) *Against the Grain* confirmed this point of view. He believes that sedentism occurs much earlier than crop-field agriculture. And the era that Scott delimited between the occurrence of sedentism and crop-field agriculture is nearly synchronous to, although not the same as what Marx regarded as, the era of the clan community. Both eras sit at the very beginning of human history when humans sustain their livelihood through hunting. Scott noted that "in ancient southern Mesopotamia, one encounters sedentary populations, even towns, of up to five thousand inhabitants with little or no agriculture" (ibid., p. 10). Carl Sauer's classic *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals* (1952) explained the reason why sedentism occurs earlier than agriculture. On the one hand, the discovery and cultivation of suitable crops for agriculture need "leisure for reflection, experimentation, and discussion" (Sauer, 1952, p. 21). On the other hand, this leisure is enabled at a suitable place that provides "food, water, fuel, and shelter" (ibid., p. 22).

However, in Asiatic ownership, the land has been consciously recognised as communal property that has been continually producing and reproducing itself. Obviously, for Marx, the AMP appears later than tribal ownership. As for the reason why the AMP first occurred in India and spread to Europe, Marx's viewpoint seems like geographical determinism. Marx thinks that what makes India break away from the tribal ownership of ancient barbarians is its relatively superior natural resources (Krader, 1974, pp. 99–100). The idea that the geographical environment can determine human history is nothing new, whether it was in the era of ancient Greece or the Enlightenment era closer to Marx's, or even today, human character and state organization have been considered to be determined by climate (Aristotle, 1998, p. 202; Montesquieu, 1989, p. 231). Jared Diamond (1997/1999, p. 405) stated in his bestseller, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* that "the striking differences between the long-term histories

of people of the different continents have been due… to differences in their environments". In his later years, Marx made a detailed excerpt from Louis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*, removing the false views in the book and restructuring the original paragraphs. It shows empirical evidence for Marx's version of geographical determinism. He said that the Eastern hemisphere has everything needed (with one exception) for the domestication of animals and most grain cultivation. In the western hemisphere, in contrast, there is only one crop suitable for planting, though it is the best (maize). This gave Native American people a superior position before barbarism. However, by the middle of the barbaric era, the most advanced tribes in the Eastern hemisphere had domesticated animals that provided meat and milk. Although they had no knowledge of grain cultivation, their circumstance is far better than those American Indians with maize but no livestock. The Semitic and Aryan families were separated from barbarians probably because of domesticated animals. The need to raise livestock generated the need to cultivate grain on the one hand; on the other hand, it supplemented the labour capacity of human hands with animal power. Based on this, field agriculture came into being (Central Compilation & Translation Bureau of China, 1996, p. 127; Krader, 1974, pp. 99–100). As Scott (2017, pp. 124–137) notes, on the one hand, advantageous geographical conditions saw three out of the four most archaic states and the most developed land agriculture emerge in Asia. The Asian people are, on the other hand, domesticated on the land by the animals and crops. However, Marx's geographic determinism is not the same as his predecessors' and inheritors'. Marx believes that geographical conditions alone cannot determine the way people make a living. Different ways of humans making a living also reshaped the native natural environment, turning forests, grasslands, and wasteland into hunting ground, pastures, and farmland, and thus transforming the ways humans make a living for themselves. Marx has clearly elaborated on this kind of relationship between human and natural environment in *The*

German Ideology and *Manuscripts of 1844*. He regards nature as the inorganic body of Man, which is constantly humanized by historical human activities, and views this mechanism of human and nature interaction as a kind of metabolism (cf. Saito, 2020, p. 11).

So far we can sketch the historical-geographical map of Marx's concept of the mode of production, as shown in Figure 1. Although there is indeed an historical evolution of the mode of production in general – following the sequence of Asiatic, Ancient, feudal, and capitalist modes of production, as Marx said in the *Preface*, this historical pattern of expression masks the geographical differences and geographical interaction between modes of production. We have also discovered the previous stage of the AMP and the path by which it has evolved into the feudal mode of production and even the capitalist mode of production, through its spread to Greece, Rome, and Germany. But the future of the AMP at this stage remains unclear. In other words, could it still stably reproduce itself, or would it undergo a process of feudalisation or capitalization, or even directly enter socialist society, bypassing these stages?

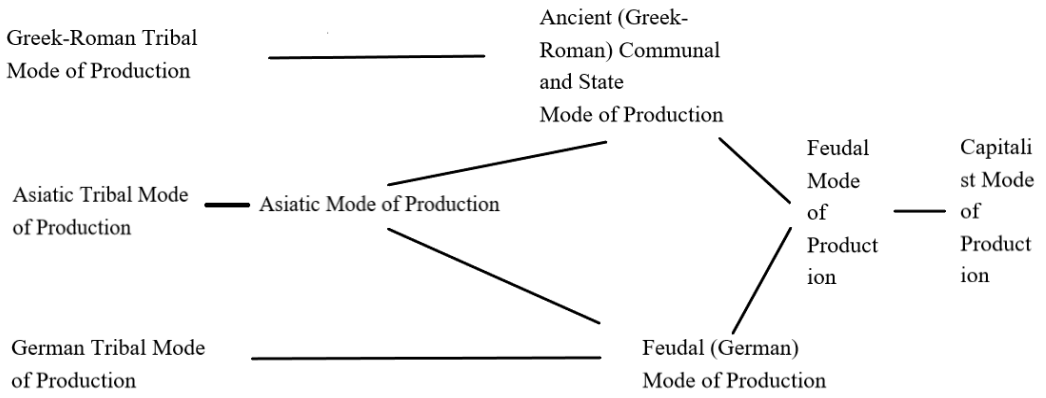

Figure 1 Marx's concept of mode of production from the tribal to the capitalist in 1850s

Source: the author

4. Stagnation and Prospect: Marx's Shifting Attitude towards the Asiatic Mode of Production

Marx's evaluation of the AMP underwent a significant transformation through his life. In 1853, Marx first discovered the uniqueness of the AMP after reading the *Voyages contenant la description des états du Grand Mogol* by François Bernier. He thinks that this book is *striking* and wrote a letter to Engels, dated 14 June, 1853. He wrote that "Bernier rightly sees all the manifestations of the East – he mentions Turkey, Persia and Hindustan – as having a common basis, namely the *absence of private landed property*. This is the real *clef*, even to the eastern heaven" (Marx, 1853c/1983, pp. 333–334). But at this time, Marx held

a negative evaluation of this communal land ownership, thinking it stagnant and laggardly, which “can be completely explained by two mutually supporting circumstances” (ibid., p. 346), Marx (1853a/1979, p. 128) proposed,

> On the one hand, leaving, like all Oriental peoples, to the Central Government the care of the great public works, the prime condition of his agriculture and commerce, dispersed, on the other hand, over the surface of the country, and agglomerated in small centers by the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits – these two circumstances had brought about, since the remotest times, a social system of particular features – the so-called village system, which gave to each of these small unions their independent organization and distinct life”.

In the first case, owing to the fact that the labourer regards the land as the natural condition of production, manufacture is directly unified with agriculture. The raw materials processed are directly derived from the collaborative agricultural labour of the commune. The products are directly used for the daily consumption of the members of the commune and the reproduction of agriculture rather than commodity exchange. Surplus products are stored for the purpose of preparing for famine years, or paid as tributes and tax in kind to the utmost commune – the state – and its leader – the autocratic monarchy. Therefore, the AMP’s dependence on the land means that the state and the monarch, as a higher level of the commune, must feed back into the village commune by constructing water conservation projects, using the tributes and tax. In a letter replying to Marx, Engels (1853/1983, p. 339) said that “Here artificial irrigation is the first prerequisite for agriculture, and this is the responsibility either of the communes, the provinces or the central government.” Wittfogel further developed and demonstrated, though overestimated, the importance of Asiatic governments’ function of constructing and maintaining

water conservation projects. He stated that “it is only above the level of an extractive subsistence economy, beyond the influence of strong centres of rainfall agriculture, and below the level of a property-based industrial civilisation that man, reacting specifically to the water-deficient landscape, moves toward a specific hydraulic order of life” (Wittfogel, 1957/1967, p. 12).

As for the second case, Marx’s view is even more negative in the 1850s. As a result of the above-mentioned characteristics of the AMP, the village commune has maintained self-sufficiency and could reproduce itself in the same form continuously. Thus, “this simplicity [of reproduction] supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States” (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 363–364). This kind of ‘stagnation’ is termed as “stereotypic reproduction” by Marshall Sahlins (1976, p. 48). Moreover, for Marx, this kind of unchangeable “idyllic republic” seems not to be peaceful and pleasant. He added the critical comment:

> These little communities… subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man the sovereign of circumstances, … and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow (Marx, 1853a/1979, p. 132).

In this way the AMP is synonymous with primitivism, barbarism, and counter-revolution for Marx in the 1850s. He hoped that the British colonial authorities would bring “a revolutionary change” to India, that is, to include India in the world system of the capitalist mode of production. He said that “England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the

annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia" (Marx, 1853b/1979, pp. 217–218). Apparently, in the historical trajectory of Marx's concept of mode of production, the AMP needed to go through a process of feudalization and even capitalization. Marx's negative view of the Asiatic mode of production continued up to the 1860s when he wrote the first volume of *Capital*, where he still characterized Asiatic societies as unchanging.

However, things began to change for Marx in the mid-1870s. As Lichtheim (1963, cited in Hindess & Hirst, 1975, pp. 181–182) has argued, "Marx's support for the progressive role of capitalism in 'breaking down all Chinese walls' became less enthusiastic in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in response to the barbarities committed by Western imperialism.… Marx began to look with greater interest at the potentialities of Eastern societies to change internally and to develop independently of Western capitalism". There is no definite indication of why Marx's view underwent such a dramatic change, but one of the important reasons may be that Marx finally expurgated the impact of Hegel's philosophical ideology of History after reading a large quantity of literature on pre-capitalist social formations and eastern societies. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* contains similar statements to Marx's sentiments in the 1850s. Hegel (1837/2001, p. 77) believed that eastern society stagnated at the beginning of history. And he once stated that although India has rich ancient literature on poetry and religion, it has no history.

One of the most revealing of Marx's commentaries on eastern societies concerns Maksim Kovalevsky's *Communal Land Ownership* of 1897. Here, Marx not only rebutted Kovalevsky regarding the changes of Indian land relations under Arabic rule as a feudalization process, but also satirized the British colonial authorities' policy of disintegrating Indian communal ownership.

According to Kovalevsky, it was in the 11th century that Islam had begun to rule India. The doctrine of the Hanafiyyah School, which is the ideological foundation for Muslim land ownership in India, holds that part of the real estate should be left in the hands of conquered residents, and parts owned by sirdars and members of the Muslim army. The sirdars and the members of the army thus obtained the ownership of the land or a part of taxation on the land. The property rights over land do not fully equate to the modern sense of property rights because it has the precondition of the owner's membership of the army and is essentially a right to enjoy state taxation that substituted for emoluments of the military members in peacetime. These members of the army thus act as the tax collectors whose emoluments are the taxes they collect. Meanwhile, the Imam has the authority to distribute public state-owned land to religious institutions and charitable organizations. Thus, communal landed property in India was transformed into the coexistence of communal landed property, military landed property, and religious landed property (Central Compilation & Translation Bureau of China, 1996, pp. 56–62). And since religious and military landed property enjoyed tax-free status, small land occupants were willing to hand over their property to the temple and its affiliated charities, as well as the military occupants of the land. The conditions for the transfer were to keep hereditary occupation on the land that was handed over (ibid., p. 58; p. 75). For Kovalevsky, this "means that although rural residents still occupy their land according to communal or private property rights … the occupants are changed from free occupants to affiliated dependents. Meanwhile, the occupation has changed from autonomous occupation to feudal occupation" (ibid., p. 63). In other words, Kovalevsky held that communal land ownership in India has been feudalized. However, Marx opposed this argument. He maintains that, first, the military occupant's right to taxation is nothing more than a transfer of the payment object from the national treasury to the person authorized by the

national treasury. The tax paid is actually the salary paid by the state to the military occupants (cf. Bernier, 1919, p. 224). Secondly, according to Indian law, the authority must not be distributed to and inherited by the next generation (ibid., p. 68). Finally, serfdom does not exist in India. The military occupant of the land need not protect the peasant's safety – unlike their counterparts in Germanic territories (ibid., p. 78). Therefore, Marx thinks that the AMP does not contain the necessary conditions for feudalization. And, apparently, Marx no longer thinks that the AMP will inevitably evolve or be transformed into the feudal mode of production as in Western Europe. S. I. Kovalev, a prominent historian of classical antiquity, helped Marx to rebut Kovalevsky. Kovalev argues that "If we consider the Asiatic mode of production feudal, then we must consider early classical [Greco-Roman] society feudal as well, since it is also based, according to Marx, on collective exploitation and collective possession [of the means of production]. Thus feudalism will turn out for us to be listed both before the classical mode of production and after it, and we will fall from the straight path into the embrace of the reactionary theory of cycles" (Kovalev, 1963, cited in Dunn, 1982/2011, p. 22).

Moreover, the characteristics of the AMP have not only been regarded as feudal, but have also been taken as proof of an inability to construct a specific concept of mode of production. Hindess and Hirst summarized some elements of the AMP: "first that it is the state which extracts the surplus-product, there is no exploiting class independent of the state; second, that there is an absence of private property in land, the land is state property; and third, that non-commodity production in agriculture is the dominant form of production" (Hindess & Hirst, 1975, p. 184). However, their refusal to admit the validity of the AMP "based on an argument about the condition of existence of its form of appropriation as a system of relations of production" is problematic (Hindess & Hirst, 1977, p. 43). First, they state that the Asiatic mode of appropriation of the

surplus-product, the state-extracted tax, or in their words tax/rent couple, “corresponds to at least two distinct sets of forces of production: the forces entailed in independent peasant cultivation and communal cultivation” (Hindess & Hirst, 1975, p. 196). But for Marx, there is only one force of production in accordance with the Asiatic mode of production – namely family cultivation with compensable mutual help amongst commune members. Marx wrote in his notebook on *The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon* that

> land tilled by the cultivators of the village, i.e. the bulk of the inhabitants, is a portion of the lower lying plain outside and around the village. Family of the homestead – consisting of a father and sons, or of brothers or of cousins – cultivate *von* 2 to 10 acres in the whole.… Some of the gangs of cultivators from one village or district go to help the cultivators of a distant village to cut their paddy, this assistance being returned if needed. The remuneration received for this work is usually one bundle out of every five, or out of every seven that are cut (Krader, 1974, p. 247).

Therefore, regardless of the nature of the extracts, rent, tax, or tax/rent couple, the force of production related to the Asiatic mode of production is unitary. Secondly, Hindess and Hurst state that the modality of the tax and tenure “is a variance which is not only politically determined but also arbitrary” (Hindess & Hirst, 1975, p. 196). Although there are indeed differences in tax levels and taxation methods at different stages of history, the tax levels and taxation methods are fixed and determined not by political order but by the law at a certain stage of history. For example, Institutes of Narada stipulated that “the amount of the tax may in no case exceed one-sixth of the net income of the community” (Krader, 1975, p. 359). As distinct from the political order that is arbitrarily made by authority figures such as emperors, the law, from Marx’s perspective, is not the “will of the ruler” but the “expression” of the will of

“individuals”, i.e. the “class”, who rule “material life”, “the mode of production and form of intercourse”. “[T]hey enforce their own will in the form of law, and at the same time make it independent of the personal arbitrariness of each individual among them, does not depend on their idealistic will” (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 329). Thus, tax in the AMP is neither arbitrarily determined by political order nor corresponding arbitrary sets of productive force.

Therefore, for Marx, the AMP is not a modification of the Graeco-Roman slave mode of production, nor did it experience a so-called process of feudalization under Muslim rule. At the same time, it is not a deviation from Marx’s own elaboration of the general concept of the mode of production, but a concept that describes the unique characteristics of communal ownership and the production process in Asiatic societies, implying that Marx’s view of social development is united by the general law of history and specific geographical differences. Moreover, in Marx’s later years, the AMP is seen as an old and promising mode of production. This changed perception is reflected not only in Marx’s anger and sympathy for the disintegration of Indian communal ownership under British colonial rule, but also in Marx’s investigation of the Russian commune.

Indian communal land ownership gradually disintegrated as a consequence of the policies of the British colonial authorities.[5] The reasons are complex. First, the British government set up regulations to transfer ownership. Secondly, the government’s charging deferred tax to Zamindars caused them to heighten the exploitation of the “tenants”, which led to a series of local peasant uprisings. As a result, some Zamindars were expelled while others were sufficiently enough impoverished to sell their land to pay off the tax in arrears and private debt. Urban usurers thus took over the Zaminars’ land and obtained membership of

[5] For the contemporary revival of Indian commune, see Brara, 2006.

the commune, expanding their property in the process. Finally, in the process of tax collection, the government, on the one hand, decomposed the indivisible communal land into the private property of small families, and levied a tax on each of them. On the other hand, the commune is responsible for helping to pay taxes when small families are unable to do so. Thus, in the face of the resultant conflict of interest, the principle of mutual support among commune members, which is “the life-blood of the clan commune”, is undermined (Central Compilation & Translation Bureau of China, 1996, p. 92). Unlike in *The Future Results of British Rule in India,* Marx here in his anthropological notebooks believes that the British colonialists’ disintegration of Indian communal ownership is a crime: “British Indian officials…are the main sinners responsible for this decline” (ibid., p. 94). Marx sighed, in Hobbes’s words, that “the war of all against all begins” (ibid., p. 98).

The implication of the disintegration of the AMP in India is not that the historical evolution of Marx’s concept of mode of production has returned to a general, single timeline. Rather, Marx discovered the possibility of the birth of Russia’s comedy from India’s tragedy. In 1881, a Russian female revolutionary, Vera Zasulich, wrote to Marx asking for his opinion on Russian historical development, especially the rural communes. Marx’s drafts and final letter, composed in French, have failed to draw much attention from scholars interested in the AMP. Hindess and Hirst make no mention and Krader (1975, p. 197; p. 302) makes only passing reference. Marx wrote as many as 3,900 words in the first draft of the letter, but nearly half of them were deleted in the second draft (Marx, 1881a, n.p.). Although the length of the third draft increased slightly, little more than 300 words were retained in the fourth draft and formal reply (Marx, 1881b, n.p.). What is puzzling is that although Marx laboriously wrote four drafts before sending Zasulich the letter, he said in the formal reply that “a nervous complaint which has periodically affected me for the last ten

years has prevented me from answering sooner your letter of 16 February" (Marx, 1881d/1989, p. 370). Irrespective of whether Marx was really suffering from a nervous complaint or had other undisclosed reasons (such as worrying about whether his statements would be misunderstood), he indeed thought twice and paid much attention to this issue. Marx repeatedly stated in the drafts that Russia can build into communes all the positive achievements of capitalism without having to pass under the Capitalist Caudine Forks,[6] and indicated that the AMP *could* leap the capitalist mode of production and turn into a communist mode of production directly. However, "the commune is bled dry and tortured, its land rendered barren and poor, the literary lackeys of the 'new pillars of society' ironically depict the wounds inflicted on it as so many symptoms of its spontaneous decrepitude" (Marx, 1881c/1989, p. 359). Therefore, although Russia is richly endowed with respect to its historical conditions at this time – it "is the sole European country where the 'agricultural commune' has kept going on a nationwide scale up to the present day. It is not the prey of a foreign conqueror…and neither does it lead a life cut off from the modern world" (ibid., p. 352) – there must be a Russian Revolution to save the Russian commune. Only in this way will the Russian rural commune "soon develop as an element of regeneration in Russian society and an element of superiority over the countries enslaved by the capitalist system" (ibid., p. 360).

[6] In the year 321 BC, the Samnites inflicted a bitter defeat on the Roman legions and made them pass under the "yoke" constructed of spears, which was regarded as an enormous humiliation for the defeated army. The expression "to pass under the Caudine Forks" has entered the language to characterize the height of humiliation. See: https://www.marxists.org/francais/marx/works/1881/03/km18810300.htm#sdfootnote2sym.

5. Conclusion and Prospect

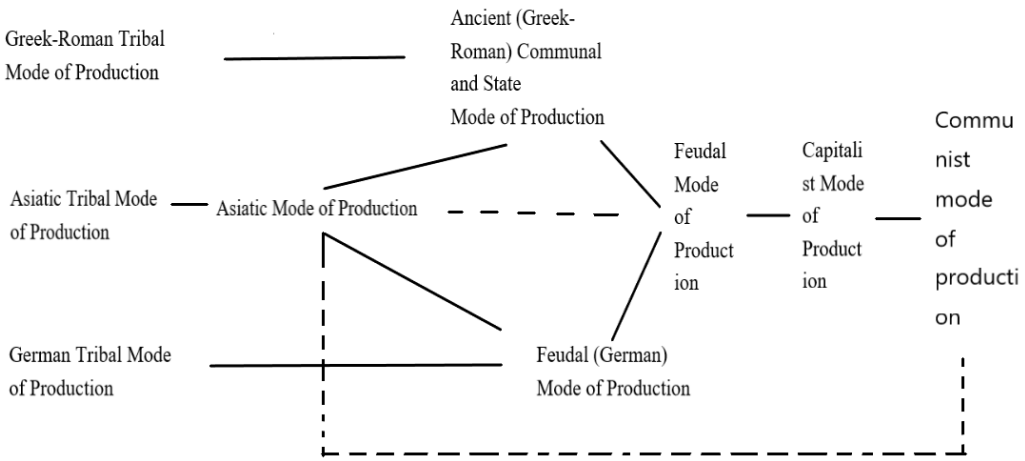

Figure 2 Historical Geography of Marx's concept of the AMP

Source: the author

At this point, we can see the entire historical geography of the concept of the AMP in Marx's work. As shown in Figure 2, in the early years of human society, primitive tribes formed unique and natural ways of producing in accordance with the geographical environment in which they lived to produce their own material life. In the Eastern Hemisphere, field agriculture was created for the purpose of raising livestock. And the original community was formed by the spontaneous connection of blood relatives. The combination of the need for communal labour for animal husbandry and field agriculture and the original clan commune formed the earliest Asiatic mode of production. It gradually spread from Asia to Europe. Under the influence of privatization and military conquest, the AMP evolved into the Ancient mode of production, feudal mode of production, and

the capitalist mode of production in Europe, while it has been preserved and reproduced in Russia and some parts of Asia. With the British conquest of India, the Indian Asiatic mode of production gradually disintegrated under colonial policies. However, Marx discovered in Russia the possibility that the AMP could avoid passing under the Capitalist Caudine Forks and enter communist society directly, were a social revolution to happen.

Reconstructing Marx's general evolutionary view of the concept of production from a geographical perspective has important theoretical significance for the correct understanding of Marx's historical materialism. It not only reveals the spatial thought of Marx that has been obscured by his historical theory, but also rebuts the accusation that Marx's historical materialism amounts to teleological determinism. The AMP also potentially helps to guide projects of anti-privatisation in the era of neoliberalist globalization. Garrett Hardin's classic article, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, supposedly provided an irrefutable demonstration that private land ownership is the most efficient among all the forms of land use (Harvey, 2011, p. 101). He argues that population growth and the tendency of individuals to maximize economic benefits will inevitably lead to the demise of the commons, and privatization is a viable solution to the problem (cf. Hardin, 1968, pp. 1243–1248). It is exactly what governments all over the world have done to their state economies. "The first experiment with neoliberal state formation… occurred in Chile" (Harvey, 2005/2007, p. 7). Chile's Chicago-trained economists "reversed the nationalizations and privatized public assets, opened up natural resources … to private and unregulated exploitation…, privatized social security, and facilitated foreign direct investment and freer trade" (ibid., pp. 7–8). A similar situation has occurred in the U.K. since 1979. According to Brett Christophers, since 1979, "the state… has sold vast quantities – some 2 million hectares, or about 10 per cent of the entire British land mass" to the private sector (Christophers, 2018,

p. 2). The result is that “the top 1 per cent of income earners in Britain have doubled their share of the national income from 6.5 per cent to 13 per cent since 1982” (Harvey, 2005/ 2007, p. 17). Harvey is correct that “the real problem here … is not the commons per se. It is the failure of individualized private property rights to fulfil our common interests in the way they are supposed to do” (Harvey, 2011, p. 104). And that is the reason why the commons under the AMP, characterized by communal property and communal labour, persists into the modern era despite the far greater population in India, China and Russia than in Western European countries. But the problem that really matters is that the capitalist mode of production is ever-evolving and assimilating other modes of production into its system. And the remaining occurrences of the AMP scattered across the world face extinction if we do not devise projects to develop this mode into a higher formation.

There are at least two projects at hand geared towards anti-privatisation and the development of a contemporary neo-Asiatic mode of production. One lies in the Market Socialism project that Samir Amin recommended to China. In the face of the potential perils of the Chinese government’s capitalist approach to economic development and the impact of neoliberalist ideology, China has “one major asset”, equal right to access to land, which is “the legacy of its revolution”, for self-defence (Amin, 2005, p. 271). According to China’s current land administration law (2004), urban land is owned by the state while land in rural and suburban areas is owned by peasants’ collectives. And the Chinese government abolished agricultural tax completely on 1st January, 2006. Amin thinks

> “that socialism in China has so far neither won nor lost. ‘As long as the principle of equal access to land is recognized and is effectively implemented,’ he claims, ‘it is not too late for social action to successfully

influence an as yet uncertain evolution'" (cited in Arrighi 2007, p. 16).

Giovani Arrighi (ibid., p. 16) also notes that "in February 2006 the Chinese government announced major initiatives under the banner of a 'new socialist countryside' to expand health, education, and welfare benefits for farmers, while further postponing the privatization of land property".

The other project seems to come from a newly emerged school of Marxism, Organic Marxism, whose members partly overlap with constructive postmodernists. Their arguments are mainly theoretically based on Alfred North Whitehead's organic view of nature and Marx's critique of the capitalist mode of production. They call on organic agriculture rooted in well-loved land (Daly & Cobb, 1994; Birch & Cobb, 1981), and organic ecological education in order to build an organic postmodern community for the common good (Clayton & Heinzekehr, 2014). This project resonates with bioregionalism which "celebrate the particular, the unique and often indescribable features of a place … through the visual arts, music, drama and symbols which convey the feeling of place" (Editorial of *The New Catalyst 1*, 1986, cited in Alexander, 1990, p. 163; cf. Harvey, 1993, p. 17). Joe Holland summarized the characteristics of this community. First, in terms of economy, he argues that

> we must find new ways of organizing human labour into democratic or participatory cooperatives, where human dignity can be better respected, where decision-making roles can be more widely shared, and above all where the dormant labour of the unemployed can creatively express itself in meeting basic human needs" (Holland, 1988, p. 58).

Secondly, in terms of politics, he supported "the rise of the pastoral strategy of building basic Christian communities, creating, in effect, a new small scale unit

of the church itself", "the rise of community organizing movements, sponsored by the churches", and "the rise of vast networks of international solidarity, linking groups in struggle across the globe" (ibid., p. 58). Finally, he also mentioned the "root" as a new metaphor of culture against a mechanistic vision. This is a far cry from Deleuze and Guattari's championing of the rhizome and their machinic conception (D. B. Clarke, personal communication, July 31, 2021).

However, whether these two projects could help to retain the AMP remains uncertain. On the one hand, the project of market socialism seems like a contemporary version of Georgism (named after Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879)). Marx criticized Georgism in his Letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, dated 20 June, 1881, insisting that the ground rent paid to the state could not change the essence of the capitalist mode of production, which is to exploit surplus value from wage labour. From Marx's perspective, George's speculations about "those portions of surplus value that have become independent" is therefore "merely an attempt, tricked out with socialism, to save the capitalist *régime* and, indeed, to re-establish it on an even broader basis than at present" (Marx, 1881e/1992, pp. 99–101).

On the other hand, the project of Organic Marxism has misinterpreted Marx's theory. It would face great difficulty were it to be implemented in Chinese society and thus seems to amount to a form of utopian socialism. First, Organic Marxism declares that classical Marxism is "deterministic", "which is manifested in the progressive stages of socio-economic development" (Clayton & Heizekehr, 2014, pp. 56–57). However, as we have argued, Marx refused to view his "broad line" of "economic development of society" as the "general path imposed by fate upon every people". Indeed, Marx thinks that human history is determined by the interaction between productive force and relations of production. But the problem is that the productive force and relations of

production are both variable and influenced by a complex of factors such as geographical location, climate, flora and fauna, etc. Any change in these factors leads to the change of metabolism between the human and nature and the way that humans interact with each other, namely the productive force and relations of production. Since Marx confined his sketch of economic development of society in the realm of Western Europe, the influence of spatial factors on the historical evolution of modes of production and social formations is also reduced. But if we put our sights on a larger scale, as Marx discovered, the evolutionary trajectory of the AMP is completely different from Europe. Similarly, it is conceivable that, if Marx had investigated a putative African mode of production, he would have elaborated yet another completely different “broad line” of the “economic development of society”. Thus, we cannot use our hindsight that most Asiatic and African modes of production have been replaced by the capitalist mode of production to accuse Marx of failing to see the diversity of human socio-economic evolution. Besides, Organic Marxism, while lauding traditional Chinese philosophy such as Taoism, is inherently theistic, which is in conflict with China’s mainstream ideology, deviates from Marxist materialist conception of history, and is somewhat indigestible for Chinese Marxists. Having experienced a research upsurge after its introduced into China, Organic Marxism received some harsh critiques from Chinese academia and the public (cf. Bu & Luo, 2016; Yang, 2017). Moreover, although it is consistent with the fundamental goal of Chinese government and Chinese Communist Party to pursue the “Common Good”, organic Marxist projects such as a steady-state economy and small-scale communal agriculture are impracticable in contemporary Chinese society. Abandoning the pursuit of growth can indeed slow down the accumulation of capital, but “GDP is definitely not an empty symbol. It is related to the poverty alleviation of tens of millions of people still in China” (Bu & Luo, 2016, p. 88). And the wealth gap cannot be resolved by abandoning industrialization and returning to an agricultural economy.

Therefore, it is over-optimistic to regard an organic Marxist community as a way to conserve and develop the AMP.

To this extent, we must not forget Marx's reminder. Whether it is to preserve and develop the AMP and communal property or directly rebel against the capitalist mode of production, the key lies in either ecological or social revolution, or a combination of the two. It is necessary to establish a broad alliance of the working class with the peasantry, on the one hand to retain the rural commune and communal land ownership, and on the other hand to adhere to the anti-capitalist social revolution. Thus, Engels' predictive Afterword to *On Social Relations in Russia,* written 23 year before the October revolution, may be borrowed here as an apt conclusion (Cai, 2003, p. 73). He wrote that

if a remnant of this commune is to be preserved, the first condition is the fall of tsarist despotism – revolution in Russia…without which present-day Russia can never achieve a socialist transformation, whether proceeding from the commune or from capitalism (Engels, 1894/1990, p. 433).

Chapter 2: Marx's Concept of Rent under the Mode of Extraction of Surplus Labour

1. Introduction

Marx once stated that "the essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave labour, and one based on wage labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer" (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 226–227). This line appears in the chapter on the production of absolute surplus value in the first volume of *Capital*. Obviously, Marx includes the mode of extraction of surplus value in the category of mode of production rather than mode of distribution. For Marx, a complete capitalist mode of production process can be divided into three interrelated components: the reproduction of the loss of constant capital, the reproduction of variable capital and the production of surplus value. The existence of the first two modes of reproduction only reflects what is logically and arithmetically needed in the reproduction of means of production and persistence of human being, that is, the product could be maintained only if production at least equals cost. Therefore, the first two modes of reproduction exhibit only quantitative differences in the various historical modes of production. In contrast, the last part of mode of production, the mode of extraction of surplus labour, as Marx stated, determines the socio-economic form and embodies the complex relations of production in the socio-economic form. Taking the capitalist mode of production as an example, the production of surplus value includes the production of absolute surplus value and relative surplus value. Absolute surplus value is "produced by prolongation of the working day" while relative

surplus value arises “from the curtailment of necessary labour time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 320). Therefore, the mode of extraction of surplus labour in capitalist society reveals the exploitive relationship between the capitalist and wage labourer as well as various methods deployed to exacerbate the exploitation. Moreover, the mode of extraction of surplus labour not only determines the economic form of society but also functions as the pivot of production and distribution of surplus labour, on the one hand, “originates in the production process by virtue of the class relation between capital and labour”, and, on the other hand, is the source of distribution “among individual capitalists according to the rules of competition” (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 61). Therefore, the extraction of surplus labour in general plays an important role in Marx’s political economy, which can be seen from the length of *The Theory of Surplus Value*, and is especially important for understanding a particular mode of production.

In this sense, more attention needs to be paid to the category of ground rent in the investigation of the Asiatic mode of production. On the one hand, although the mechanism of extraction of land rent has undergone a historical transformation, it is, based on monopoly ownership of land, the common denominator of all modes of distribution in relation to their modes of production up to the capitalist era. Indeed, “[t]here is … no general theory of rent, nor can the conclusions reached for one instance in which a rent relation exists be automatically applied to others” (Fine, 1979, p. 248). However, the historical difference in the form of land rent caused by the evolution of mode of production can be understood by the study of capitalist rent, for as Marx stated, “Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape… the bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 105). The manner in which Marx discovers the mode of surplus extraction covered up by rent as a

specific form of surplus value is instructive to the exploration of mode of surplus extraction specific to the AMP. On the other hand, Marx, in his published works, newspaper articles, letters and manuscripts portrayed the Asiatic mode of production as being characterized by the absence of private land ownership, self-sufficient non-productive domestic agriculture and domestic handicraft industry, and compensable mutual help amongst commune members. However, there is one additional thing we need to know concerning this mode of production, that is, its corresponding mode of distribution. Marx stated that the distribution of "the instruments of production, and the members of the society among the different kinds of production… is comprised within the process of production itself and determines the structure of production. To examine production while disregarding this internal distribution within it is obviously an empty abstraction" (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 96).

It is, notwithstanding Marx's statement, nonetheless noteworthy that production is not subordinate to distribution. Marx criticized the "mistake to make a so-called distribution and put the principal stress on it" and stated that "any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself" (Marx, 1875/1989, p. 87). Hence, production and distribution are interactive. In other words, production and distribution form "members of a totality" and "distinction within a unity" (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 99). "The reciprocal effect between these different moments have to be understood in the context of capitalist society considered as an organic whole" (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 41). Therefore, a mode of production cannot be fully understood unless its corresponding mode of distribution has been analysed and the mode of distribution cannot determine production by itself unless being considered as the condition of production reciprocally.

For this reason, the importance of the mode of extraction of surplus value as the pivot of production and distribution needs to be emphasized. On the one hand, we start our investigation with Marx's theory of rent extraction in order to give a theoretical basis before we "anatomize the ape" – the analysis of the mechanism of the mode of extraction of surplus labour in the AMP. On the other hand, we should carefully avoid the overestimation of the determinant effect of distribution on production both inside and outside the research field of the AMP. Godes (1931, as cited in Blue, 1999, p. 106) refuses to view the AMP as an effective Marxist concept because the characteristics of the concept that Marx described, such as a tax-rent form of surplus appropriation was insufficiently unique to distinguish the Asiatic mode from other modes of production. Hindess and Hirst further stated that "no concept of a mode of production can be derived from the tax/rent couple." Both of their arguments derive from a statement of Marx in the third volume of *Capital*, to wit:

> [S]hould the direct producers not be confronted by a private landowner, but rather, as in Asia, under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide, or rather, there exists no tax which differs from this [Asiatic] form of ground rent." (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 777)

Indeed, Marx thinks that the tax/rent couple corresponds to the Asiatic mode of production. However, the arguments of Godes, Hindess and Hirst confuse the form of surplus appropriation and the mode of extraction of surplus labour. They correctly point out that tax-rent is a form of surplus labour but forget Marx's argument that it is the mode of extraction of surplus labour that distinguishes one mode of production from another. For example, what distinguishes the capitalist mode of production from the other modes of production is that it

separates the direct labourer from the means of production, and the labourer can survive only when employed by the capitalist. Thus the capitalist gains ownership of the value of the labour power. And by extending working hours, driving down wages or technological innovation, the capitalist makes this use value make more value than the value of the labour power, namely the production of surplus value. If we stop here, surplus value has been extracted even if it has not been realized and appropriated.

However, surplus value is not only produced but must also be realized, so as to enter into distribution and consumption to complete a cycle of capital accumulation. As one of the historical forms of surplus value, capitalist land rent belongs to the category of distribution, and its premise must be that surplus value has been realized. Since Marx insists that only labour produces value, the products produced in the production process are calculated by value. However, under the condition of capitalist mode of production, the competition of enterprises with different value compositions will equalize the profit rate; that is, the products of enterprises with low value composition are sold at a price of production lower than their value while the products of enterprises with high value composition are sold at a price of production higher than their value. In this way, the value of the product is actually realized in the market by transforming to the price of production, namely, the cost plus an average profit. Compared to industrial enterprises, the value composition of agricultural enterprises is relatively low, and the price of production of agricultural enterprises are lower than their value. Meanwhile, even under the capitalist mode of production, by the dint of monopolistic ownership of land, the landowner will not rent the land to the capitalist farmer for free. “The original feudal monopoly is added to the capitalist monopoly” (Lefebvre, 1956/2016, p. 70). So, the agricultural products must be sold at a market price higher than their price of production in order to give a part of surplus value over the price of

production to the landowner, and to access to the necessary means of agricultural production, the land. As a result, surplus appropriation is only part of the extraction of surplus labour. Similarly, the analysis of whether the tax/rent couple correspond to the AMP lies neither in whether it could distinguish the AMP from other modes of production, nor whether it can theoretically derive a mode of production, but in understanding the mode of extraction of surplus labour as a whole.

Nevertheless, because the AMP is recognized as being entirely dominated by agricultural production, and thus the tax/rent couple is the dominant form of surplus appropriation in Asia, the concept of rent stands at the core of my analysis, even though Marx has reminded us that “all economists share the error of examining surplus-value not as such, in its pure form, but in the particular forms of profit and rent” (Marx, 1863/1963, p. 40). Engels added that

> Though perfectly aware that both profits and rents are but sub-divisions, fragments of that unpaid part of the product which the labourer has to supply to his employer…, yet even classical political economy never went beyond the received notions of profits and rents, never examined this unpaid part of the product (called by Marx surplus product) in its integrity as a whole, and therefore never arrived at a clear comprehension, either of its origin and nature, or of the laws that regulate the subsequent distribution of its value. (Engels, 1887/1996, pp. 33–34)

An in-depth look into the concept of rent and its mode of extraction gives a theoretical framework not only for the analysis of the mode of extraction of surplus labour in the AMP but also the critique of the emerging rentier capitalism characterizing significant portions of the global economy today. “Aided by the neoliberal economics community”, neo-liberalist countries “have constructed a

global framework of institutions and regulations that enable elites to maximise their rental income" (Standing, 2017, pp. 41–42). This is accompanied by two intertwined trends of financialization and deindustrialization caused by short-term distortions in the entity economy sector by encouraging rentier-type investments (Demir, 2007, p. 353). Thus, rents "become the main form of monopolistic surplus profits under late capitalism" (Mandel, 1975, p. 9). Rent could be extracted not only from a financialized real economy sector but also from cultural commodity exchange (Harvey, 2009), and even from the service industry we confront in the daily life such as hairdressing (Finlayson, 2015).

2. Capitalist mode of extraction of rent.

(1) Capitalist mode of rent production

It is well-known that Marx expressed the "total social product in a given year… as C+V+S, where C is the value of constant capital (machine, raw materials, energy inputs, etc.), V is the value paid out for labour power, and S is the total surplus value produced" (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 45). This formula seems to be a calculation of the total social product in its appearance, but it actually contains Marx's in-depth analysis of the relation of production of capitalist society. Marx contends that the surplus value arises from the capitalist exploitation of the use value of direct labour bought in the market. In other words, the capitalist pays for V, i.e. the value of labour power whose amount is determined by "the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the labourer" which varies in different "climatic and other physical conditions", and "historical and moral element[s]" (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 181), and earns V + S, because the labour power "both reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and also produces an excess." (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 219). It is worth noting that this labour-power does not equate to labour, as Ricardo thought, since "labour is the substance, and the immanent measure of value, but has itself no value" (Marx, 1867/1996,

p. 537), whereas labour-power is a commodity with a peculiar quality of self-valorisation whose owner “is divorced from the means of production, i.e., proletarianization” (Eatwell, 1974, p. 295). Thus, capital on the one hand “create[s] this surplus labour by means of proletarianization”, whilst, on the other hand, its “ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives labour beyond the limit of its natural paltriness” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 325). In this way, Marx unveiled the general relation of capitalist exploitation covered over by wages and the special form of surplus value. “Surplus value in general is value in excess of the equivalent. The equivalent, by definition, is only the identity of value with itself. Hence surplus value can never sprout out of the equivalent; nor can it do so originally out of circulation; it has to arise from the production process of capital itself” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 324).

Marx not only made a qualitative definition of this kind of exploitation relationship but also measured its variation in quantity. Michael Lebowitz sums up Marx’s method of measuring the change of surplus value in two formulae:

$$w = U/q$$

$$s = d - w$$

– where w, U, q, s and d are, respectively, “necessary labour, the worker’s consumption bundle … the productivity of labour”, “hours of surplus labour and the workday (in terms of length and intensity)” (Lebowitz, 1992/2003, p. 6). As value is determined by socially necessary labour time and Marx supposed that the quantity of worker’s consumption bundle, the “average quantity of means of subsistence necessary for the labourer in a given country at a given period is practically known” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 181), the degree of exploitation is thus determined by the “two variables – the workday and the level of productivity” (Lebowitz, 1992/2003, p. 6).

On the one hand, “As workers add value to commodities in the labour process, there arrives a point in the day when workers will have created the exact equivalent of the value of their own labour-power” (Harvey, 2010a, p. 136). However, “the capitalist maintains his right as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working days out of one” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 243). Thus, during the working day, there is a part that exceeds the value of the labour produced by the worker. Marx refers to this part of capital possession as absolute surplus value. “According to Marx’s definition, it denotes a straightforward increase of total work-time, which is coupled by either a stagnant paid work-time or a paid work-time rising at a lower rate than the total work-time” (Mavroudeas & Ioannides, 2011, p. 427). “On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the labourer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to one of definite normal duration” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 243), because the labour force must “rest, sleep” and “satisfy other physical needs”, as well as “intellectual and social wants” (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 240–241). “Under such circumstances, capital’s insatiable appetite for surplus labour compels it to attempt to grow in another way – by reducing necessary labour through increases in the productivity of labour” (Lebowitz, 1992/2003, p. 8). Thus, in order to break the physical, intellectual, and moral limit to capital’s chase after surplus value, “the necessary labour is shortened”, firstly, “by methods whereby the equivalent for the wages is produced in less time”, which “revolutionises out and out the technical processes of labour and the composition of society [cooperation and division]” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 511). Marx called the surplus value obtained through these methods relative surplus value. Secondly, “the decrease of necessary labour time is equal to the decrease of real wages, since the worker is now paid the same amount for a job that produces more” (Dussel,

2008, p. 74). But the arbitrary decrease of the wage below the value of labour power endangers the reproduction of the labourer in the long term, which will undermine the base of capitalist accumulation, so it is not a sustainable way to extract surplus value. Finally, whether labour intensification should be categorized as a mode of extraction of absolute value or relative surplus value is controversial. Some defend Marx's categorization of labour intensification as a source of relative surplus value (Mavroudeas & Ioannides, 2011; Hong, 1980, Shi, 1982), while others argue that if intensification of labour is common across all economic sectors, relative surplus value will be generated, and if only a single enterprise or a single economic sector increase labour intensity, absolute value will be generated (Li & Chen, 1981; Gu & Gu, 1981). But for Marx, "it is self-evident, that in proportion as the use of machinery spreads, and the experience of a special class of workmen habituated to machinery accumulates, the rapidity and intensity of labour increase as a natural consequence" (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 412). As a result, "a more intensified labour substituted for labour of more extensive duration" and thus, for example, "the product … of one of the former hours has as much or more value than has the product of 1.2 of the latter hours" (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 412–413). In other words, the intensification of labour has the same effect as improvements in productivity.

(2) Transformation from Values into Prices of Production

The distinction between absolute surplus value and relative surplus value is of great significance for Marx's distinction between differential and absolute rent and for the analysis of the pre-capitalist mode of rent extraction, but discussion of this point will be deferred until later. Moreover, the possibility of devaluation in the process of value realization is not entertained here, thereby focusing attention onto the necessary mechanism of transforming surplus value from the realm of production to distribution. For Marx, the key to this transformation lies

in the transformation of values into prices of production.

Persistent attacks on certain of Marx's concepts, both by his opponents and his proponents, are nowhere more starkly apparent than in relation to the so-called transformation problem. Böhm-Bawerk (1896/1949) is the principal guide of the contemporary "vulgar capitalist economist". He alleged that Marx's theory of prices of production "stood in contradiction with the theory that exchange-values are determined by the quantity of labour socially necessary to produce a commodity. For when the ratio of capital invested in means of production to wages–capital differs in different industries, equal values correspond to equal prices only in those industries in which this ratio coincides with the average ratio" (Winternitz, 1948, p. 276). However, Marx discussed the equalization of rate of profit only in the sense of the overall economy. And he noticed the deviation of the general rate of profit among different sectors of capital. Marx stated that any departure from the general rate in "one sphere of production compensates for that in another, their effects cross and paralyse one another" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 168). Bortkiewicz (1907/1949) was the first to try to amend Marx's theory of prices of production mathematically using a simultaneous equation approach, something which is successively adopted and revised by economists such as Sweezy (1942), Winternitz (1948), Seton (1957), and later on by the Sraffian interpretations. Steedman (1977, p. 14) developed Sraffa's model and stated that "Marx's solution of the 'transformation problem' is incorrect, not only with respect to prices of production but also, more importantly, with respect to the rate of profit. The rate of profit in a competitive capitalist economy is not equal, in general, to [S/(C+V)]". These corrections and critiques to the "transformation problem" imply "that Marx's two aggregate equalities (aggregate price = aggregate value, and aggregate profit = aggregate surplus-value) cannot both be true simultaneously" (Moseley, 2000, p. 283). However, Bortkiewicz misunderstood that average profit and price of production are the forms of

distribution of surplus value and value (Bai, 2006), and makes a number of other errors. He makes unjustified and unnecessary assumptions, such as basing his calculations on the equation of simple reproduction (Winternitz, 1948, p. 278). He also “emphasised… that a solution is independent of the composition of capital in Department III [luxury department]: in other words, that the rate of profit is determined exclusively by the situation of Department I and II, producing capital goods and wage-goods respectively” (Dobb, 1955, p. 274). More recently, an emerging genre, the Temporal Single System Interpretation (TSSI) of Marxian value theory, provided a refutation of Bortkiewicz’s accusation with regard to the transformation problem. From their perspective, Bortkiewicz made “two false assumptions: simultaneism and physicalism” (Kapitalism101, 2008, n.p.). “In essence, Bortkiewicz’s error was to ‘disprove’ Marx by taking a case of simple reproduction (unproblematic in itself), working through from value inputs to outputs defined in terms of prices of production, and then plugging those back in as inputs in the same time period to reveal ‘problems’ (ignoring the fact that surplus value has been created that isn’t there at the start)” (D. B. Clarke, personal communication, Dec 15, 2019; cf. Kliman and McGlone, 1988; Kliman, 2007). Besides, Bortkiewicz views “changes in value [as being] directly tied to changes in the amount of actual physical commodities. i.e. If I produce ten apples instead of five I have twice as much value. This seems to make sense. But look at the way this actually plays out in the real world. When a supply expands its value falls” (Kapitalism101, 2008, n.p.). Thus, Bortkiewicz’s “pseudo mathematical mystifications bore little or no relation to the basic problem posed by Marx” (May, 1948, p. 596).

Bortkiewicz’s ‘correction’ and the critiques of his position didn’t end matters but instead brought the debate into a new climax when the Nobel-prize-winning economist Paul Samuelson came to the conference table. With a detailed and complicated mathematical operation, Samuelson taunts that “the

‘transformation algorithm’ is precisely of the following form: ‘Contemplate two alternative and discordant systems. Write down one. Now transform by taking an eraser and rubbing it out. Then fill in the other one.’” (Samuelson, 1971, p. 400) and that “anybody’s method of solving the famous transformation problem is seen to involve returning from the unnecessary detour taken in Volume I’s analysis of values.” (ibid., p. 421) However, as a “crackerjack mathematical economist” and “terrible political economist” (Laibman, 1973/1974, p. 432), Samuelson didn’t recognize that “mathematics as the instrument of political economy is not omnipotent”, and that “[a]ny mathematical deduction must be carried out under certain conditions and assumptions. If the premise is wrong, the complicated mathematical model and the accurate and difficult calculations can only be led to the erroneous conclusions that seem to be scientific” (Yan, 1985, p. 20). Samuelson’s advocacy of price, profit, interest, rent and the relationship between supply and demand has turned him into “a replica of the vulgar economist that Marx criticized more than a hundred years ago” (Yan, 1985, p. 17). Marx well understood “why the same economists who oppose determining the value of commodities by labour-time, i.e., by the quantity of labour contained in them, why they always speak of price of production as centres around which market-prices fluctuate. They can afford to do it because the price of production is an utterly external and *prima facie* meaningless form of the value of commodities, a form as it appears in competition, therefore in the mind of the vulgar capitalist, and consequently in that of the vulgar economist” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 197).

The other focus of contemporary debate on the transformation problem concerns whether there is a historical interpretation to be placed on it. On the one hand, R. L. Meek (1977, p. 145) stated that Marx’s “analysis of values and prices did have an important ‘historical’ dimension, and that it cannot be properly understood unless one appreciates this.” Marx indeed acknowledged

that “it is quite appropriate to regard the values of commodities as not only theoretically but also historically *prius* to the prices of production” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 176). Under this historical interpretation, “commodities did indeed exchange at their values under conditions of simple commodity exchange among independent producers not subjected to the rule of capital. With the rise of capitalist relations of production, the value relations become obscured and ultimately buried under prices of production” (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 65). On the other hand, by arguing that Marx thought that the logical deduction of the concept and the actual development of history is relatively independent, Morishima and Catephores (1976, p. 352) stated that “Marx used his ideal type, value, as a tool to clarify the logic of the working of the capitalist economy, rather than to explain the historical transition from a pre-capitalist value epoch to a capitalist price.”

Both Meek (1977) and Morishima and Catephores (1976) are partially correct because, for Marx, the ideal type or the general law of historical development and its actual state could be discrepant, but the relationship between logic and history is not relatively independent but dialectically united. On the one hand, for Marx, the deduction of concepts and the specific historical development can indeed be unified, but this unity is not concrete but abstract. Marx (1857/1973, p. 101) thought that the methodology – from abstract to concrete – of researching political economy “is obviously the scientifically correct method. The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure”. In other words, we could explore whether there is a historical transformation from value to price of production by the examination of the conceptual transformation. On the other hand, this is correct insofar as “the concrete totality is a totality of thoughts, concrete in thought, in fact a product of thinking and

comprehending; but not in any way a product of the concept which thinks and generates itself outside or above observation and conception; a product, rather, of the working-up of observation and conception into concepts" (ibid.). In other words, the conceptual transformation from value to price of production is never a Hegelian conceptual unfolding but an abstraction from the understanding of the concrete reality of the capitalist mode of production. Moreover, the relationship between concepts changes under certain historical conditions. The thing that transformed into price of production is the capitalist value contained in the commodity produced under the capitalist mode of production; that is, the labour time of capitalist wage labour, which is different from the various types of value under pre-capitalist modes of production. Therefore, research on the transformation problem should neither be obsessed with mathematical calculation, nor should it entangle historical forms of value, but rather seek the characteristics and mechanism of the capitalist mode of production that make the transformation take place.

In this sense, Baumol's analysis amounted to a breath of fresh air with respect to this debate. He argued that "the heart of the transformation process" is "the conversion of surplus value into profit, interest, and rent" (Baumol, 1974, p. 53), namely the conversion from the "pure [abstract] form" to "the particular forms", and that "the value theory was never intended as a theory of price, which, as a superficial manifestation of the bourgeois economy, Marx considered worth very little attention, but was instead designed to explain something to him far more fundamental: the process of production, i.e., the extraction of surplus values in the various sectors of the economy" (ibid., p. 54). The whole difficulty of the transformation problem, in Marx's opinion, "arises from the fact that commodities are not exchanged simply as *commodities*, but as *products of capitals*, which claim participation in the total amount of surplus-value, proportional to their magnitude, or equal if they are equal magnitude" (Marx,

1894/1998, p. 174). However, “the *punctum saliens* will be brought out if we approach the matter as follows: suppose, the labourers themselves are in possession of their respective means of production and exchange their commodities with one another” (ibid.). Marx conceived of two types of commodities – Commodity I that consumes more means of production and Commodity II that needs more labour time – that are directly produced under the dominance of labourer-owned production. He argues that “If labourer I has greater expenses, they are made good by a greater portion of the value of his commodity, which replace this constant part, and he therefore has to reconvert a larger portion of the total value of his product into the material elements of this ‘constant’ part, while labourer II, though receiving less for this, has so much less to reconvert. In these circumstances, a difference in the rates of profit would therefore be immaterial, just as it is immaterial to the wage labourer today what rate of profit may express the amount of surplus value filched from him” (ibid., p. 175). Therefore, the aim of *Capital* is not to investigate so-called critical economic concepts in volume 3 by transforming value into price of production and discarding the unnecessary detour in the volume 1, but to uncover a logic from volume 3 to volume 1 that discloses “how the aggregate exploitation of labour on the part of the total social capital is, in a capitalist economy, obscured by the distortion of prices from values” (Morishima, 1973, p. 86; cf. Kolhatkar, 1973). Marx’s conceptual construction is like an onion. When we study Marx’s theory, we need to peel back the skin layer by layer. Indeed, value is the core concept of Marx’s political economy. However, if curtailed at the category of value, Marx's labour theory of value is not very different from Ricardo’s, or even from classical political economy as a whole. For Marx, “value can be thought of as the name for how productive, social activities get divided up within societies, activities – labour, in the very broadest sense – that yield the assemblages of humans and non-humans that are necessary to sustain life, as well as spark new life” (Henderson, 2013, p. xii). In this sense, Diane Elson (1979, p. 123) is

correct that “the object of Marx’s theory of value is not price at all” but “labour”. But her failing to distinguish labour power from labour, i.e. living labour from materialised/realised labour,[7] causes her to deny that the labour theory of value is proof of exploitation (Elson, 1979, p. 115) – it is living labour that is the source of value (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 536) and it is the living labourer who is exploited by capital. In this way, the labour power posited at the beginning of the production process possesses the peculiar characteristic of offering living labour that is quantitatively more than the materialised/realised labour paid to buy it. Living labour persists in and acts as the processor of the production process that transforms the materialised/realised labour in the means of production into new living labour, reproducing the materialised/realised labour paid to buy labour power in living forms, and add a surplus living labour into the total product. The socially necessary duration that living labour spends to preserve and add value is the social necessary labour time that regulates the value of the commodity; whereas the materialised/realised labour posited at the end of the production process indicates the objectification of living labour that might thereafter be manifested by money, needs to be exchanged as materialised/realised labour, and distributed. Economists who stay at the most superficial level – price and materialised/realised labour – fail to discover the reality concealed by the “fetishistic illusions” and “historical, i.e., transitory, ephemeral nature of phenomena” (Lukács, 1971, p. 14). “*This* concealment is made possible by the fact that in capitalist society man’s environment, and especially the categories of economics, appear to him immediately and necessarily in forms of objectivity which conceal the fact that they are the categories of *the relations of men with each other*” (ibid., p. 14), Therefore, as previously mentioned, the theoretical aim of all of Marx’s critique of political economy is to uncover the general law of the exploitative relationship of surplus

[7] The German term *vergegenständlichte Arbeit* is translated into English as materialised labour and realised labour separately (Marx, 1867/1962, p. 228, p. 558; Marx, 1867/1996, p. 221, p. 226, p. 536).

value under a capitalist mode of production, which is concealed by its particular form. Those who stop at the category of value rarely notice that value in turn has its own core – socially necessary labour time of living labour offered by labour power – whose quantity lies at the social level of the length of the working day and labour productivity; that is, the extent to which capitalists simultaneously exploit absolute surplus value and relative surplus value at specific moments. In this sense, Baumol (1974, p. 56) is correct to say that "Marx was concerned primarily with the relationship between profits and surplus value and only incidentally (as a means to get at the former) with that between prices and values".

(3) The concept of rent

So far, Marx's "diagram sets out to describe the accumulative process on the assumption that the capitalist and workers are the sole agents of capitalist consumption.… Under these conditions, there can admittedly be no other classes of society than capitalists and workers…. However…, real life has never known a self-sufficient capitalist society under the exclusive domination of the capitalist mode of production" (Luxemburg, 1913/2003, p. 328), because "the workers and capitalist themselves cannot possibly realise that part of the surplus value which is to be capitalised" (ibid., p. 330). "Therefore, the realisation of the surplus value for the purpose of accumulation is an impossible task for a society which consists solely of workers and capitalists" (ibid., p. 330). Luxemburg's argument is correct in that the capitalist mode of production does need a third class beyond capitalist and worker but her accusation that Marx failed to notice the significance of this third class is unjust. At the very end of volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx stated that "wage labourers, capitalists and landowners", "whose respective sources of income are wages, profit, and ground rent", "constitute the three big classes of modern society based upon

the capitalist mode of production" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 870). Even in contemporary society, when "the categories of rent beyond land in the analysis of a capitalism increasingly reliant on flows of rentier income through financial instruments" (Ward & Aalbers, 2016, p. 1780) is ever more pertinent, and where "the varieties of monopoly, absolute, and redistributive rent, with no claim to universality, may in fact be more important in explaining the contemporary urban process than their universalistic cousin" (Walker, 1974, p. 57), the thriving financial capitalists still need to act in collusion with rentier capitalists in order to extract surplus value via land and housing constructed on land, and speculation thereon. Marx foresaw that "the interests of the 'producing class', including the manufacturers, the industrial capitalists, and interests of the monied class are two very different matters and that these classes are different classes", and that "a battle between the industrial capitalists and the landlords was thus by no means a battle between the '*monied* interest' and 'the *landed* interest'" because if we knew "the history of the corn laws of 1815 and the struggle over these", we would know that "the monied interest and some even of commercial interest … were to be found amongst the *allies* of the landed interest against the manufacturing interest" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 123).

Marx is well aware that ground rent, the source of income of land owners, is not only important in explaining contemporary urbanization and financialization, but also critical to his entire project of proffering a critique of classical and vulgar political economy theoretically and thence of capitalist exploitation. What is more, rent is the logical consequence of transformation from surplus value to average profit – the process of transformation actually connected surplus value not with profit but with rent – when spatial factors – location and soil fertility, no matter whether they are absolute or relative – are taken into account. Moreover, as Marx's manuscript of *Capital* suddenly breaks off when he decides to tell us "what makes wage labourer, capitalists and landlords constitute three great

social classes" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 871), rather than repeating well-rehearsed arguments concerning the opposition between capitalist and proletariat put forward in *The Communist Manifesto*, revisiting Marx's concept of land rent offers the possibility of remoulding the Marxist conception of the relations of production.

Marx's "land rent theory is inseparable from classical political economy, and contains all of the elements of that approach, in extended form" (Park, 2014, p. 90). In this regard, there are three major figures of influence on Marx's own theory: Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Karl Rodbertus, whom Marx spent at least a chapter in criticizing.

Adam Smith's "rent theory is often regarded as inconsistent and self-contradictory" (Park, 2014, p. 90). He "rightly points out that only the part of the labour (value) which the workman newly adds to the material resolves itself into wages and profit, that is to say, the newly-created surplus-value in itself has nothing to do with the part of the capital which has been advanced" (Marx, 1863/1963, p. 81). However, Smith "almost at once… takes the opposite course and identifies value with natural price (the average price determined by competition or the cost-price of the commodities) and builds up the latter from wages, profit and rent" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 343). He stated that "[w]ages, profit and rent, are the three original sources of all revenue as well as all exchangeable value" (Smith, 1981, p. 69). Furthermore, Smith distinguished the sufficient price from the natural price, which made his theory of rent more contradictory. Previously, the natural price of the commodity was 'the whole value of the rent, labour, and profit, which must be paid in order to bring it thither'" (Smith, 1981, p. 73). Now, Smith tends to believe that "if the ordinary price is more than this [the sufficient price] (sufficient to replace the stock together with its ordinary profits), the surplus part of it will naturally go to the rent of the land"

(Smith, cited in Marx, 1863/1968, p. 350). Thus, Smith makes the rent “enter into the composition of the price of commodities in a different way from wages and profit. High or low wages and profit are the causes of high or low price; high or low rent is the effect of it” (Smith, 1981, p. 162). In this sense, Marx thinks that Smith’s unnecessary detour means that his concept of rent “is now the surplus over natural price, previously [it was] a component part of the natural price; now [it is the] effect, previously [it was] the cause, of price” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 353).

David Harvey thinks that Ricardo spotted the contradiction and firmly rejected that wage, profit and rent are sources of exchangeable value (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 39). Unfortunately, as Ricardo identifies surplus value with profit, and “works out the fundamental law of value in more systematic unity and consistency,… the inconsistencies and contradictions stand out more strikingly” (Marx, 1863/1963, p. 89). Although Ricardo discovered that “the presupposition of a continuous flow of capital from one sphere of production into another” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 239), he started from “the false assumption that if the value of commodities is determined by labour-time” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 129), “values and average prices of commodities are identical” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 242), and “argues that rent was due, not to any unique productive powers of land, but to its inherent limitation. It was only the scarcity of the land” (Ghosh, 1985, p. 71) which led to “Ricardo’s denial of absolute rent” because “to admit the existence of the absolute rent would be to admit that the same quantity of labour (materialised, laid out in constant capital and bought with wages) creates varying values according to the element in which [the labour is expended] or according to the material which it works up” (Marx, 1863/1968, pp. 129–130).

Johann Karl Rodbertus, a famous German socialist economist of Marx’s era – who accused “Marx of having plundered him and of having freely used [his work]

in his *Capital* without quoting him" (Engels, 1885/1990, p. 279) – accepted Ricardo's identification of value with average price. Marx has a concise description of their argument on the equalisation of value and average price.

> If we take the average of the increases and decreases in the price of the commodity above or below its value, or the period of equalisation of rises and falls – periods which are constantly repeated – then the average price is equal to the value of the commodity. The average profit in a particular sphere is therefore also equal to the general profit; for although, in this sphere, profit rose above or fell below its old rate with the rise or fall in prices – or with the increase or decrease in costs of production while the price remained constant – on an average, over the period, the commodity was sold at its value. (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 27)

As the precondition of Rodbertus's theory of rent, Rodbertus insists that "rent [surplus in Rodbertus's sense while ground-rent is rent in Marx's sense] is not determined by the size of the capital on which the gain is calculated, but by the direct labour + that amount of labour which must be added on account of the wear and tear of tools and machines" (Rodbertus, 1851, cited in Marx, 1863/1968, p. 58). But for Marx, as per his insistence on the labour theory of value, "the volume of surplus-value… depends only on the immediate labour involved and not on the depreciation of fixed capital" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 58). Thus it is hard to say that Marx plagiarized Rodbertus' work but easy to state that Rodbertus did not understand his English predecessor.

Dissatisfied with Smith, Ricardo and Rodbertus's theories of rent, Marx questioned why, "in the process of equalisation of commodities at average, this particular commodity does not have to pass on to other commodities so much of its intrinsic surplus-value that it only yields the average profit, but is able to

realise a portion of its own surplus-value which forms an excess over and above average profit" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 37). In order to answer this question, Marx provided a highly instructive illustration. He assumes "that most of the factories of a certain country derive their power from steam-engines, while a smaller number derive it from natural waterfalls" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 634).[8] On the one hand, "the greater natural productive power of labour bound up with the application of a force of Nature" increased the productive power of labour (ibid., p. 638). On the other hand, "the motive power of the waterfall – which is found readily available in Nature and is not itself a product of labour like the coal which … must be paid for by an equivalent" (ibid., pp. 636–637). As the result of these two factors, factories deriving their power from natural waterfalls produce an extra surplus power with the same quantity of investment of capital, and the cost price of these factories is lower than their steam-driven counterparts. And, owing to the fact that the product of both factories is sold at the general social price of production, the waterfall-driven factory earns a surplus profit.

Marx called this portion of surplus above average profit deriving from the use value of the natural power of land – whether it arises from fertility or location –, differential rent. The first form of differential rent, differential rent Ⅰ, is "the result of varying productivity of equal amounts of capital invested in equal areas of land of different fertility" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 666). On the one hand, like Ricardo, Marx agreed that "the price of production on the worst soil, i.e.", that is presumed to yield no rent in the sense of differential rent, would be "always the one regulating the market price" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 651). In this case, Ricardo presupposed "a movement toward worse and worse soil, or an ever-

[8] As an aside, without diminishing the pertinence of Marx's example, waterpower came first historically, steam power was a tortuously won (i.e. non-inevitable) latecomer – with lasting environmental consequences (Malm, 2016). Vernadsky (2021a, 2021b, 2021c) offers a trenchant critique of Malm in the (non-peer-reviewed but impassioned) blogosphere.

decreasing fertility of the soil" (ibid., p. 652). As we have mentioned, the condition for capital to be put into production is to obtain at least an average profit in a circuit of capital. Therefore, only when agricultural products are sold at the price of production of the worst land, can capital invested in all the land, whose output meet the need of consumption in the market, earn at least an average profit. On the other hand, Marx thinks that Ricardo's presupposition is unnecessary. Marx argued that "the existence of a differential rent and of a graduated differential rent can develop equally well in a descending sequence, which proceeds from better to worse soils, as in an ascending one, which progresses in the opposite direction from worse to better soils; or it may be brought about in checkered fashion by alternating movements" (ibid., p. 652). For Marx, the existence of a differential rent lies not only in the natural difference of fertility between soils, but also in "the capitalist mode of production through competition", which means that the "market value is always above the total price of production of the total quantity of products" (ibid., p. 653). Therefore, the reason why the price of production deriving from the worst soil regulates market price "is a social act, albeit a socially unconscious and unintentional one. It is based necessarily upon the exchange value of the product" (ibid., p. 654). And the reason why producers on better land receive excessive profits (cf. Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 354) is that they could manage production with higher productivity and thus a lower cost-price based on the superior fertility of land, and sell their products at a market price higher than their price of production based on the law of capitalist mode of production. Therefore, differential rent Ⅰ "was determined by the difference between the yield from the capital invested in the worst, rentless soil and that from the capital invested in superior soil" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 666). In contrast to differential rent Ⅰ, differential rent Ⅱ is determined by the continuous investment on the same plot of land, which artificially produces the differential productivity. However, "when investments create permanent improvements", "such improvements, although products of

capital, have the same effect as natural differences in the quality of the land" (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 356; Marx, 1894/1998, p. 697).

The bad news for the capitalist farmer is that he can't take possession of this part of the excess profit, because he is only by chance acting as both farmer and landlord. A major feature of the capitalist agricultural mode of production, which differs from pre-capitalist modes, is the separation of landownership and land-management rights. Thus, the monopoly of the landlord "of a portion of our planet enables him to levy such tribute" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 619). Even worse, while it "is commonly believed that" differential rent "does not affect product prices" (Haila, 1990, p. 279), the landlord charges rent not only for relatively fertile land but also the worst land that could sufficiently yield the price of production; therefore, "the market price must rise to a point above the price of production, i.e., to P + r, so that rent can be paid to the landlord" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 744). This is because, on the one hand, the value composition of agriculture is lower than the social average – its price of production is lower than the value – and, on the other hand, monopoly rights with respect to land "limit… investment in certain spheres, admitting it only under conditions which wholly or partly exclude general equalisation of surplus value to average profit" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 748; cf. Swyngedouw, 2012, pp. 311–312). Moreover, as argued above, commodities have a tendency to exchange at their value while capitalist competition forces the seller to sell their product at prices of production (cf. Murray, 1977, p. 109). Thus, "agricultural products can trade above their prices of production and so yield" an excess profit that is called absolute rent (A.R.) by Marx (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 351). Additionally, this absolute rent does not mean that the law of differential rent would lose its force. For if the market price of the worst soil that yields general profit is P + r, the price for more fertile soil would likewise = P + r (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 736). "A common criticism of A.R. is that Marx is wrong to suppose that A.R. is always

less than or equal to the difference between prices of production and values (Emmanuel, 1972). According to this criticism landlords, through their monopoly power, can hike prices above labour values and consequently reap greater absolute rents" (Barnes, 1984, p. 132). But Marx thinks that, for example, "[o]n a small island, where there is no foreign trade in corn, the corn, food, like every other product, could unquestionably be sold at a monopoly price, that is, at a price only limited by the state of demand, i.e., of *demand backed by ability to pay*, and according to the price level of the product supplied the magnitude and extent of this effective demand can vary greatly" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 332). He mentioned the case again in Volume 3 of *Capital*, stating that a particular form of rent "can be based only upon an actual monopoly price, which is determined neither by price of production nor by value of commodities, but by the buyers' needs and ability to pay". Harvey (1982/2006, pp. 349–353) termed it monopoly rent,[9] which is distinguished from absolute rent, maintaining that it derives from scarcity and class power. The other common criticism of A.R. is that "absolute rent would disappear altogether if the organic composition in farming were to rise to its social average, even though land remained a scarce, privately-owned, non-reproducible resource essential to the production of many commodities" (Howard & King, 1985, p. 147). However, from Marx's perspective, the formation of absolute rent is an historical–logical process. Marx consciously applied dialectics when writing *Capital*. In contradistinction to Hegel's unifying history with logic, Marx unified logic with history. Specifically, the logic of the formation of absolute rent is its transformation from surplus value to rent via equalisation of profit. And its historical conditions are a "lower organic composition" in agricultural production "than manufacturing industry" because "landed property… impede[s] capital… from flowing freely into the agricultural sector" (Ramirez, 2009, p. 81). In this regard, only when the logic – the

[9] Harvey (1974a) had earlier explored this topic under the label of 'class-monopoly rent.' For a discussion of the varied usage of the term, see Evans (1991).

transformation process – passes through these historical conditions can the concept of absolute rent emerge. Furthermore, even if, in contemporary society, the value composition of agriculture increased to the social average, absolute rent may not disappear. For Marx (1894/1998, p. 753), firstly, the increase of the agricultural organic composition to the level of other industries does not "prove that the social productivity of labour is equally developed in it" since constant capital includes not only machines but also raw materials whose price fluctuations may influence the value composition of capital. Secondly, the improvement of agricultural productivity does not necessarily compensate for the reduction of the natural productive forces of the land (ibid., pp. 753–754). Finally, Marx admitted that the difference between the organic compositions of agriculture and industry may decrease. But this decrease is subject to the condition that "the proportionate decrease of variable as compared with constant capital is still greater in the case of industrial than in the case of agricultural capital" (ibid., p. 759). For example, the use of machines has caused the liberated surplus labour-power to flow to other industrial sectors, resulting in a shortage of labour in the agricultural sector and an increase in the wages of agricultural workers. Therefore, variable capital has the same upward trend as constant capital. Moreover, as the value created by a unit of labour power has increased, the rate of surplus value will also increase. Thus, agriculture still participates in the transformation process with a higher surplus value than the social average. Kautsky added two more reasons for the sustainability of absolute rent. On the one hand, with the use of machinery and the improvement of agricultural technology, the increase of constant capital in agricultural production will be compensated by the acceleration of capital turnover time (Kautsky, 1899/1988, p. 79). On the other hand, "if absolute ground-rent is paid on poorest soils, then it must also be paid on all others" (Kautsky, 1899/1988, p. 80). Because, in contemporary society, agricultural products must participate in competition in the world market, whether absolute

rent should be paid lies in the land in technologically lagging countries with lower value composition. Thus, the disappearance of absolute rent is conditional rather than inevitable.

At this point, we may return to consider Marx's distinction between absolute surplus value and relative surplus value. In Marx's opinion, absolute rent and differential rent could be deduced not only through the mediation of the transformation process but also directly from absolute surplus value and relative surplus value, because absolute and relative surplus value share the same mechanism of extraction with their particular forms. Specifically, absolute surplus value and absolute rent derive from the monopoly control of certain elements of production, whilst relative surplus value and differential rent derive from relatively advantageous individual conditions of production. However, the identification of this mechanism does not mean that rent is a general mode of extraction of surplus labour that parallels capitalist exploitation, i.e. the expropriation of surplus value, because only the use value of labour creates surplus value over and above its own value: any excessive surplus value charged by landlords to capitalist farmers is produced by the agricultural workers.

3. Asiatic tax/rent couple

(1) Introduction

Our preparatory dissection of the ape, so to speak, has now come to an end. Let us return from the era of capitalism to the era in which the Asiatic mode of production is located, recalling that "[t]he bourgeois economy … supplies the key to the ancient, etc. but not at all in manner of those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society. One can understand tribute, tithe, etc., if one is acquainted with ground rent.

But one must not identify them" (Marx, 1857/1973, p.105).

The greatness of Marx's theory of capitalist rent is to revise the mistakes made by classical political economy: "all economists share the error of examining surplus-value not as such, in its pure form, but in the particular forms of profit and rent" (Marx, 1863/1963, p. 40). Marx believes that rent appears in two forms: differential rent and absolute rent. The two forms represent the different modes of extraction of surplus value. Differential rent is the result of the use of greater productive power of labour by the capitalist production unit. Because of competition under the capitalist mode of production, the same amount of capital put into production yields the same amount of profit. The product is sold at the price of production, i.e. the cost price plus the average profit. Moreover, the price of production of the worst land stipulated the market price of agricultural products. Thus, the land that provides higher productivity can contribute a lower cost to the capitalist farmer and a part of excess surplus value to the landowners.

Therefore, the extraction of differential rent lies, on the one hand, in the higher productive force provided by fertility, location, and investment on the same plot of land; and, on the other hand, in the transformation from value into the price of production. In contrast, the existence of absolute rent is because, on the one hand, the value composition of agriculture is lower than the social average – its price of production is lower than the value – and, on the other hand, monopoly rights concerning land "limit… investment in certain spheres, admitting it only under conditions which wholly or partly exclude general equalisation of surplus value to average profit" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 748). In this sense, Lenin (1962, p. 298) is quite correct to say that "differential rent is inevitably an inherent feature of every form of capitalist agriculture". However, he is just as surely mistaken when he states that "absolute rent is not [an inherent feature of capitalist agriculture]; it arises only under the private ownership of land, only

under the historically created backwardness of agriculture" (ibid.). Indeed, "capitalist production starts its career on the presupposition of landed property, which is not its own creation, but which was already here before it" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 243). However, "capital can… subject agriculture to the conditions of capitalist production" (ibid.). In other words, in the absence of conditions under which capitalist competition equalizes profit, and where the value composition of agriculture is lower than the other capitalist industrial production sectors, landowners could not extract absolute rent merely by virtue of land ownership. Marx stated that

> Landed property is based on the monopoly by certain persons over definite portions of the globe, as exclusive spheres of their private will to the exclusion of all others. With this in mind, the problem is to ascertain the economic value, that is, the realisation of this monopoly on the basis of capitalist production. The use of this power depends wholly upon economic conditions, which are independent of their will. (Marx, 1894/1998, pp. 609–610)

What is more, even if absolute rent exists in pre-capitalist modes of production, it is more than just a product of private property rights. State and communal ownership in the Asiatic mode of production can also generate rent, but this absolute rent is a different form of surplus labour, discussed by Marx in *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value.* They comply with different modes of extraction.

One of "the prerequisites for the capitalist mode of production" is that the "actual tillers of the soil are wage labourers employed by a capitalist" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 612). Landowners and agricultural workers only have an indirect relationship. The landowner's extraction of the surplus labour of the agricultural worker is concealed in the exchange relationship that the capitalist purchases the labour

power of the agricultural worker, sells products to realise the surplus value, and distributes a portion of the surplus value to the landowner. Rent thus appears as an accessory to the activity of the capitalist who earns the profit. However, "[r]ent (as the Physiocrats conceive it by *reminiscence* [of feudal conditions]) appears historically (and still on the largest scale among the Asiatic peoples) as the general form of *surplus labour*, of labour performed without payment in return" (Marx, 1863/1972, p. 400). This uniformity lies in the fact that "the world between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries consisted of one vast peasantry, where between 80% and 90% of people lived from the land and from nothing else. The rhythm, quality and deficiency of harvests ordered all material life" (Braudel, 1992, p. 49). Thus, for Marx, the mode of extraction of surplus labour under the Asiatic mode of production is synonymous with the mode of rent extraction. This synonymy determines the methodology of exploration of the mode of rent extraction under the AMP.

The approach of our research on capitalist rent follows Marx's logical-historical approach, which 'reduces' rent from the general capitalist production of surplus value. This general-to-specific approach is based on the overall grasp of Marx's theory of surplus value found in *Capital*, the logic of exposition of which is a demonstration of Marx's thought. However, Marx himself followed an opposite route when he researched the theory of surplus value, moving from the specific to the general. He first saw the various particular forms of surplus value through the works of classical political economists. By analysing the relations of production, Marx finally discovered the secret of surplus value covered by these particular forms. Similarly, the uniformity of rent and general form of surplus labour in the Asiatic mode of production suggest that it is possible to infer what kind of relation of production caused this form of rent. More importantly, we can uncover the mystery of Asiatic mode of production that distinguishes it from other pre-capitalist modes of production, and why it does not spontaneously

grow into the capitalist mode of production.

(2) Asiatic Tax/Rent Couple I

Ray Huang (1974/2009) has provided a detailed and profound analysis of the land rent and taxation of the Ming Dynasty in China (1368–1644). In his book, he documents a taxation rule recorded by the 1585 edition of the Shun-te county gazetteer. It has only three terms, but it implies the most important relations of production in ancient China. The three terms as cited by Huang (1974/2009, p. 85), though not in this order, are:

- "All taxable land, regardless of classification, was assessed at a uniform 0.0094 piculs [of husked rice] per mou[10] to compensate for the rents lost to the government by the write-off of public estates."
- "A 7 per cent surcharge was added to the grain payment to cover losses due to handling"
- "All taxable land in the county was classified into upper, middle, and lower grades according to soil productivity" and taxed accordingly

The first tax collection rule shows the relationship between communal land ownership and private land ownership in the Ming Dynasty. Even though a large portion of the former communal land has been encroached upon by private ownership, the government of the Ming dynasty could still impose a tax on private land to supplement the losses caused by the occupation of communal land. Therefore, the tax collection of communal land is still the main source of the country's income. Although the *History of Ming* recorded that "In Hongzhi 15 years [1502], there are 4,228,058 qings of land in the state. The amount of communal land accounts for one seventh of all the land, which is about 600,000

[10] Chinese unit of land measurement. 15 mou = 1 hectare; 1 qing = 100 mou.

qings" (Xu, 2004, p.1488), these figures excluded almost all kinds of communal land. The 600,000 qings are mainly confiscated lands (Wu, 1982, p. 23). According to the definition of communal land in Ming dynasty, "at the beginning, communal land is confiscated in Song and Yuan Dynasties. Later, there were Huanguantian [11] … Duanruguantian [12], Xueguantian [13], Huangzhuang [14], Mumacaochang[15]…, Ciqizhuangtian[16] …, and Tuntian[17] etc." (Xu, 2004, p. 1487). In the case of Tuntian alone, there are about 650,000–900,000 qings. Similarly, the 600,000 qings excludes Ciqizhuangtian (Wu, 1982, p. 23). Only in the Prefecture of Shuntian[18], 200,919 qings and 28 mous of Qincizhuangtian was ferreted out in Jiajing's era (Chen, 1638/1962, p. 790). Therefore, in the late Ming Dynasty, communal land still accounted for a large proportion of the total land. At the same time, the tax provided by the Jiangnan area in 1578 accounted for 37% of the national total tax revenue. Of these taxes, most is received from the communal land, tax from private land accounting only for a very small portion of total taxation (Wang, Lin & Li, 1985, p. 69). Moreover, the proportion of communal land in the Jiangnan area is also greater than that of private land. For example, communal land accounts for 65.2% of the total in the Suzhou Prefecture, which rises to 84.52% in the Songjiang Prefecture (Wu, 1982, p. 26). Therefore, both land ownership and land rent are dominated by the state in the Ming Dynasty.

The dominance of communal ownership is even more obvious when considered over the *longue durée* of Chinese history. A poem by an ordinary person in the

[11] Land given to a meritorious bureaucrat.

[12] Land of uncertain ownership and was adjudged by the government

[13] Land paying for sacrificial offerings, teachers' salaries and students' subsidies

[14] Farmland owned directly by the royal family

[15] Pasture land.

[16] The farmland of kings, princesses, bureaucrats, eunuchs, and monasteries acquired as a gift of the emperor and via self-petitioning.

[17] Land cultivated by organized soldiers, prisoners and recruited peasants to supply for military expenditure and the national treasury reserve.

[18] Roughly equivalent to Beijing, Tianjin and most of Hebei Province.

Zhou Dynasty, included in *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*),[19] recorded that "[w]here'er their arch the heavens expand, the king can claim the land below. Within the sea-bounds of the land, all at his summons come or go" (Legge (trans.), 1876, p. 247). Mencius also stated that a "square *li* constitutes a well-field, and the well-field contains nine hundred *mu [mou]*. The central plot among them is a public field, and eight families each have private holdings of a hundred *mu*. Together they cultivate the public field, and only when the public work is done do they dare attend to their private work" (Mencius, Bloom (trans.) & Ivanhoe (ed.), 2009, p. 54). Wu Dakun argued that "the so-called well-field is the commune organization that Marx described in his works on the Asiatic mode of production". "Although there were slaves at that time, these slaves served only in the family, and the labourer who engaged in the cultivation on the well-field were the free-peasants of the commune" (Wu, 1953b, p. 25). Corresponding to this communal land ownership is a mixture of land rent and taxation. The two words are often used together without distinction (Wu, 1953a, p. 30). Mozi (468 B.C.E.–376 B.C.E.) stated that "through their regular levies and the collection of their rents and taxes, the people may have expenditure, but are not distressed" (Mozi & Johnston, 2009, p. 39). Guanzi (723 B.C.E.–645 B.C.E.) stated that "Land rent and … taxes are the way to make requests based on prior calculations" (Guanzi & Rickett, 1998, p. 378). Ancient Chinese dictionaries also explained the two words as synonyms. *Shuowen Jiezi*[20] explained that "tax is rent" (Xu, 1963, p. 146). Land rent and tax did not differ until Qin Shihuang first eliminated other regimes and made China a unified country. A decree of 216 B.C.E. allowed "people to report the amount of land they occupied to the government", thus establishing the private possession of land. However, "the privatization of land does not mean the disappearance of

[19] A poetry anthology compiled by Confucius describing social life between the early West Zhou Dynasty to mid-Chunqiu (11th century B.C.E–6th century B.C.E.).

[20] The first Chinese dictionary that systematically analysed the Chinese character pattern. It was compiled between 100 A.D. and 121 A.D.

communal ownership which exists in different ways" (Chen, 2007, p. 6). Additionally, even if land can be traded after the Qin and Han dynasties, the Chinese emperor is still the uttermost landowner. "The emperors of the Chinese Dynasties and their governments not only directly mastered a lot of lands, enslaved farmers to cultivate for him, and collect rents; at the same time, he also collected national taxes and tributes as national ruler, and concurrently made peasants provide corvée" (Wu, 1953a, p. 31). This continued superiority of communal land ownership is not only reflected in the many forms of communal land, but also the taxation on these lands after the Qin and Han Dynasties. "The burden of tax on communal land is very different from that of private land. The highest rate of taxation in Suzhou is more than one hundred times that of the lowest, while it is nearly four hundred times in Songjiang" (Wu, 1982, p. 19). This difference in taxation is not only due to the tax that is the source of the fiscal revenue required to manage the operation of the country and associated construction projects but also includes the rent that is levied by the state as the landowner. It means that the tax levied on communal land is the combination of tax levied for state revenue and rent collected by landownership, which is much greater than rent collected on private-owned land. In this way, Marx's assertion that "in Asia, under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 777) is not arbitrary but deducible from his theory of surplus value and history in Asiatic society. "Under such circumstances, there need exist no stronger political or economic pressure than that common to all subjects to that state. The state is then the supreme lord" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 777). "A part of … surplus labour belongs to the higher community, which exists ultimately as a person, and this surplus labour takes the form of tribute etc." (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 473). Sovereignty here consists in the ownership of land concentrated on a national scale. But, on the other hand, no private ownership of land exists, although there is both private and common

possession and use of land (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 777).

How, then, does the government under the Asiatic mode of production levy this tax/rent couple by virtue of land ownership? We already know that, under capitalist relations of production, there is also a land rent levied by land ownership, that is, absolute rent. However, this kind of rent is premised on the capitalist mode of production and only occurs at a certain historical stage when the organic composition of agriculture is lower than other industrial sectors. Therefore, capitalist rent is the economic coercion by the landowner of the capitalist farmer. In contrast, under the Asiatic mode of production, there is no other industrial sector; agriculture accounts for the vast majority of the social economy, and craft industry is attached to agriculture. Therefore, the landowner's possession of the surplus labour under the Asiatic mode of production is different from that under the capitalist mode of production. According to Marx, this possession is based on political domination. Under the Asiatic mode of production, especially in China, 'there are usually two essential conditions for being an emperor: first, there is enough force to back him up. Second, there must be a corresponding political prestige…. However, ultimately, power is the basis" (Zhou, 1999, p. 14). Lü Buwei (292 B.C.E.–235 B.C.E.) stated

> The victor [in battle] became chieftain…. Chieftains proved unequal to the tasks of governing – this is why the position of lord was established. Lords also proved unequal to the tasks of governing – this is why the position of Son of Heaven was established. The position of Son of Heaven developed out of that of lord; that of lord in turn developed out of that of chief; and that of chief developed from fighting. (Lü, Knoblock & Riegel (trans.), 2000, p. 176)

The second term of taxation cited at the beginning of this section, the conditions stipulated in the Shun-te county gazetteer, also demonstrates that the mode of extraction of the tax/rent couple under the Asiatic mode of production is political. If the tax on the land is at least due to the provision of the means of production, amortizing the taxation on administrative consumption to the land tax/rent is completely political. Nay, the state imposes a service levy on the peasant to meet the needs of government functions. “The service obligations fulfilled by the *li-chia* were referred to by contemporaries as *i*, and sometimes translated as ‘service’. It was more than labor service however, for it also included the contribution and handling of materials and always some small cash payments” (Huang, 1974/2009, p. 34). Therefore, land ownership is not a sufficient condition for the state to collect taxes. On the one hand, the government could use its political coercive power to impose a tax on certain issues that are not related to land use. On the other hand, the possession and use of communal land in the rural commune give way to the state as a higher-level commune who owns political and military power that guarantees the exercise of its land ownership. Consequently, although the Asiatic mode of production is based on communal ownership and rural communes, it does not mean that it is a harmonious and idyllic world. There is still violence, coercion, oppression and exploitation.

However, this surplus is not exclusive to the emperor, and most of the surplus products are used in the social functions of the state. Engels agreed that

> the exercise of a social function was everywhere the basis of political supremacy; and further that political supremacy has existed for any length of time only when it discharged its social functions. However great the number of despotisms which rose and fell in Persia and India, each was fully aware that above all it was the entrepreneur responsible for the

> collective maintenance of irrigation throughout the river valleys, without which no agriculture was possible there. (Engels, 1877/1987, p. 167)

Marx also said that “[c]limate and territorial conditions … constituted artificial irrigation by canals and water-works [as] the basis of Oriental agriculture”, and that “an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic Governments, the function of providing public works” (Marx, 1853a/1979, p. 123). Wittfogel developed this point of view. He described a hydraulic economy corresponding to oriental despotism. He stated that “[i]t is only above the level of an extractive subsistence economy, beyond the influence of strong centers of rainfall agriculture, and below the level of a property-based industrial civilisation that man, reacting specifically to the water-deficient landscape, moves toward a specific hydraulic order of life” (Wittfogel, 1957/1967, p. 12). He indeed correctly described some of the conditions of Asiatic society. In 16th-Century China, large scale water-control projects “went on almost incessantly, rarely being interrupted for more than five years….”

> Major construction works were carried out in 1528, 1565, 1578, 1587 and 1595…. Initially 50,000 laborers were mobilized though the [1578] project as a whole seems to have involved at least 100,000 men for a little over a year. Altogether 139 breaks in the dikes were repaired and over thirty miles of new dikes were constructed, complete with tunnels, glacises, and stone embankments. In addition 830,000 new willow trees were planted. Had all materials and labor been paid for in full, a conservative estimate would have put the total cost at more than 2.5 million taels. (Huang, 1974/2009, pp. 279–280)

However, Marx’s interpretation of Asiatic states is not functionalist like Wittfogel’s. The need for irrigation projects does not necessarily lead to a

despotic state. Marx holds that “this supervision work necessarily arises in all modes of production based on the antithesis between the labourer, as the direct producer, and the owner of the means of production” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 382). In the early stages of the Asiatic history, “[t]he community can … appear within the clan system more in a situation where the unity is represented in a chief of the clan-family, or as the relation of the patriarchs among one another” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 473). “Corresponding to this, the form of this community system is either despotic or democratic” (Marx, 1857/2012, p. 727; cf. Marx, 1857/1973, p. 473). “The communal conditions of real appropriation through labour, *aqueducts*, very important among the Asiatic peoples; means of communication etc. then appear as the work of the higher unity – of the despotic regime hovering over the little communes” (Marx, 1857/1973, pp. 473–474). Therefore, from Marx’s perspective, the emergence of oriental despotism is not, as Wittfogel maintained, because hydrological irrigation requires strong management and control. On the contrary, the despotist emperor as the father of the commune becoming the uttermost landowner is the prerequisite of irrigation projects becoming the enterprise of the government. Hence, “the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state”, is to be found not in the function of this state, but in “the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 778). Therefore, the reason why the emperor and his government can extract Asiatic land rent from the direct producers relies on historical materialism, that is, to find answers in forces and relations of production. As Wittfogel said, as demonstrated in the first chapter of the thesis, geographical features such as climate do affect social forms and social relationships, but social relationships are also influenced by their previous historical forms. Moreover, two forms of social relationship that are geographically closed will modify each other when people in the two areas

starts to interact. In other words, history and geography – time and space – constitute the social process as a whole that determines social relations. It is misguided to think that geographical features determine forms of state aside from the historical formation of the oriental society and social relations.

At this stage, we can sum up the first mode of extraction of the tax/rent couple in the Asiatic mode of production, which is similar to Marx's concept of absolute rent. Both forms of rent involve surplus labour based on monopoly ownership of land. But unlike absolute rent, this tax/rent couple 1 is not exchange-mediated but politically enforced. Even though the commune or its members possess the land, i.e. the means of production, this possession is premised on its dual identity in the commune and the state. The state as a higher united commune owns the land and the emperor as the symbol of this commune can use his political coercive force to make his government collect and manage the surplus produced in the communal land. The use of taxation for administrative and social services in such states is not the cause but the result of the Asiatic relations of production.

(3) Asiatic tax/rent couple 2

We have now examined the mode of extraction of Asiatic tax/rent couple 1, but the relation of production behind this form of surplus extraction, the direct political rule of the state or the emperor as the uttermost landowner with respect to the direct labour force, does not make the Asiatic mode of surplus extraction different from other pre-capitalist modes of surplus extraction. "Marx's view of historical development was never simply unilinear, nor did he ever regard it as a mere record of progress" (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp. 147–148). "Broadly speaking, there are now three … alternative routes out of the primitive communal system, each representing a form of the social division of labour already existing or

implicit within it: the *oriental*, the *ancient*, the *Germanic*" (Hobsbawm, 2011, p. 147). Therefore, "pre-class society forms a large and complex historical epoch of its own, with its own history and laws of development, and its own varieties of socio-economic organisation" (Hobsbawm, 2011, p. 163). Accordingly, it is still necessary to discover how the acquisition of Asiatic land rents differs from that of other pre-capitalist rents. This difference still needs to be found in "the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers".

The Shun-te County gazetteer's third term suggests the unique relation of production in the Asiatic mode of production. Dividing the land into different grades according to fertility, and levying differential taxes according to grade appears at first blush to be very similar to differential rent in the capitalist mode of production. However, there is a huge difference between the two forms of surplus labour. The extraction of differential rent lies, on the one hand, in the higher productive force provided by fertility, location, and investment on the same plot of land, and, on the other hand, in the transformation of value into price of production. The extraction of Asiatic tax/rent 2, in contrast, lies in the restriction to and the concession of the emperor's political domination.

In appearance, China's political system in history is the same as the Asiatic state described by Marx and Engels. It is the political domination of the state over direct labourers. However, Marx and Engels were limited by the shortage of the materials they were able to master at the time in which they were writing, as well as by their primary interest in western European society. They did not elaborate on the subtle relations of production behind direct political domination. This is comparable to the way in which, when people research capitalist rent, they only notice rent collected by the landowner from agriculture workers, neglecting the role of the capitalist farmer in the process of surplus production

and distribution.

As far as China is concerned, the power of the emperor as ruler and owner of means of production is limited. This limitation is manifested firstly in the indirectness of domination. In contrast, the domination of the serfs of the European lords was direct. “It was their specific organization in a vertically articulated system of parcellized sovereignty and scalar property that distinguished the feudal mode of production in Europe” (Anderson, 1974a, p. 408). Engels described the emergence of this pyramidal political structure in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. “The first thing the king of the Franks, transformed from an ordinary supreme military commander into a real monarch, did was to convert this property of the people into a royal estate, to steal it from the people and to donate or grant it in fief to his retainers” (Engels, 1884/1990, p. 251). “This retinue … was soon augmented” (Engels, 1884/1990, pp. 251–252). Thus, the “free Frankish peasants found themselves in a position similar to that of their predecessors, the Roman colons. Ruined by war and plunder, they had to seek the protection of the newly arisen magnates or the Church, for royal authority was too weak to protect them; but they had to pay dear for this protection” (Engels, 1884/1990, pp. 252–253). In contrast, the Asiatic political system is bistratal. This bistratal system “somehow managed to ‘hang up’ the centralized power so that it did not reach to the ground, since the officials sent by the central government stopped at the district yamen[21]” (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 79). “District orders did not come to the various households but to the local self-governing unit” (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 81). Fei Hsiao-Tung speaks of this type of organization as a ‘self-governing unit’ because “it was organized by local people to look out for the public affairs of the community. Public affairs included problems of irrigation, self-defense, mediation in personal disputes, mutual aid, recreation, and religious activities” (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 81).

[21] The local government office which also includes the residence of the local official in Imperial China.

Therefore, this type of organization which is also recognized by Marx is a rural commune which is relatively independent of the domination of the emperor. “The gentry play an adjustive role between the emperor and the peasants” (Liang, 2006, p. 41). “The emperor who holds the supremacy of power can certainly decide not to share his power with others, but the vast territory of the state could not be operated by his two hands. Although he does not want to be ignorant of everything, the emperor is still a human: there are still practical restrictions. So he has to hire a large number of bureaucrats” (Fei, 1948a, p. 5; cf. Creel, 1964). In the China of this period, gentry and bureaucrat were synonymous (Wu, 1948, p. 49). Since the Sui Dynasty, the system of imperial examinations gradually became the main method of selecting bureaucrats. In the early days, literature and the classics of Confucianism were both tested, while in the Ming and Qing dynasties, only the interpretation of classics was examined.

> [H]ieroglyphics take a long time to learn, and if they are not used often, it is easy to forget. The syntax of classical Chinese is different from its colloquial style. The person who speaks does not necessarily write, the article is another set and must be studied separately. The words contained in the text are mostly official documents. It is the official documents, records, history, and ethics that are written in characters which do not have much use for ordinary people. (Fei, 1948b, p. 17)

Therefore, the gentry and the bureaucrat mastered ideography and ideology. Having done so, they adopt a mediating role as they

> on the one hand admonish the emperor, ask him to restrain himself, levy less tax, build fewer construction works for himself, stop going on punitive expeditions and promote culture and education. On the other, they teach

> the populace to show loyalty and filial piety to their emperor and parents and tell them to do their share of work and never rebel. Thus the function of the gentry meets the needs of both sides, of the emperor and the populace, and overcame conflict (Liang, 2006, p. 42).

After the Song Dynasty, the scale of the imperial examinations was expanded. “The number of the bureaucrats born in grass-roots families overwhelmed their competitors from the gentry” (Wu, 1948, p. 53). In this way, there is a soft communication channel between the emperor and the populace. “The mechanism of bringing influences to bear from the bottom up was worked out through the informal pressure of the gentry upon their relatives in office and out or upon friends who had taken the same examinations. By this means influence could be brought to bear sometimes even upon the emperor himself.” (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 84).

What is more, the relations of production between Chinese rulers and labourers is not only intermediated and buffered by the gentry but also destroyed and reconstructed through peasant uprisings. “The possession of riches or the lack of them was what was important for making some acquiesce and others rebel.” (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 23). Normally, the emperor, gentry and peasants are reciprocally constraining. The so-called *Extended Continuation to Zizhi Tongjian* (1183 A.D.) recorded a conversation between Emperor Shenzong of Song, Zhao Xu, and his minister of the military, Wen Yanbo, on the effect of reform on the gentry and populace.

> Wen Yanbo said that the predecessors have designed the system very well, which does not need to be changed so as not to lose people’s support. The emperor said that changing the system will indeed make many member of the gentry unhappy but is good for the populace. Wen

> answered that the emperor governs the state with the gentry, not with the populace. The emperor questioned whether all the gentry think that reform is wrong. Then he answered the question himself: among them, some of the gentry also agreed to reform. (Li, 1986, p. 5370)

That is to say, although the emperor needs the gentry to help him govern the state, the interests of the emperor are not always consistent with those of the gentry. The emperor sometimes imposes restrictions on the gentry for the support of the populace and the stability of the regime. For example, the government will use political coercion to order private landowners to reduce private land rent. *The History of Yuan* records that

> At the beginning of Emperor Chengzong of Yuan's succession, he ordered a reduction of three tenths of the tax/rent. However, the situation in Jiangnan where the poor rent land from and pay rent to the rich, is different from that in Jiangbei. Only the tax/rent that land possessors need to pay is reduced, and the tenant peasants still have to pay the rent. The grace of the decree is only for the rich and not for the poor. Therefore, the emperor should order and reduce the rent that the tenant peasants need to pay to the land possessors. The amount of reduction should be the same as the reduction of tax/rent. (Song, 1976, p. 387)

Later, in 1304, Emperor Chengzong of Yuan regards private rent in the Jiangnan area as still being too high. He ordered a reduction of 20% in the amount of rent and makes it a usual practice (Song, 1976, p. 457), meaning that the reduction is enforced in perpetuity, providing the emperor does not disannul the order. Moreover, whereas in Western Europe, a change of dynasty is typically carried out from within the existing nobility, in China, the emperor does not necessarily derive from a constant social class. Dynastic change is

often carried out through a rebellion of military bureaucrats or a peasant uprising. Thus, the first emperor of a new dynasty often belonged to the gentry or the general populace of the previous dynasty. As early as the Warring States period, Xunzi offered an apposite metaphor for the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. He said that “the lord is the boat; his subjects the water. It is the water that sustains the boat, and it is the water that capsizes the boat” (Xunzi & Knoblock (trans.) 1990, p. 97). The gentry is one of the two major strata rebelling against and taking over the imperial power. Both the first emperor of Tang Dynasty (618–907) and of Song Dynasty (960–1279) was born into families of the gentry. In the late Qin Dynasty, Chen Sheng, the leader of the first nationwide peasant uprising in Chinese history, bellowed out that “[k]ings and nobles, generals and ministers – such men are made, not born” (Sima, 1993, p. 21)! This slogan heralded a peasant rebellion against the imperial power spanning over 2000 years. In Chinese history, many people were born of the populace but obtained imperial power. Liu Yu[22] was a free peasant. Zhu Yuanzhang[23] was a tenant peasant and a monk. Liu Bang[24] was a peace officer in the countryside. Liu Bei[25] was a chapman of straw sandals. Therefore, the emperors in the early years of the dynasties were able to experience the hardships of the people and implement policies to reduce the burden of taxation. At the same time, due to the military power and the prestige established in the rebellion, imperial power in the early stage of dynasties is often strong. It can guarantee the state’s ultimate position as landowner and pay more attention to the poor in terms of the distribution of usufructuary rights. However, in the late, possibly decadent period of a dynasty, because the emperor may well have become immersed in hedonism and the bureaucrats corrupt, government income may no longer support huge expenses,

[22] The first emperor of Liu Song Dynasty (420–479).
[23] The first emperor of Ming dynasty (1368–1644).
[24] The first emperor of Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220).
[25] The first emperor of Shu Han Dynasty (221–263).

undermining the possibility of continuing to provide adequate social services. The gentry can gain economic benefits for themselves and their families from the administrative power shared by the imperial power. At the grassroots level, communal ownership and the right of use of small-scale peasant family often collapsed when land was allowed to be freely traded. In this way, the gentry acquired a large quantity of land-use rights and imposed heavy tax/rent couples on tenant peasants.

“When most of the peasants who are direct producers lose their land and can no longer survive…. [t]his dynasty is poised to be conquered by the nomads or to be overthrown by the people it ruled” (Wu. 1953b, p. 27). Malthusianism would contend that the collapse of a ruling dynasty arises from the fact that the population exceeds the limits that resources can bear. “The resource base expands slowly, and thus in the long run there is a fixed negative relationship between population size and individual income…. The population is kept within the bounds dictated by natural resources by a ‘positive check’” (Rosenthal & Wong, 2011, p. 37). However, this assumption has not been authenticated by the history of Asia. For example, although the GNP per capita of China and India in the early 19th century declined (Braudel, 1979/1984, p. 534), the population was not kept within the bounds dictated by a positive check but considerably rose (Bennet, 1954, cited in Frank, 1998, p. 168). Moreover, “in times of crisis, access to resources is economically, socially and, most important, politically determined…. Indeed, politics, as well as other forces outside the demographic regime, can cause failures both in production and in distribution and in turn lead death rates to jump skyward” (Rosenthal & Wong, 2011, p. 41). “[S]ome of the worst famines have taken place with no significant decline in food availability per head” (Sen, 1981, p. 7). In imperial China, famine is caused mainly by climate change, locust plagues and population increase, but famine does not necessarily lead to peasant uprisings. In the early days of

a dynasty, peasants in famine often anticipated government relief or fled to the city as a victim. Only when the peasants lost their confidence in the government's function of redistributing surplus product to them and developed a strong sense of deprivation, usually in the latter years of a dynasty, would the peasant revolt. Therefore, in China, the basic contradiction of society manifests itself in the contradiction of the relations of production among emperors, gentry and peasants, and communal ownership and private right of use. This contradiction is alleviated by the cycle of rebellion and reconstruction, but "the nature of this despotic monarchy is not changed by the handing-on or relaying of power" (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 19). Whether the peasants or the gentry have seized imperial power, they will form a triangular relationship among emperors, gentry and peasants. As long as the relations of production do not change structurally, the mode of surplus extraction will not change. In this sense, we can understand Marx's words: "simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky" (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 363–364).

Hence, Asiatic tax/rent 2 is meant to guarantee the survival even of those peasants who are cultivating the worst land. The prescriptive nature of this worst land is not to stipulate the market price, as in the capitalist mode of production, but to stipulate the boundary of the political exploitive power of the emperor and the gentry to the peasants' right of survival. "In a peasant society we are dealing with an exchange between wealth and power on the one hand and a near subsistence peasantry on the other, and the norms of obligation are set, to a great extent, by the existential needs of the lower class. The recurrent economic problem of peasant life is the ecological precariousness of the food

supply: therefore, those who control the scarce resources of the society are responsible for the basic material requirements of their subordinates" (Scott, 1976, p. 182). Accordingly, although some scholars of economic history (Diamond, 1991; Jones, 1981) think that "[t]he emperors … tax excessively, fail to invest in useful public goods, and greedily divert public resources to their own purposes" (Rosenthal & Wong, 2011, p. 170), "the Chinese regime focused on a significant production of public goods with moderate taxation" (Rosenthal & Wong, 2011, p. 205).

4. Conclusion: A rentierised economy?

Rethinking Marx's concept of rent under the mode of extraction of surplus value has at least three dimensions of significance to society: present, past, and prospective. First, it helps to understand contemporary capitalism, which is increasingly described as rentier capitalism by both Marxists and a range of social scientists. Secondly, it has affirmed the geographical diversity of modes of production in Marx's elaborations and thus cast light on the great transformation from precapitalist modes of production to the capitalist mode of production and great divergence between the West and the East in history. Finally, it serves to highlight the necessary relation of production to the prospect of revolution. We will discuss the first dimension here as a conclusion. The second and third dimensions will be only touched upon here and discussed in detail in the next two chapters.

Capitalist profit has long been subject to critique as morally deficient and unequal by both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars. Zygmunt Bauman (1982, p. 21) stated that "[t]here was nothing wrong with the unprecedented increase of surplus product attained through the new organisation of the productive process;

everything, however, was wrong with the acquisition of this surplus product as the profit of the capital owner", which led to the "ruthless exploitation of labour force" and anarchy of production. However, "[o]ver the past few decades, several analysts have observed a relative shift in capital accumulation strategies, from the primacy of production of surplus value by expanded reproduction… toward increased foregrounding of the circulation of money and profit through non-productive forms of value appropriation" (Andreucci et al., 2017, p. 1), basically interest and rent. On the one hand the hegemonic power of finance capital is the controlling influence over the urbanisation process" (Harvey, 1974a, p. 239).[26] It is true that "both economic and social reproduction and restructuring under neoliberalism have been underpinned, directly and indirectly, by financialization" (Bayliss et al., 2019, cited in Fine, 2019, p. 457). On the other hand, "land titles have become integral parts of financial capital investment portfolios" (Swyngedouw, 2012, p. 315). In this sense, financialization and rentierization become two main characteristics of the contemporary capitalist mode of production.

Financialization has indeed facilitated rent extraction by means of speculation and monopolistic control of certain kinds of asset such as housing. In this way, "an increasing proportion of ordinary people's income has gone on paying for property – effectively rent – and on interest on debt, and hence into the hands of rentiers" (Sayer, 2016, p. 70). Thomas Purcell et al. (2020, p. 443) suggested that "it is not only that land and assets are treated as pure financial assets but, and perhaps more importantly, that rent, extracted from various forms of private monopoly, has increasingly been pursued by fictitious capital". Rent is thus recognised as an essential form of surplus extraction that "has to be brought

[26] For another take on the role of rent in the urbanization process, from around the same period as Harvey's (1974a) contribution, see Ball (1977). One might also note, in passing, Scott's (1976a; 1976b; 1979) and Bandyopadhyay's (1982) attempts to add a Sraffian dimension (for an evaluation, see Gottdeiner, 1985). A further contemporaneous contribution, often cited as influential but now inaccessible, is Breugel (1975).

forward into the forefront of the analysis" (Harvey, 2010b, p. 183). In this sense, it is stated that the capitalist economy, at least in advanced capitalist countries, has been "rentierised" (Baiman, 2014, p. 536; Christophers, 2019a, p. 3). Rentier means different social classes to different people. In terms of everyday usage, people who make their living from rent and interest could both be called rentiers. The rentier is thus the aggregation of financier and landlord. Both the financier and the landlord enjoy an unproductive share of surplus value, as opposed to the functioning capitalist. In Marxist terminology, the term 'rentier', refers to "people who were fed up with the regular tension in business and therefore wanted merely to amuse themselves or to follow a mild pursuit as directors or governors of companies" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 895). Indeed, Marx (ibid., p. 359) used the term 'rentier' synonymously with 'lender of capital' when he cited Ramsay to analyse the rate of interest. Nonetheless, elsewhere in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx clearly stated that the rentier is different from the financier: "[w]ith the growth of material wealth the class of money-capitalists grows; on the one hand, the number and wealth of... rentiers increases; and on the other hand, the development of the credit system is promoted, thereby increasing the number of bankers, money-lenders, financiers, etc." (ibid., p. 508). Moreover, in Marx's terminology, rentier is also distinct from the concept of landlord (cf. Marx, 1885/1997, p. 420). Bukharin rightly spotted two kinds of capitalist within the rentier class. They "are, above all, the owners of gilt-edged securities: national bonds, secure obligations of various kinds. Furthermore, there are persons who have invested their fortunes in real estate and draw permanent and secure incomes from the latter" (Bukharin, 1927, p. 25). Therefore, rentier in Marx's sense could extract both interest and rent through its parasitic relationship to the capitalist mode of production. And in terms of the forms of surplus value, subsuming financial income, especially interest, under the concept of rent (Christophers, 2019a, p. 7; Standing, 2017, p. 23) should be carefully avoided from a Marxist perspective.

There are two reasons, from a Marxian perspective, for resisting this confused and ultimately confusing elision of various categories that has become commonplace for advocates of the ‘rentierism’ thesis. First, Marx’s concept of rent is misunderstood. Brett Christophers has recently published a series of works on rent and rentierism (cf. 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2020). He insightfully points out that “the massive transfer of land from the public to the private sector – taking place through tens of thousands of sales of local sites by different public-sector bodies – has fuelled the growth of rentierism, a type of economic activity dedicated to the collection of rents” (Christophers, 2019c, p. 1). However, his criticism of Marx’s concept of rent completely misconstrues Marx’s carefully crafted concept. Christophers (2019a, p. 4) stated that, for Marx, “land rent was the form in which the monopoly that is landed property is economically valorised under capitalism… Marx’s rent was essentially everyone else’s rent. It was payment to monopoly control of land”. Indeed, all landlords control a plot of land and charge fees for producing on it. However, what allows the landlord to enjoy rent are the conditions that make use of this ownership under capitalism. Otherwise, we could not distinguish capitalist rent from its pre-capitalist forms and other forms of surplus extraction. As we have illustrated, in addition to the monopoly ownership of land, absolute rent derives from the lower organic composition of agricultural capital. Differential rent derives from the use value of the natural power of land.

Marx’s concept of rent is based on three conditions apart from the surplus labour deriving from labour power: the monopoly control of land; the competition inherent to the capitalist economy; and the capacity for land to provide an average or above-average profit to production, rather than being solely determined by the monopoly. In this sense, “the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few privileged rentiers is not a deviation from capitalist

competition, but a logical and regular outcome" (Roos, 2019, n.p.). And Javier Zacarés (2021, p. 54) is right to "problematize Christophers's historical account of the ongoing process of rentierization" since the competition of capitalist and monopoly right of assets are not contradictory. Additionally, Marx did not have a crystal ball to foresee all "the new forms of capitalist rent [that] might … evolve within the evolutionary structures of capitalism" (Harvey, 2017/2018, p. 37), but his general conceptualisation is still able to explain many of their modes of extraction, of which intellectual property (IP) is most prominent. "Undoubtedly, much of the mega profits of giant technology companies like Apple, Microsoft, Netflix, Amazon, Facebook are due to their control over patents, financial strength and buying up of potential competitors" (Michael, 2019, n.p.). "Technological innovations also explain the success of these big companies, not just monopoly power" (Michael, 2019, n.p.).

The second reason is that interest and rent comply with different modes of extraction. "[I]t is their *qualitative difference* that is the source of the *quantitative division* of … surplus value into rent and profit. Nothing of the kind occurs in the case of interest. Here the *qualitative differentiation* … proceeds rather from purely *quantitative division* of the same sum of surplus value" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 362). This is because the division of rent and profit is determined by the two distinct elements of land and capital, whereas the division of interest and capital is determined by the same capital acting as loanable capital and functioning capital in the production process. As we have argued, rent is a portion of surplus value that exceeds the transformed average profit, whereas interest is a portion of the average profit that is shared and paid back by functioning capitalists borrowing interest-bearing capital from money capitalists. "The interest… thus appears as that portion of gross profit which is due to the ownership of capital as such. As distinct from this, that portion of profit which falls to the active capitalist appears now as profit of enterprise, deriving solely from the operations,

or functions, which he performs with the capital in the process of reproduction" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 371). "[T]he division of profit into interest and profit proper [profit of enterprise] is regulated by supply and demand, that is, by competition" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 354). In other words, there is no fixed ratio between corporate profits and interest. (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 355). Although both rent and interest derive from monopoly ownership of specific means of production, the mechanism of this ownership operative in the capitalist economy is quite different. Differential rent, for example, is determined by the contribution of land to the production of extra surplus value. The fertile or well-located land lent to the functional capitalist by the landlord participates in the production of an excess surplus value greater than that produced under normal conditions. In terms of interest, although the money-dealing capital lent by the money capitalist also participates in production and circulation, it does not create any additional surplus value. The £1,000 owned by a functioning capitalist yields the same surplus value under identical conditions as the £1,000 he borrows from money capitalist.

At the same time, the historical origins of rent and interest are also different. Capitalist land rent is the result of the transformation from the feudal mode of rent extraction; whereas the division of interest from profit is determined by the division of labour of capital. Capital could be divided into industrial capital and trading capital. Trading capital "breaks up into … commercial capital and money-dealing capital" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 266). For the industrial capitalist, his commodity capital needs to be exchanged and converted to money capital to initiate the next cycle of reproduction; whereas for the trading capitalist, he purchases and sells the same commodity, "and thus a reflux of money capital which leaves him in the purchase, and returns to him in the sale," is all that is involved (Marx, 1894/1998, pp. 271–272). In this way, the extraction of profit appears to be such that the industrial capitalist sells his commodity at the price

of production to obtain average profit, and the trading capitalist receives a profit through a mark-up. Thus, the income of the trading capitalist appears as the surplus value created in trading activity. However, Marx argues that this appearance is “just an illusion” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 281). “No value is produced in the process of circulation, and therefore, no surplus value… If surplus value is realised in the sale of produced commodities, then this is only because it already existed in them” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 279). This assumption that “the industrial capitalist sells his commodities to merchants at their price of production” presupposes that “merchant’s capital… did not go into forming the general rate of profit” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 283). Indeed, Marx does not include trading capital when he analyses the equalisation of the profit rate. However, trading capital “participates in levelling surplus value to average profit, although it does not take part in the production of this surplus value” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 285). “Hence, it is now necessary to supplement our earlier exposition” of the formation of average profit (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 283). In this case, “merchant’s capital enters the formation of the general rate of profit as determinant *pro rata* to its part in the total capital” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 284). Thus, if the surplus value remains unchanged and is produced entirely by the process of production, and the trading capital is added to the total capital, the new average profit rate will inevitably be lower than the original average profit rate calculated by industrial capital. That is to say, when trading capital participates, the industrial capitalist can sell his commodities to the merchant at a price lower than their price of production when he sells the product by himself, and the merchant can obtain a portion of the surplus value that is a part of the profit. In this way, the price at which the merchant sells becomes the aggregation of the cost price of the industrial capitalist, the profit of the industrial capitalist, and the average profit of the merchant.

The profit earned by trading capital – i.e. by the merchant capitalist – is not only

related to his participation in the distribution of surplus value but also related to his turnover rate. The more capital that can be operated at the same time, and the shorter the turnover time, the greater the profit the merchant can receive. However, this turnover is restricted by “the period of turnover of industrial capital” and “the velocity and volume of the total individual consumption” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 302). Therefore, the amount of money needed in circulation and the demand for money for trading increases. “It becomes a specialised business, and because performed as a specialised business for the money mechanism of the whole class”, makes “money-dealing capital of the capital advanced for these functions” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 315). By regarding the money-dealing capitalist as the derivative of the trading capitalist, Marx, according to Christophers (2011, p. 114), suggests that “banking belonged to a cluster of services he saw as economically unproductive but – in view of their role in reproducing capitalist class relations – socially necessary”. However, the social necessity of money-dealing capital and the banking system is not for public utility, as Adam Smith (1981, p. 488) argued, but for the trading capitalists’ utility in terms of lubricating capital circulation. The credit system created by interest-bearing capital

> permits the reallocation of money capital…. It promotes the dovetailing of diverse activities, a burgeoning division of labour and a reduction in turnover times. It facilitates the equalization of the rate of profit and arbitrates between the forces making for centralisation and decentralisation of capital. It helps co-ordinate the relations between flows of fixed and circulating capital. (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 284)

Nonetheless, when money is concentrated by money-dealing capitalists and converted into capital that provides loans for production by functioning capitalists and is eventually refluxed in the form of principal and interest, the

money appears to be “a self-expanding, or increasing, value” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 336). “While interest is only a portion of the profit, i.e. of the surplus value, which the functioning capitalist squeezes out of the labourer, it appears now, on the contrary, as though interest were the typical product of capital, the primary matter, and profit, in the shape of profit of enterprise, were a mere accessory and by product of the process of reproduction” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 390). Likewise, in the past few decades, “increases in portfolio income… largely reflect growth in interest”; financialization could, accordingly, be defined as “a pattern of accumulation in which profits accrue primarily through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production” (Krippner, 2005, p. 174; p. 200). “It is clear that with the increasing concentration of property, the owners of the fictitious capital which gives power over the banks, and the owners of the capital which gives power over industry, become increasingly the same people” (Hilferding, 1910/1981, p. 225), or, alternatively, that banks dominate over industrial firms (Krippner, 2005, p. 201). Moreover, even in agricultural production, “there is a tendency for rent to change its form, to agricultural profit and interest paid to banks” (Murray, 1978, p. 23). In other words, the portion of surplus value produced by the industrial capitalist and the profit appropriated by functioning capitalist has been mostly grabbed by the financial capitalist in the form of interest or some combination of interest and profit. Similarly, when the owners of fictitious capital and the landowners become the same people, they appropriate rent and interest rather than solely rent or interest.

For this reason, Marx would probably argue that the capitalist economy is not only rentierised but also financialised (see also Lapavitsas, 2009; 2013) as “we get the fetish form of capital and the conception of fetish capital” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 390). However, this does not mean that rent is no longer critical in the contemporary capitalist economy. Christophers (2020, p. 5) is right to say

that financialisation is only “one vector of a wider structural shift”. “The appropriation of rents may not be central to all forms of financialisation; nevertheless, an analysis of rent is crucial when seeking to understand how revenue streams can be securitized and sold on as interest bearing capital through landed and institutional barriers of private monopoly over resources” (Purcell et al., 2020, p. 446). Moreover, pseudo-commodities, such as natural resources, credentials, patents and virtual spaces (cf. Andreucci, et al., 2017, p. 3), and public wealth like radio spectrums and railway networks (Christophers, 2019b, p. 306), are created and privatised to generate rent and make today’s capitalism rentierised. To conclude, either the fetishism of interest-bearing capital or the effort to explain it as rentierization “conceals a much deeper set of underlying relations between the circulation of interest-bearing money as capital and the processes of production of surplus value” (Harvey, 1982/2006, p. 287). “Marx refers to money almost exclusively as the form of expression or as the representation of value. He scrupulously avoids the idea that money is value incarnate, or that it is an arbitrary symbol imposed by convention on exchange relations” (Harvey, 2017/2018, p. 51). When Marx discloses the complete form of money fetishism, the interest-bearing capital as self-expanding value, his ultimate intention is not to tell us what interest is, or what rent is. Insofar as all these particular forms of surplus value are produced by labour power, Marx intends to discover “why labour takes the form it does, and what the political consequences are” (Elson, 1979, p. 121). Therefore, any elaboration of finance and rent from a Marxist perspective could not override the value theory of labour, which is “necessary to critically interrogate a society in which the majority of producers have no access to life or subsistence apart from money and commodities” (Huber, 2017, p. 12). Marx himself also stated at the end of *Capital* that

> In capital–profit, or still better capital–interest, land–rent, labour–wages,

> in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the conversion of social relations into things, the direct coalescence of the material production relations with their historical and social determination. It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things. (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 817)

In this sense, this long chapter on rent is not an account of the specific form of surplus value but a comparison between different modes of extraction, which amounts to the other kind of production relations in addition to ownership discussed in the first chapter, hidden in the “enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy” world. By making this comparison, this chapter has further illustrated the distinction and validity of the Asiatic mode of production and the geographically diversified evolution of modes of production. Moreover, Marx (1844a/1975, p. 177) himself was well aware that “criticism appears no longer as an end in itself, but only as a means”. For this reason, the positive possibility of emancipation lies in a “sphere … which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete rewinning of man” (Marx, 1844a/1975, p. 186).

Chapter 3: Western Europe and China: The Dynamics of Historical Geographical Transition to Capitalist Mode of Production

1. Introduction

Marx, on at least three occasions, mentioned how to distinguish the various economic epochs; the factors defining the economic and social epochs mentioned on these three occasions nonetheless differ. They are (1) “the mode in which … [the] surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 227); (2) “how [the articles] … are made and by what instruments” (ibid., p. 190); and (3) the specific manner in which the union of labourer and means of production is accomplished (Marx, 1885/1997, p. 42). At first glance, the criteria for distinguishing the social and economic formation is somewhat arbitrary from Marx’s perspective. However, these three sets of standards have an inherent logic: the specific manner in which union of labourer and means of production and the mode of surplus extraction constitute the category of relations of production, which appear as the “direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 778). On this definition of relations of production, ownership represents the relationship between the owner and the means of production, while the mode of surplus extraction represents the exploitative relation between owners and producers.

In contrast, ‘forces of production’ refers to the way and instruments by means of which the articles are made. Marx (1863/1988, p. 56) argues: “the development of human labour capacity is displayed in particular in the

development of the means of labour or instrument of production". Therefore, the forces of production amount to the capability of the human being exercised whenever he or she produces a use value (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 177). Marx stated that "in acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations" (Marx, 1847/1976, p. 166). Therefore, each stage in the evolutionary path of the forces of production, mode of production and relations of production is not strictly synchronic with its counterparts in the other paths but generally follows the same diachronic sequence. At the same time, it is reasonable to explain each component of the tripartite schema in terms of the historical-geographical transformation of the other two concepts.

Nevertheless, such a discussion still describes only the static characteristics of the mode of production. Various modes of production are like isolated islands in the long river of history. They are scattered either upstream or downstream, or near the left or right bank. These islands are not static and immutable but are continually being eroded by water and reshaped by sediment. Understanding the formation and disappearance of islands in this river requires an understanding of the dynamics of the river. Therefore, the historical materialist examination of mode of production must not stop at a static and particular description of a specific mode of production but, rather, explain the dynamics from which the mode of production took shape and was overtaken by other modes of production. Among these transitions of modes of production, the transition from feudalism to capitalism must surely be the most controversial. The question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism has two aspects. The first aspect is why capitalism appeared in Western Europe. The second is why capitalism did not appear in other parts of the world. That is to say, in this research, why, in the pre-modern or pre-capitalist era, East Asia, which has

generally been considered by recent economic historians to have had no lesser a level of economic development than that of Western Europe, did not transform its distinctively Asiatic mode of production into a more “efficient” one.

2. Debate on the Transition Problem

Soviet Five Stage Theory has long poisoned observation of this issue in the field of Marxism. This view holds that “social productivity determines the relation of production; the relation of production determines the superstructure. Ultimately, a social formation is determined by productivity” (Jiao, 1991, p. 27). Therefore, the emergence and diffusion of mechanised industry in Western Europe is regarded as a magic bullet in accounting for the victory of the European economic miracle and the rise of the bourgeoisie. The proponents of this five-stage theory paraphrased Marx’s words and held that “modern industry” “pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages” (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976, p. 486), which made Marx seem like some kind of technological determinist. However, Marx himself gave considerable weight to the significance of the emergence of chartered burghers, the discovery of America, and the feudal system of industry in generating the capitalist mode of production. The progress of the three debates from the 1950s up until the 21st century confirmed Marx’s view and pointed to the necessity of the renewal of traditional explanatory paradigm to the transition problem. It is undeniable that the forces of production determine the mode of production and thence the relations of production. However, “[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, 1852/1979, p. 103). In other words, the transformation is based on not only the forces of production and the relations of production they are given and which are transmitted from the past but also

the circumstances they encounter. In Marx's eyes, the encounter is premised on the expanded relation of intercourse, which will be elaborated in due course.

(1) The Dobb–Sweezy Debate

Not until the 1950s did Maurice Dobb's (1946) *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* "provide a basis in both method and historical analysis for surpassing the unilineal view of development" (Brenner, 1978a, p. 121), whence arises the first significant debate on the transition problem – the Dobb–Sweezy debate. Although the two scholars failed to make clear certain basic concepts, such as the relationship between productive forces – for example, they use feudalism and capitalism as terms providing an overall description of an economic formation while defining them according to either productivity or the relations of production (see Dobb, 1946, p. 35) – the debate did indeed raise some fundamental questions on the transition issue.

There are three main areas of controversy between the two scholars. The first concerns the "prime mover behind the development of western European feudalism" (Sweezy, 1953/1963, p. 59). Sweezy (ibid., p. 62) stated that "the feudal system contains no internal prime mover and when it undergoes genuine development… the driving force is to be sought outside the system". In contrast, referring to Marx, Dobb (1950/1963, p. 22) asserted that "economic society is moved by its own internal contradictions" and that "the feudal period witnessed considerable changes in technique".

The second controversy is also an internal–external debate, which indicates the actual occasions that give rise to the transition. Dobb and Sweezy held different positions on the reason why "the development of feudalism in western Europe [led] to crisis and collapse" (Sweezy, 1953/1963, p. 62). Sweezy (1986, p. 81)

believed that “trade (and of course its concomitant commodity production) … play[s] a major role in undermining Western European feudalism and at the same time established the necessary preconditions for the rise of capitalism”. Dobb (1950/1963, pp. 21–23) denied that the “over-exploitation of the labour force” (Sweezy, 1950/1963, p. 4) per se leads to the breakdown of feudalism and took a dialectical position. He argued that the decline of feudalism stemmed not only from the “exploitation of the producer by virtue of direct politico-legal compulsion” but also as a consequence of the interaction of internal conflict within feudalism and of external forces. Dobb (1950/1963, p. 23) asserts that “trade exercised its influence to the extent that it accentuated the internal conflicts within the old mode of production”. Sweezy concurred with Dobb that interior and exterior are relative and relational. “Historical forces which are external with respect to one set of social relations are internal with respect to a more comprehensive set of social relations” (Sweezy, 1953/1963, p. 61). In this light, Sweezy (1986, p. 83) came to realise that “the original feudalism-to-capitalism debate concentrated almost exclusively on Western Europe” is deficient

Setting aside, for now, the fact that both Dobb and Sweezy presuppose that capitalism must arise out of feudalism, the third controversy characterizing their arguments is the reason “why … feudalism [was] succeeded by capitalism” (Sweezy, 1953/1963, p. 62). However, given that Sweezy finally agreed with Dobb’s interpretation of the “revolutionary way for industrial capitalist to develop” as relating to the rise of small “merchant-manufacturers” from the ranks of petty producers, the controversy here involves the definition of the transitional period from the 15th to 16th century. Sweezy (1950/1963, p. 15) insisted that the period be called “pre-capitalist commodity production,” arguing that feudalism was already moribund before capitalism was born, but that the transition was determined by “the growth of commodity production”, which made the period

“not a single uninterrupted process” but one “made up of two distinct phases”. By comparison, Dobb (1950/1963, p. 26) argued that “as long as political constraint and the pressures of manorial custom still ruled economic relationships…, and a free market in land was absent…, the form of this exploitation cannot be said to have shed its feudal form”. In this sense, Dobb’s argument is more akin to Marx’s than Sweezy’s. Marx (1859c/1987, p. 263) once stated that “No social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and all the new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society”. Indeed, some may contend that Marx’s argument in the primitive accumulation chapter in Capital that “serfdom had practically disappeared in the last part of the 14th century” in England, and that “[t]he prelude of the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production, was played in the last third of the 15th, and the first decade of the 16th century,” confirms Sweezy’s line (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 707; p. 708). However, Marx also stated on the previous page that “the economic structure of capitalistic society has grown out of” not the “pre-capitalist commodity production”, as Sweezy insisted, but “the economic structure of feudal society” (ibid., p. 706). On the one hand, free farmers “produced the means of subsistence and the raw materials, which they themselves, for most part, consumed” rather than offered for sale (ibid., p. 736). On the other hand, other feudal institutions, such as guilds and churches, were still functioning.

Besides, the Dobb–Sweezy debate raised another problem relating to the impact of the growth of towns on the transition process, which is “concomitant”, in Sweezy’s words, to the commercialization approach. Sweezy (1950/1963, p. 6) asserted that “the rapidly developing towns – offering … liberty, employment, and improved social status – acted as a powerful magnet to the oppressed rural

population". In this light, Sweezy thought that, although Dobb rightly considered flight from the land as one of the decisive factors in the decline of feudalism, the development of towns is the underlying cause. (ibid., p. 10). By contrast, what Dobb (1950/1963, p. 23) asserted "is that trade exercised its influence to the extent that it accentuated the internal conflicts within the old mode of production". He thought that external forces must pass through internal relations and only then might exert an influence on them. It is the "interaction of the two" that determines the transformation of modes of production. Therefore, Dobb disagreed with Sweezy, maintaining that there is no necessary "correlation between feudal disintegration and 'nearness to centers of trade'" (ibid., p. 24). Hilton (1953/1963, p. 71) added, in line with Dobb but against Sweezy, that

> The expansion … of the medieval market centres and towns from the tenth to the eleventh centuries was based fundamentally on the expansion of simple commodity production…. [T]he growth of big commercial centres …are chronologically secondary to the development of forces of production in agriculture, stimulated in the process of the struggle for feudal rent.

The two developments were successive. Ira Katznelson (1992/2004, p. 163; p. 170) holds that medieval towns must be placed in the context of feudalism, since "their ramparts, their juridical privileges, even their economic functions as cross roads and as relay points of exchange" were "inherently feudal". By contrast, newly emerging cities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are strongly related to the "development of highly centralized, bureaucratic, absolutist" national states which dissolve "the cell-like units of feudalism that had property rights" (ibid., p. 181; p. 186). However, this line of argument is not as commonly accepted as the opposing view. Thus, Braudel argued that

“certain towns made themselves into autonomous worlds, city-states, buttressed with privileges (acquired or extorted) like so many ramparts”. “The miracle of the first great urban centuries in Europe was that the city won hands down, at least in Italy, Flanders and Germany,” while in the other parts of the world, the “state usually won and the city then remained subject and under a heavy yoke” (Braudel, 1979/1985, p. 511). Anderson (1974a, p. 422) echoed the sentiment that “[f]eudalism as a mode of production… was the first in history to render possible a dynamic *opposition* between town and country; the parcellization of sovereignty inherent in its structure permitted autonomous urban enclaves to grow as centres of production within an overwhelmingly rural economy, rather than as privileged or parasitic centres of consumption or administration – the pattern Marx believed to be typically Asiatic”.

(2) The Brenner Debate

A quarter of a century later, in the 1970s, by criticising Neo-Smithian Marxism and Neo-Malthusianism – notably the theories of Paul Sweezy, André Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Postan and Le Roy Ladurie – Robert Brenner (1976, 1977) provoked a second debate on the transition problem, which bears his name (see, for example, Aston and Philpin, 1985). Brenner (1976, p. 31) argues that “it is the structure of class relations, of class power, which will determine the manner and degree to which particular demographic and commercial changes will affect long-run trends in the distribution of income and economic growth – not vice versa”. Despite the ambiguous connotation of the concept of class structure, which inappropriately mingled the “labour process”, the “social forces of production”, the “property relationship” and the “surplus extraction relationship” into one category, Brenner’s conceptualization carried forward Dobb’s account of the feudal relationship and its disintegration. From the perspective of class structure, Brenner thus accredits the origin of

“capitalist economic development” to England for, “on the one hand, serfdom was dissolved … and, on the other, peasant property was short-circuited or undermined” (Brenner, 1977, p. 78).

Brenner alleged that Immanuel Wallerstein and André Gunder Frank aligned with Sweezy to take a neo-Smithian approach and “emphasize the role of exchange as determinant rather than the stimulus of changes in class structure” (Brenner, 1977, p. 33; Fine, 1978, p. 88; cf. Frank, 1969, pp. 14–15; Wallerstein 1974, p. 398). Sweezy (1978, p. 95) countered that he agreed with Dobb and Marx in viewing capitalist class relations as the basis of capitalist development, and thus disagreed with Brenner’s characterization of him as a trade determinist. Yet his argument remained: 1. “that trade undermined and disintegrated the feudal system; and 2. In Marx’s words: ‘the circulation of commodities is the starting point of capital. Commodity production, trade, form the historical preconditions under which it arises’” (Sweezy, 1978, p. 94, citing Marx, 1867/1996, p. 157). It seems to Brenner (1978b, pp. 95–96) that Sweezy “leaves the ground of his trade-centred position and begins to argue from the viewpoint which it was his original purpose to attack”, and thus seems to be “ambivalent and self-contradictory”.

In the other work, Brenner (1976, pp. 32–33) criticised the so-called ‘secular Malthusian’ demographic model of “interpretations of long-term economic change in medieval and early modern Europe”, which “replaced the unilineal ‘rise of the market’ as the key to long-term economic and social change in pre-industrial society”. As the quantity of arable land is relatively fixed during a specific period, Postan (1966) argues that demographical change, and thus the people: land ratio, determines the class structure of society. Postan (1966, pp. 608–609) specifically argues that population growth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to the relative scarcity of land and strengthened the lords’ ability

to coerce the villeins corporally and economically. By contrast, the Black Death broke out in the middle of the fourteenth century, causing population scarcity for a century and a half, which intensified the competition of attracting settlers among landlords. As a result, the tenants enjoyed lower rents and were released from servile obligations due to the dividend of population decline.

Brenner held that this demographic explanation is unconvincing when geographical factors are taken into account. Different regions act differently when confronting the same demographic trends. For example, “in France, as population increased, there was extreme fragmentation of holdings and declining productivity. But in England, by contrast, the dominant tendency was to build up larger and larger units” (Brenner (1976, p. 42). Brenner maintained that it is “the different class structures” rather than demographic change that “determined substantially different results in terms of changes in agricultural productivity and, indeed, wholly disparate overall patterns of economic development.” In this way, he proposed that “it was the emergence of the classical landlord–capitalist tenant–wage labour structure which made possible the transformation of agricultural production in England” (ibid., p. 63). Perlin (1983, p. 44) echoed that “a serious weakness of” neo-Malthusianism “lies in failure to integrate changes in fertility and population within class oriented models of society”.

However, Postan and Hatcher’s (1978, p. 25) response was to insist that “the historians in question do not present demographic factors as an omni-present and omnipotent force”. A range of social factors such as “[f]amily structure, inheritance customs, attitudes to technological discovery and innovation… - have been commonly drawn by the same historians into their general view of economic and social processes in the middle ages” (ibid., p. 26). Moreover, they

felt Brenner's example of the comparison between different regions to be problematic and weak as a basis to discredit their arguments, since "the inequality of development within" the world of feudal production "appears to be fundamental" (Bois, 1978, pp. 66–67). Brenner not only misconstrued the date when serfdom arose in eastern Europe, but also confused declining population with scarcity of manpower (Postan & Hatcher, p. 27).

Le Roy Laudurie described Brenner's work, somewhat contradictorily, as "superficial", "insular", "stimulating" and "provocative". Among his thirteen critical notes to Brenner, he again mentioned the broader focus of neo-Malthusianism as opposed to tradition Malthusianism. Moreover, he challenged Brenner's claims that a similar demographic trend may lead to a dissimilar class structure by pointing out Brenner's mistakes regarding regions such as the Bordelais, the Sologne and Catalonia. He cites evidence that "[i]n these three regions, the depopulation of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was accompanied after an interval by weakening of 'evil customs', labour services and share-cropping" (Le Roy Laudurie, 1978, p. 58).

The Brenner debate continued and expanded the topics discussed in the Dobb–Sweezy debate (Hilton, 1987, p. 1). The debate not only renewed the focus on "the question of social causation" (Little, 2010, n.p.), but also took demographic change into account, in addition to class structure and trade. "Although there remains a suspicion that the targets of Malthusianism and Smithian commercialisation are a good deal more sophisticated and robust than Brenner has presented, he does pinpoint many weaknesses in their applicability to cross-national variations in economic development" (Holton, 1987, pp. 166–167). However, "it appears that a lot of the energy in the debates stemmed from the false presupposition that it should be possible to identify a single master factor that explained these large changes in economic development" (Little,

2010, n.p.). Therefore, the Brenner debate did not solve the transition problem but made it more contentious. The controversy over the determination of the transition process was no longer confined to whether the determinants were internal or external but extended to whether singular or multiple factors were involved. It also gave rise to a critical issue, which needs to be explained – whether there are geographical differences in the transition.

(3) The Great Divergence Debate

The third debate on the transition problem occurred in the 2000s, following the publication of Kenneth Pomeranz's (2000) groundbreaking work, *The Great Divergence*. The latter addresses the convergence of two questions haunting economic history. One is the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe while the other is the so-called Needham Question. Needham (1969/2005, p. 16) asked, "why did modern science … with all its implications for advanced technology, take its meteoric rise only in the West" and not in East Asia, whose "culture was much more efficient than the European West in applying human knowledge of Nature to useful purpose between the 2nd century B.C. and the 16th century A.D?" The California School, whose members include Ken Pomeranz, Roy Bin Wong, Jack Goldstone, James Lee, and the late André Gunder Frank, as well as renowned supporters such as Li Bozhong, stand on the one side of the debate. Robert Brenner, Christopher Isett and Phillip Huang, who were labelled as Eurocentrists, stand on the other side.

Although the geographical dimension is taken into account in this debate, an internal–external controversy remains at its core. In dealing with geographical differences in the transition, the California School proposed that difference derives neither from the historical-geographical and social-economic difference

of the region, nor the distinct advantages of Europe, but external casual factors. This is superficially similar to the arguments of Sweezy, Wallerstein and the early Frank, at first sight. However, the reciprocal-comparison approach adopted by this school of thought distinguishes it from their predecessors. Pomeranz states that the comparison between core areas like the Jiangnan area and England can help to distinguish the unique determining factors. By contrast, Wong and Rosenthal (2011, p. 4) argue that it is more appropriate to compare China with Europe. This comparative approach has previously been adopted by Blaut (1989, p. 267), though his main purpose is to illustrate that "the triumph of capitalism occurred in Europe not because of uniquely European facts but because of colonialism". In his critique of Brenner, Blaut argued that the places that Brenner compared with one another to back up his argument "lie within northern (mainly northwestern) Europe, and true comparison would have to look at all possible cases of a given type and so carry one over to Mediterranean Europe, to Asia and Africa, and Brenner does not do this" (Blaut, 2000, p. 55). Blaut maintains that the only reason why colonialism and thus capitalism rose in the west is "location, or more broadly accessibility" (Blaut, 1989, p. 277).

Pomeranz (2000, p. 5) alleged that "[most] of the existing literature… has remained set in an either/or framework – with either a Europe-centered world system carrying out essential primitive accumulation overseas or endogenous European growth called upon to explain almost everything". Goldstone (2009, p. viii) summarizes the argument of the California school thus:

> [These young economic and social historians] argue that societies in Asia and the Middle East were the world leaders… until about AD 1500. At the time Europe emerged from the Middle Ages and entered its Renaissance, these scholars contend, Europe was far behind many of the advanced

> civilisations elsewhere in the world and did not catch up with and surpass the leading Asian societies until about AD 1800. The rise of the West was thus relatively recent and sudden and rested to a large degree on the achievements of other civilisations and not merely on what happened in Europe.

While declaring the leading position of the Asian social economy, the California school endeavoured to depict the world as a ‘world of surprising resemblances’ (Pomerantz’s phrase) inasmuch as common “attributes of material life appeared … across the Eurasian landmass" (O’Brien, 2010, n.p.). For example, they denied that “the ‘rise of material culture’ as something peculiar to the so called and uniquely ‘acquisitive’ and ‘industrious’ households of West Europe” (ibid.). Kaoru Sugihara (2003, p. 82) demonstrated that the population growth in East Asia from the 16th to 18th century is due to successfully constructed “labour-absorbing institutions and labour-intensive technology”. In Zhao’s (2014, p. 158) words: “Due to population growth and resource constraints”, both East Asia and West Europe “faced similar constraints at the same time, so they do not have the necessary conditions for an industrial revolution”. The success of Western Europe depends on “the incorporation … of two highly contingent factors into its economic orbit: (1) the availability of coal in the relatively developed regions of Western Europe; and (2) rich natural resources of the New World” (Sugihara, 2003, p. 94). Pomeranz and his Californian colleagues would probably agree with Deleuze and Guattari’s radically contingent philosophy of history. “Many historians no doubt devote their energies to minimizing or eradicating the spectre of this contingency, often by falling back on or allowing for teleological or causal-linear mechanisms to guide their work – what Henri Bergson would refer to as ‘radical finalism’ and ‘radical mechanism’. But as Deleuze and Guattari recognize, history and contingency share a bond” (Lundy, 2013, n.p.; cf. Cockshott, 2013).

Most scholars on both sides of the Great Divergence debate agree that East Asia experienced population growth from the 16th to 18th century. They also agree that peasants in the Jiangnan area devoted more labour to agrarian production during that period. However, some of them doubt the effectiveness of so-called labour-absorbing institutions and labour-intensive technology, while others argue that these devices would effectively promote productivity. Phillip Huang (2002, p. 507) has stated that, “other things being equal, mixed farming [in England] made for a more capital-intensive agriculture regime…. In a crops-only economy [in the Yangzi Delta], continued population pressure without technological change drove out animal husbandry to allow for maximising output per unit of land but inevitably through less use of capital per unit of labor and hence also of lower productivity per unit of labor”.

Moreover, “Beyond the differences between English animal husbandry and the Yangzi delta’s, there were of course also significant differences in the degree of labor intensity in cropping itself” (ibid., p. 509). Huang thus referred to this “high intensity of labor use per unit of land and diminished returns per unit of labor” as “involution” (ibid., p. 507) or “growth (in output) without development (in labor productivity)” (ibid., p. 512), which resists capitalisation and economies of scale (Horner, 2003, p. 295). However, Pomeranz (2002, pp. 552–553) believed that the capitalisation of agrarian production and proletarianization are not the prerequisites of modern development, and the intensification of labour should not be viewed as opposed to modern development. Both sides of the debate seem to have reasonable-enough data on labour time spent on cultivation, spinning and weaving, etc. to back up their arguments and do not refute one another. However, the primary method that Pomeranz distinguished as a means of effectively reducing the cost of labour and raising productivity – the use of beancake as fertiliser – has been challenged.

Pomeranz states that “the Lower Yangzi… imported large amounts of beancake fertiliser from Manchuria” (Pomeranz, 2000, p. 226), which “required anywhere from 1/35 to 1/50 as much labor as an equally nutritious application of manure” (Pomeranz, 2002, p. 562). “There is no doubt that the introduction of beancake was a major technological change in Jiangnan agriculture” (Xue, 2007, p. 198). However, “the magnitude of the imported Manchurian beancake was only about 10 percent of Pomeranz’s estimate” due to the exaggeration of loading capacity and travel frequency (ibid., p. 197; p. 208). Moreover, “beancake came to be applied as ‘chase fertiliser in the delta’, supplementary to the ‘base fertiliser’ of pig manure” (Huang, 2002, p. 508). Finally, “there is no evidence that yield per mu in the Jiangnan region improved significantly” by applying beancake “from the Ming to the Qing” (Xue, 2007, p. 216). In this way, Pomeranz’s argument that “the worsening person/land ratios were largely balanced by large gains in per acre yields” seems over-optimistic. “The Jiangnan area and England had indeed similar levels of economic development and quality of life in the 18th century” (Zhao, 2014, p. 159), as Pomeranz claimed. Nonetheless, people accomplished this not by a fertiliser revolution but by spending “much of their time struggling to raise their incomes in unproductive activities” (Allen, 2009, p. 549), such as the supplementary cultivation of winter wheat and devoting more family labour to spinning and weaving.

The world is, therefore, far from a world of resemblances: different worlds arose because “the conditions and institutions that generated them were quite different” (Zhao, 2014, p. 159–160). The California School economic historians initially failed to go beyond the traditional demographic–mercantile approach (Wong, 1997; Lee & Campbell, 1997). Huang’s (2003) critique seems highly reliant on the demographic approach, too, when he examines the case of China, whereas he stresses the conjuncture of factors such as the agricultural

revolution, urbanisation, proto-industrialisation and the development of coal industry when speaking of the rise of Britain. The California School historians did subsequently revise their arguments. Pomeranz, in an interview, admitted that Zhao Dingxin's critique "is probably correct because I just pointed out the high level of agricultural productivity and did not say much about how this happened due to the limited space in *The Great Divergence*" (Yang, 2015, n.p.). Wong and Rosenthal (2011, p. 8) added that it is the institutional and political scales that determined the political and economic transformation of China and Europe. Brenner and Isett's (2002, p. 617) critique, from the perspective of property relations and social institutions, is thus a useful supplement. They insisted on the argument put forward earlier (in the Brenner Debate) that "the key to England's economic evolution" was the decisive break from the "system of property relations" in the medieval epoch, when "agriculture had been largely in the hands of economic agents who, like their counter parts in the early modern Yangzi delta, by and large held direct, non-market access" to the means of production and labour power. However, Brenner and Isett's identifying the Yangzi delta in the early modern era and Western Europe in the medieval epoch betrays a distinct prejudice. On the one hand, they refuse to acknowledge the fact that the quality of life and the output in East Asia is on par with its western counterpart. This Eurocentrist view holds to a "gospel about the European development of the modern world capitalist economy and system since 1500 or whenever"; one which "forms a Maginot line of defense behind which one and all remain resistant to seeing the real world" (Frank, 1998, p. 47). On the other hand, they failed to distinguish the Asiatic mode of production from the feudal mode of production, which deviates from Brenner's Marxist stance. Even in the Qing dynasty, when the land was largely privatised, communal land remained a substantial portion of the total amount of land (of various types) in the country (Zhang, 1998, pp. 133–151). The centralised monarchy and rural communal autonomy did not dissolve but intensified.

(4) A Brief Review

From the Dobb–Sweezy debate to the Great Divergence debate, although the leading participants on both sides are constantly changing, their central topics are internal and external driving forces. One camp has emphasized that the transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode of production was driven by the inherent social property relations or class structure of western European feudalism. The other camp believes the transition to capitalism is determined by the factors outside the system such as population, trade and luck.

The supporters of the first camp were mainly Marxists, with Brenner, who played a role in inheriting and inspiring, at the centre. Brenner's argument is much indebted to Dobb and provides 'ammunition' to the contemporary critiques of revisionist historians like Pomeranz and Wong. Brenner thought that a change in relations of production propels the transition from feudalism to capitalism. However, from Marx's perspective, Brenner's perspective has two problems: first, Brenner believes that relations of production drive the development of forces of production, rather than the other way round. Second, the scope of Marx's term, 'relations of production,' is far broader than it is generally thought, which we will discuss in detail later.

The supporters of the other camp are more significant in number and diversity than the first camp, including not only Marxists but also many Neo-Smithians and Neo-Malthusians. Generally speaking, the problem with this camp is that they look outside the system for the reasons for the transition. As Dobb disagreed with Sweezy, no matter whether the reason why the feudal mode of production changed is population or trade, this kind of stimulus must work

through the inside of the system. On the other side of the globe, Mao Tse-Tung (1937/1965, p. 314) echoes, “external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes”. In addition, both mercantilists and Malthusians have their specific problems. Mercantilists failed to explain why capitalism did not arise in eastern societies, which also had developed commerce. Malthusians tried to solve this problem with demographic theory, but this attempt is “absurd” in Marx’s eyes, just like his harsh critique of Malthus. Malthusians think that the reason why Western Europe developed to the capitalist stage is that the landlord class, due to the scarcity of population after Black Death, adopted a new model to attract settlement. By contrast, in East Asia, due to overpopulation, there was an involution of economic growth, which reached a natural limit. Marx agreed that there is overpopulation in all kinds of societies, but the emergence of overpopulation is social and historical rather than natural. It is determined by the boundary defined by the specific condition of production, that is the level of development of productive force (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 605; Harvey, 1974b). One of the most straightforward pieces of evidence is that the cultivation of transgenic or hybridized crops in contemporary agriculture has proved that the population that the land can support did not reach its so-called natural limit or carrying capacity in the 15th century. The scarcity of land does not naturally define a finite limit to production (Lan, 2010, p. 162).

What is more, the capitalist mode of surplus extraction is based on wage labour, whereas pre-capitalist modes of surplus extraction are based on the different political and ideological systems of Europe and Asia. But neither Pomeranz nor Lee and Campbell identify the fundamental difference between Eastern and Western pre-capitalist modes of production as lying in their political and ideological systems. The uniqueness of Western Europe compared to Imperial

China lies in the fact that the interactive development of Western Europe's forces and relations of production permit commodity production to escape from the political domination of surplus extraction. Therefore, from a Marxist perspective, there are significant differences between East Asia and Western Europe in terms of both the development of forces of production and characteristics of relations of production in pre-capitalist modes of production.

In this way, although Marx firmly rejected Malthusian demographic theory, it is still acceptable to integrate Brenner's political Marxist interpretation with some views of mercantilism. It is not hard to determine that Marx never placed commercial activities outside of the concept of relations of production in a broad sense. Accordingly, a better position from which to view the historical geography of the transition process is to combine both sides of the debate. We should, on the one hand, admit the resemblance of living standards in both China and Western Europe, to avoid falling into the trap of Eurocentrism; and, on the other hand, discover the different factors applicable to China and Western Europe, rather than positing the supposed advantages of Western Europe responsible for causing the two regions to diverge. On this basis, the next section will introduce Marx's concept of 'relation of intercourse' as the juncture of external and internal forces that drive the transformation of modes of production to reconcile the sides of debates and renew the existing explanation of force of production and relation of production, not by adding a new concept but incorporating relations of intercourse into the expanded category of relations of production.

3. The Transition Problem Revisited from a Marxist Perspective

It is widely acknowledged that Marx's chapter on "so-called primitive accumulation", "on the rise of free wage labour/*labour power as a commodity*,

presented [the latter] as the fundamental basis for the capitalist mode of production" (Brenner, 1977, p. 55). Indeed, Marx, in this chapter, stated that the "so-called primitive accumulation… is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as primitive, because it forms the prehistoric stage of capital and of the mode of production corresponding with it" (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 705–706). However, it is insufficient for Brenner to argue that the transition of the relations of production in rural England drives the whole transition process from feudalism to capitalism. Not only the chapter on "primitive accumulation" but even *Capital* as a whole is but a small part of Marx's oeuvre, where he constructed a much more complex explanation of the transition problem. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx offered a detailed explanation of "so-called primitive accumulation". He held that the original formation of capital develops such "that, through the historic process of the dissolution of the old mode of production, value existing as money-wealth is enabled, on one side, to *buy* the objective conditions of labour; on the other side, to exchange money for the *living labour* of the workers who have been set free" (Marx, 1857/1973, pp. 506–507). In other words, Marx on the one hand admitted that capital emerged from "merchant's and usurer's wealth" (ibid., p. 505). However, this wealth "was prevented from turning into industrial capital, in the country by the feudal constitution, in the towns by the guild organisation. These fetters vanished with the dissolution of feudal society, with the expropriation and partial eviction of country population" (Marx,1867/1996, pp. 738–739). Therefore, on the other hand, capital alone is not sufficient to determine a capitalist mode of production. The transformation from money-wealth to capital and from feudal mode of production to the capitalist mode of production is a process of "encounter" in which money-capital comes face to face with "unbound, propertyless individuals" and the "objective conditions of labour" such as "land and soil, raw material, necessaries of life" which are based on developed forces of production (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 503; p. 505).

For Marx, the force of labour is “displayed in particular in the development of the means of labour or instrument of production” (Marx, 1863/1988, p. 56). In this way, “so-called primitive accumulation” is nothing other than the intertwined transition of forces of production and relations of production.

Although Marx is not a technological determinist, he nonetheless consistently placed particular emphasis on the improvement of the instruments of labour. As early as *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels noted: “we shall, of course, not take the trouble to explain to our wise philosophers that… it is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means, that slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture” (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 38). The reason why forces of production appear before the corresponding relations of production lies in what Marx and Engels term “the first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to make history” (ibid., p. 41). “The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself” (ibid., p. 42). In other words, only when people possessed the forces of production necessary to feed themselves would they start to develop relations around this productive activity with others. In this way, each stage of history “contains a material result, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation to nature and individuals to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor” (ibid., p. 54). “If it were thought that productivity on the same land could be increased by developing the forces of production etc. … then the new order would include combinations of labour, a large part of the day spent in agriculture etc., and thereby again” destroy “the old economic conditions of the community” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 494).

The forces of production could not determine the transition of history from one stage to the other by themselves. Marx invariably talks about forces of production in conjunction with relations of production. Generations of Marxists interpret Marx's term, 'relations of production,' in a narrow sense, which refers to the "direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 778). This is also the main reason why political Marxists and mercantile Marxists argue endlessly over the nature of the transition problem. Marx himself made a distinction between the broad sense and narrow sense when he used the term 'relations of production'. He would probably agree that the narrow sense of 'relations of production' together with the 'relations of intercourse' (see below) constitute a broad sense of 'relations of production'.

Marx wrote in his Letter to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov: "If he is not to be deprived of the results obtained or to forfeit the fruits of civilisation, man is compelled to change all his traditional social forms as soon as the mode of commerce ceases to correspond to the productive forces acquired. Here I use the word *commerce* in its widest sense – as we would say *Verkehr* [intercourse] in German" (Marx, 1846/1982, p. 97). Therefore, Marx thought that the relations of intercourse also changed with forces of production, as did the relations of production. He unswervingly holds that "all collisions in history have their origin… in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 74). Engels applied this principle in explaining the replacement of feudalism by capitalism. He argues that "the new forces of production set in motion by the bourgeoisie… and the condition and requirements of exchange, developed through these forces of production, became incompatible with the existing order[27] of production handed down through history and sanctified by law, that is to say, incompatible with the

[27] "The 1886 edition has 'relations'" (Engels, 1886/1990, p. 390).

privileges of the guild and the numerous other personal and local privileges of… the feudal order of society" (Engels, 1886/1990, p. 390).

Marx mobilised the two kinds of relations side by side on various occasions. In the last section of the Introduction to the *Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*, there were "points to be mentioned … and not to be forgotten" (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 109), which include "*Produktionsverhältnisse* und *Verkehrsverhältnisse* [relations of production and relations of intercourse]"[28] (Marx, 1859a/1961, p. 639). In *The German Ideology*, Marx stated that "money is a necessary product of definite relations of production and intercourse" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 203). Therefore, relations of production and intercourse are different but closely connected. These two relations originate from two kinds of essential human activity – production and intercourse, in the earliest stage of history. "This production only makes its appearance with the increase of population. In its turn this presupposes the intercourse [*Verkehr*] of individuals with one another. The form of this intercourse is again determined by production". Thus, relations of production are the relations between a human being and his/her means of subsistence and means of production, while relations of intercourse are the material and spiritual relations between humans who produce their material life.

The reason why Marx emphasized relations of production and seldom mentioned relations of intercourse in his later years is historical. Under the pre-capitalist mode of production, intercourse between humans such as politics dominated their production of material life. Under the capitalist mode of production, producers no longer directly possess the means of production. In order to survive, they must follow the economic logic of capital to sell their

[28] The English translation of the *Grundrisse* misinterpreted *Verkehrsverhältnisse* as relations of circulation (cf. Editorial Commissions of Marx Engels Collected Works, 1976, p. 590).

labour power in order to obtain means of subsistence, so that relations of production become the dominant social relationship under the capitalist mode of production in Marx's era. Nevertheless, this does not mean that relations of intercourse are unimportant, especially in the course of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. On the contrary, this notion can help us better understand what changes in the relations of intercourse enabled this transition.

However, "these abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 37). Marx's view of feudalism is often interpreted abstractly, and Marx himself is also regarded as a philosopher or political economist with little knowledge of actual medieval history. But Marx was perfectly well acquainted with this period of European history. During the late 1870s and early 1880s, Marx filled four notebooks on European history when he studied and excerpted key passages from the following texts: "Friedrich Christoph Schlosser's *Weltgeschichte für das Deutsche Volk*, Carlo Guiseppe Gulielmo Botta's *Histoire des peoples d'Italie*, William Cobbett's *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England,* David Hume's *The History of England,* Machiavelli's *History of Florence and of the Affairs of Italy,* Nikolay Karamzin's *History of the Russian State,* Louis Philippe's *History of Russia and of Peter the Great* and John Richard Green's *History of the English People*" (Pang, 1994, p. 178). "Engels provided the notebooks with titles written by hand on rectangular affixed labels:

Chronological Extracts I, 96 to approximately 1320
Chronological Extracts II, approximately 1300 to about 1470
Chronological Extracts III, approximately 1470 to 1580
Chronological Extracts IV, approximately 1580 to approximately 1648" (Krätke, 2018, p. 92).

The reason why these excerpts have largely failed to draw the attention of English-speaking Marxists is, no doubt, that Marx wrote them in a mixture of different languages, and wholesale translations seem only to be available in Russian and Chinese until 2021. However, they amount to a systematic attempt to explore the law of history by assembling various economic and political historical accounts, with Marx recording critical comments whenever he was dissatisfied with the authors from whom he excerpted specific material; the absence of such comments otherwise suggesting agreement.

The change of two relations of intercourse played an essential role in enabling the transformation from the feudal mode of production to the capitalist mode of production, Marx held. These are war and trade, which take up the majority of space in Marx's historical manuscripts. Taken together, these two relations of intercourse on the one hand weakened feudal political and religious power, and on the other hand stimulated the rise of new forces of production. As for war, Marx stated that "*Auch das Verhältnis von Produktivkraft und Verkehrsverhältnissen besonders anschaulich in der Armee* [The relationship between productive forces and relations of intercourse is particularly clear in the army]" (Marx, 1859a/1961, p. 639). As for trade, Marx thought that "[w]ith intercourse vested in a particular class, with the extension of trade through the merchants beyond the immediate surroundings of the town, there immediately appears a reciprocal action between production and intercourse" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 67). "The first advance beyond naturally derived estate capital was provided by the rise of merchants, whose capital was from the beginning movable, capital in the modern sense as far as one can speak of it, given the circumstances of those times" (ibid.).

The conflict between lords, kings, Pope and sovereign city-states is pervasive

in the four-volume of notebooks. “Farming and fighting are commonplace, and peace is rare” (Marx, 1992a, p. 56). As a unity of economic exploitation and political rule, the foundation of the feudal mode of production lies in the super-economic coercion of the lords on the surplus labour of peasants and military obligations among peasants, lords, and kings (Anderson, 1974b, p. 147). In this sense, external warfare, along with farming, “was an epidemic feature of feudal society” (Duchesne, 2001, p. 81). These wars connected a fragmented Europe and, in some sense, lent it the semblance of a geographical unity. Marx also stated in the primitive accumulation chapter, “force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power” (Marx, 1967/1996, p. 739). For example, the Wars of the Roses was a devastating war for the old English aristocracy (Marx, 1992a, p. 202). Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick, killed numerous nobles and knights at the Battle of Northampton (1460) (ibid.), substantially wiping out the power of British feudalism. Moreover, the establishment of a standing army of the royal family or the kingdom also undermined the basis of feudalism, insofar as people could stop paying the feudal tribute to protect the country to the lords, according to the new system (ibid., p. 203). Anievas and Nisancioglu (2015, p. 12) have recently echoed this: “capitalism could only emerge, take root and reproduce itself – both domestically and internationally – through a violent, coercive, and often war-assisted process subjugating, dominating, and often annihilating many of those social forces that stood in its way – processes that continue to this day”. Di Muzio and Dow (2017, p. 14), however, contest Anievas and Nisancioglu’s position and criticize the way in which Anievas and Nisancioglu simply regard *everything* as the cause of capitalism, adding that war pushed forward the establishment of the national debt and financial system.

Correlatively, the conflict between Church and Monarchy weakened the power of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. “The property of the church

formed the religious bulwark of the traditional conditions of landed property. With its fall these were no longer tenable" (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 712–713). Most Marxists would agree with Marx that "[t]he process of forcible expropriation of the people received in the 16th century a new and frightful impulse from the Reformation, and from the consequent colossal spoliation of the church property" (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 711). However, the Reformation was not accomplished in one fell swoop. There was a long history to the decline of religious power from the 14th century onwards in Europe. There was, for instance, moral turpitude and widespread corruption amongst the priesthood. At this time, a group of fanatical reformists appeared, the most famous of which was the illegitimate son of a priest, Fra Dolcino. He used oration and letters to publicize the simplicity of early Christianity, including the public ownership of property. He called for the establishment of a Christian Republic, to overthrow the secular tyrants (many of the rich) and save the poor and the oppressed (Marx, 1992a, p. 4). The influence of the Church and the Pope was lesser and declined earlier in England. By the time of William I, no lords could be excommunicated, no religious conference could issue a decree, and no official document of the pope could enter the kingdom without the permission of the King (Marx, 1992c, p. 201).

Nonetheless, up until the 13th–14th century, the Pope could still exert significant influence in mainland Europe by stopping the sacrament, declaring a decree invalid and by excommunication. In 1245, at a world religious conference in Lyon, Sancho II of Portugal was pronounced to have lost his throne: Pope Innocentius IV gave the power to Sancho II's brother, Afonso III, who had sworn loyalty to the Pope and, in one particular document, declared absolute obedience to the ecclesiastical system (Marx, 1992a, p. 60). In 1309, Pope Clement V ordered the cancellation of prayer in Venice, declared all government decrees invalid, proclaimed that officials were not protected by law,

and sent priests to hunt down and arrest Venetian merchants and seize their goods. Although Venice's senate held on for many years, the people demanded that it should be reconciled with the Papacy because trade and the people's income suffered damage (ibid., p. 11).

The reason why the power of the Pope and the Church was in continual decline was partly due to internal corruption, and partly due to the lords, knights and kings. Their union and struggle consumed the strength of the clergy and the secular aristocracy alike. At the end of 1476, Italy was divided into two groups; one was the Pope and the king, the other was Florence and Milan, which were allied with Venice. In 1481, five years later, one side was Naples, Florence and Milan, the other was Pope and Venice (Marx, 1992b, p. 27; p. 30).

The rise of mercantile cities also represented a crucial change in relations of intercourse as the feudal mode of production made the transition to a capitalist mode of production. For a considerable period, Venice was highly influential in Europe. The monarchies in mainland Europe continually attacked this republic that implemented oligarchy at the centre of a powerful trading network. This was the time when royal power battled against bourgeois mercantile power, represented by Venice, which was about to be overtaken by a number of new factors that were coming into play. From Marx's perspective, these included the discovery of America's gold and silver mines, the expansion of colonial relations, and the establishment of standing armies. The driving force of the conflict between monarchies and Venice was to subdue the scourge of capital and the bourgeoisie (ibid., p. 60). Not only because of the continuous conflict with the large monarchies, but also because of these various novel factors, the beginning of the 16th century witnessed the collapse of the wealth and power of Venice. Marx noted that the power of Turkey was increasing. Trade with East India and China had been transferred to Portugal. The Netherlands utilized the

discoveries of Spaniards and Portuguese to gain advantage. All of these factors led to the decline of Venice (ibid., p. 79).

For Marx, the shifting centre among the early modern mercantile cities followed a trajectory from Italy, to the Netherlands, to England (ibid., p. 79; Marx, 1992c, p. 54); a geographical trajectory accepted by world systems theory (Taylor, p. 1996). In England, the rank of citizen became increasingly unrestrained. It grew up with the development of industry and trade. Immigrants from the Netherlands brought their property, woollen mills and business connections to the UK. They were Republican advocates and strict Calvinists. Wealthy Britons followed suit, eventually to form the House of Commons (Marx, 1992c, p. 54). In addition to the commercial, religious, and military factors already mentioned, the characteristics of British feudalism are also important in allowing England to transform into capitalism earlier than mainland European states. In other countries, feudal lords with lower status only swore loyalty to their higher lords and remained hostile to all others, such that even the king took on the status of an enemy if relations between the higher lord and the monarch descended into enmity. In contrast, as early as the time when William I ruled, each feudal lord of Britain was required to swear direct allegiance to the king in addition to his higher lord (Marx, 1992c, p. 200). Moreover, William abolished four large earldoms, which dealt a fatal blow to feudalism. The shire became the largest local management unit, whose ealdorman was directly nominated by the king (ibid.). Thus, “England went a long way toward eliminating the fragmentation of the state, the ‘parcellized sovereignty’, inherited from feudalism” (Wood, 2002, p. 98).

So far, we discovered the evidence of his support for the argument that relations of intercourse influence relations of production in narrow sense and forces of production in every corner of his Chronological Extracts. Accordingly, in Marx’s

view, the transition from feudalism to capitalism is the result of the interaction between forces of production, relations of production, and relations of intercourse, as he elaborated in The German Ideology and other works. Changes in relations of production are not just the result of revolutions in forces of production. Modes of production in different spaces and the relations of production associated with them affect and change one another because of relation of intercourse. Changed relations of production will transform qualitatively when new forces of production arise. This process is manifested not only in the fusion of the Graeco-Roman mode of production and the German mode of production in the transition to the feudal mode of production, but also in the internal intercourse within Europe and external intercourse with primitive and Asiatic modes of production on other continents. War and commerce contributed to the rise of the Italian city-states, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Britain; to the decline of feudal lords and the magisterium; the rise of absolutist state and the acquisition of precious metals, raw materials and markets. These ever-changing relations of intercourse, combined with the revolution of forces of production, is what makes feudal relations of production and thus the feudal mode of production undergo its historic transition to capitalism. In this sense, this revision to the classical productive forces – mode of production – relations of production paradigm combines the two side of successive debates from Dobb to the revisionists. Imperial China and medieval Europe experienced different ownership and modes of surplus extraction. In China, relations of production were dominated by communal land ownership and a corresponding mode of surplus extraction, the unity of tax and rent conducted by a bistratal political system that "somehow managed to 'hang up' the centralized power so that it did not reach to the ground, since the officials sent by the central government stopped at the district yamen[29]" (Fei, 1953/1980, p. 79). Although there is no dominant religion in China, Confucianism, which is

[29] The local government office which also includes residence of local official in Imperial China.

always deemed a religion by western thinkers such as Max Weber, occupied a ruling position in the field of ideology. It didn't experience a continual decline, as in Europe. What is more, if China and Europe are taken as comparative cases, they also faced different forms of war. In China, this took the form of peasant uprisings marking the end of a given dynasty and periodic nomadic invasions at the northern border. But the frequency of such events is relatively low, and the areas affected by war were relatively small in China. Finally, although China also witnessed very prosperous trade and cities with sizeable populations, this kind of trade and type of city was embedded in the Asiatic mode of production, where the political system dominated the economy. Agricultural production and exchange there has not changed its purpose with respect to use value in most areas of China. Although foreign trade has persisted since the Han dynasty, the influx of silver and copper did not transform into capital due to the absence of any revolution in the forces of production and concomitant transformation of peasants into wage labourer. In this sense, imperial China did not experience the collapse of the Asiatic mode of production due to the stagnancy in developing new force of production and stability of relations of production in a broad sense. In the case of Western Europe, in contrast, money was successfully transformed into capital because of an agrarian revolution in the forces of production; the expanded external relations of intercourse with America, Africa and Asia, which boosted the development of capitalist economy; the internal relations of intercourse between Kings, lords, cities and the Pope, which largely destroyed the premise of feudal military premise; and the transformation of relations of production in narrow sense as a result of "so-called primitive accumulation". In Karl Polanyi's (1944/2001) terms, the economy in Europe was "disembedded" from society. Thus, in contrast to unilinear teleological explanations of historical materialism, this historical-geographical materialism explains why a unique Asiatic mode of production was formed in the East, rather than following the evolutionary route from

feudalism to capitalism seen in the West. Thus, the mode of production as it manifests itself in the world follows diverse, geographically differentiated evolutionary paths.

In the light of this conception, we should, on the one hand, admit that the capitalist transformation did first take place in Western Europe. This was a consequence of Europe's unique relations of production and historical-geographical conditions. The transformation also promoted the rapid economic growth of Western capitalism. On the other hand, we should not regard the occurrence of this transition as a sign that Western Europe ever was the centre of the world. Nor should we deem East Asia before 15th century or its recent revival as its becoming the centre of the world. Rather, the single standard of productivity for judging the level of development should be examined, especially at a time when ecological disasters loom large.

Chapter 4: Revisiting Marx's Theory of Crisis during the Covid-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

In the 14th century, the black death first broke out in Central Asia and spread to the continent of Europe through the expansion of the Mongol Empire and the prosperous Silk Road trade-route. This long-lasting and far-reaching pandemic not only resulted in a large reduction in the population of Western Europe but also paved the way to the crisis of the feudal mode of production and the rise of the capitalist mode of production. However, six centuries later, when the capitalist world was satisfied with its great progress in economic development, public health and medical science, the new coronavirus has dealt the capitalist mode of production a head-on blow. "COVID-19 caused a global recession whose depth was surpassed only by the two World Wars and the Great Depression over the past century and a half. … In all, the global economy is estimated to have contracted 4.3 percent in 2020." (The World Bank, 2021, p.3). The Nobel laureate economist, Joseph E. Stiglitz, pronounced that "[i]n many ways it's far worse than 2008" (Goodman, 2020, n.p.). Nevertheless, what we have to clarify is whether the crisis caused by COVID-19 has some particularity, which will in turn cause some structural change within the capitalist mode of production, or whether it is, so to speak, just another economic recession. If the former is the case, what is the relationship between a virus and the crisis of a mode of production in human society? If the latter appertains, what will be the future of capitalism? Will it be, as Goldman Sachs has predicted, that current share values provide an opportunity to slowly add to the risk levels of a portfolio? For those who may be sitting on excess cash and have staying power, with the

right strategic asset allocation, this is the time to start incrementally adding to S&P equities (Mossavar-Rahmani et al, 2020, n.p.); or will we witness, in Marxist terms, a sudden and immediate collapse?

In order to address these questions, this chapter interrogates crisis theory from a Marxist perspective. Concurring with Bukharin (1972, p. 264), the chapter sees that "[c]apitalist society is a 'unity of contradictions.' The process of movement of capitalist society is a process of the continual reproduction of the capitalist contradictions". In agreement with Habermas (1992, p. 30), the chapter considers that the capitalist economic crisis is "a 'system crisis' marked by 'dialectical contradiction' that 'comes to pass *in terms of* structurally insoluble system contradictions or steering problems". However, the chapter takes an approach that is much closer to Marx's original formulations and argues that the theory of crisis should be understood as a part of historical-geographical materialism.

2. Theories of Capitalist Crisis.

A World Bank (2020, p. xiii) report stated that the "COVID-19 recession is the first since 1870 to be triggered solely by a pandemic". This view is very much in line with that of many mainstream economists. From their perspective, "it can be argued that in principle crises need never occur; that they do in fact occur may then be attributed to factors which are external to the normal functioning of capitalist reproduction" (Shaikh, 1978a, p. 220). Sunspots, climatic changes, crop failures, and human activities such as war and revolutions are variously conceived as factors responsible for breaking the normal economic cycle. For example, W. Stanley Jevons (1878, p. 334) argued that the "cause [of a crisis] can only be found in some great and wide-spread meteorological influence recurring at like periods". In this way, the World Bank's report is just adding the

deadly virus pandemic to the long list of external factors contributing to capitalist crises.

Although it seems clear and straightforward to regard capitalist crises as the direct result of external destructive factors, this interpretation does not touch on the internal essence of the capitalist mode of production, nor can it explain the recurrence of crises throughout the history of capitalism. In consequence, “theories trying to explore the economic crisis from the endogenous factors of capitalist economy emerged. Keynes and Neo-Keynesianism’s cycle theory belongs to this kind of explanation” (Wang & Cheng, 2018, p. 1). Keynes believed that, as a result of changes in human psychological conditions, it was perfectly possible for the aggregate demand for consumption and investment to be insufficient or suboptimal, resulting in “involuntary unemployment”. The market mechanism itself has no inbuilt capacity to keep the economy in a balanced state of supply and demand with full employment (cf. Liu, 2010, p. 178). When the market fails to operate by itself and the state fails to implement effective intervention policies, economic crisis can arise. After World War II, a form of liberalism based on Keynesian theory came to be embedded in developed capitalist states, serving to promote the rapid recovery and growth of the economy (Harvey, 2005/2007, pp. 10–11).

Nonetheless, “By the end of 1960s, embedded liberalism began to break down, both internationally and within domestic economies…. Unemployment and inflation were both surging everywhere, ushering in a global phase of ‘stagflation’ that lasted throughout much of the 1970s” (Harvey, 2005/2007, p. 12). Under such circumstances, Keynesian policies, especially fiscal policy and government intervention in the economy, are considered to be no longer effective in stimulating economic development and maintaining the economic and class status of capitalists. As a result of discontent arising from the crisis of

capital accumulation, social movements became widespread. The conspiracy of capitalists who were desperate to rescind government ‘interference’ and quash the powers of trade unions, in favour of a neoliberal doctrine that emphasized individual freedom and the inviolability of private property, are an expected result of this economic and historical circumstance (ibid., pp. 14–15). “Individual freedom of choice is seen as the fundamental basis of human welfare, with market relations understood as the institution that allows individual choice to drive the economy. The state, by contrast, is seen as an enemy of individual liberty” (Kotz, 2015, p. 11). In this theory, from the perspective of this neoliberalist political economy, the crisis is generated by extensive government intervention in the market.

Both neoliberalist and Keynesian economic theories discuss the economic crisis, or at least “economic fluctuation” given that some of economists deny that there is a crisis tendency in the capitalist mode of production, and capitalist reproduction cycle on the premise of not changing the existing market economic institution, which is based on the capitalist private ownership of means of production, and restrict themselves to offering policy suggestions to manage the economic cycle and periodic crises (Wang & Cheng, 2018, p. 2). In other words, mainstream economists hold that crisis or “fluctuation” is an abnormal moment of capitalist reproduction. By contrast, Marxists maintain that policies that are implemented to tackle capitalist crises “serve only to postpone the crisis, at the price of intensifying it” (Clarke, 1994, p. 31). For Marxists, “[c]rises are essential to the reproduction of capitalism” (Harvey 2014, p. ix). Crisis must be regarded as “the real concentration and forcible adjustment of all contradictions of bourgeois economy” (Marx, 1863/1989, p. 140). However, Marx did not elaborate a “final presentation of his theory of crisis…. Instead, there are various approaches to explain crises” (Heinrich, 2013, p. 15). Among these approaches, theories of overproduction, underconsumption, disproportion, and

the falling rate of profit are the most influential. The remainder of this section will consider each of these in turn to explore how a Marxist crisis theory could contribute to the analysis of the current crisis.

Although Karl Kautsky's theory of crisis is labelled as proto-Keynesian in that it regards the crisis as a normal phase in the economic cycle (cf. Clarke, 1994, p. 27), Kautsky argued that overproduction and disproportion lead to crisis. He stated that "[t]he great modern crises which convulse the world's markets arise from overproduction, which, in its turn, arises from the planlessness that inevitably characterizes our system of commodity production" (Kautsky, 1892/2000, n. p.). This 'planlessness' appears as the asymmetry of the total production of society. "[T]he total production of society is not carried on in a systematic way; on the contrary, it is left to each producer to estimate for himself the demand there may be for the goods which he produces" (Kautsky, 1892/2000, n. p.). Later, Kautsky added that the asymmetry appears in not only production and consumption but also different branches of production, "because within a specific zone the capitalist mode of production tends to develop much more quickly in the industrial than in the agricultural sector" (Kautsky, 1914/1970, p. 41).

"Kautsky's belief in a secular tendency to overproduction as the basis of a general economic crisis" (Clarke, 1994, p. 29) is the main target at which Eduard Bernstein took aim. Bernstein argued that "the secular tendency to overproduction and crisis was countered by" such factors as "the growth of the domestic market", "the opening of foreign markets", "the rise of joint-stock companies and the formation of cartels", "the modern credit system" (Clarke, 1994, p. 29), and the expansion in food production (Bernstein, 1899/1993, p. 96). Therefore, for Bernstein (ibid.), a "general crisis" will only come into being as a result of "unforeseen external events", citing an absence of reasons to

believe “that such a crisis is imminent”. This position was generally seen as revisionist, including by Rosa Luxemburg: “Bernstein began his revision of the social democracy by abandoning the theory of capitalist collapse. The latter… is the cornerstone of scientific socialism. Rejecting it, Bernstein also rejects the whole doctrine of socialism” (Luxemburg, 1900/2008, p. 96).

Luxemburg criticized Bernstein’s betrayal of the working class and historical materialism adeptly: “the phenomena that are said by Bernstein to be the means of capitalist adaptation” – diverse developments such as cartels, the credit system, trade unions, etc., all of which attenuate the contradictions of capitalism and allow capitalism’s continued functioning – are simultaneously held to be “the preconditions and even in part the germs” of socialism, to the extent that they express the “social character of production” (Luxemburg, 1900/2008. p. 46). Bernstein’s argument is, however, contradictory, Luxemburg points out, in that precisely these “same factors render superfluous … the transformation of this socialized production into socialist production” (Luxemburg, 1900/2008, p. 46). Moreover, they “appear … as a determined phase of capitalist development, which in the last analysis aggravates the anarchy of the capitalist world and expresses and ripens its internal contradictions” (Luxemburg, 1900/2008, p. 51).

Luxemburg’s own views, however, are not beyond criticism. They essentially appeal to underconsumption – “a general lack of sufficient effective demand to soak up the growth in output that capitalism generates” (Harvey, 2003, p. 138) – to explain the causation of crisis, a view (hardly unique to Luxemburg) that has itself been roundly criticized. On the one hand, Luxemburg held that underconsumption arises “because workers are exploited and by definition receive much less value to spend than they produce, and capitalists are at least in part obliged to reinvest rather than to consume” (Harvey, 2003, p. 138). On

the other hand, she argued that the contradiction between productivity and exchange will inevitably lead to crisis because the world market cannot expand without limit and productivity is constantly improving (Luxemburg, 1900/2008, p. 53). It is unsurprising that Luxemburg's underconsumptionism should be echoed in Paul Sweezy's emphasis on the role of the market as a critical factor in the transformation of modes of production. There is, in Sweezy's (1946, p. 183) opinion, "an inherent tendency for the growth in consumption to fall behind the growth in the output of consumption goods", which "may express itself in crises or in stagnation, or in both". Michal Kalecki criticised Luxemburg's approach. He argued that exports to the non-capitalist external market are offset by imports, which absorb purchasing power in the capitalist market (Kalecki, 1991, p. 456). Bleaney (1976, p. 187) denied that Luxemburg is an underconsumptionist theorist. He, however, pointed out that there is a fundamental mistake in underconsumption theories since they "consistently underestimate the role of investment expenditure" (ibid., p. 209). The force of Bleaney's critique has been lent enormous credibility by the process of capitalist urbanization, especially since World War II. This is the essence of contemporary Marxist geographical and spatial analysis such as that supplied by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. Although massive infrastructure construction postpones rather than eliminates crisis, it can indeed absorb surplus capital.

One of the most influential counterarguments to underconsumptionism is disproportionality theory, represented by Tugan-Baranowsky and thence Rudolf Hilferding (cf. Shaikh, 1978a, p. 228; Wang & Cheng, 2018, p. 4). Hilferding (1910/1981, p. 241) argued that the term underconsumption "has no sense in economics except to indicate that society is consuming less than it has produced", which would not happen if production were to carry on proportionally. Likewise, as Clarke (1994, p. 34) elucidates, "[t]he conclusion which Tugan

drew was that capital would not face any barriers to the realization of its expanded product, provided only that the appropriate proportional relations between the various branches of production were maintained". Although Tugan (2000, p. 86) admitted that underconsumption is "an obstacle for the realization of social production", he thought that it is "the lack of proportionality" that ultimately caused this underconsumption. This is because "total demand for commodities is independent of the ultimate total volume of social consumption" (Milios & Sotirpoulos, 2007, p. 232). In other words, overproduction could be absorbed by the expanding demand of the means of production sector rather than consumption by the immiserised proletariat. Therefore, Tugan's explanation of Marx's theory of crisis adopted a Keynesian approach, "according to which a constantly increasing investment demand may always compensate for the lacking demand for consumer goods" (Milios & Sotiropoulos, 2007, p. 227; Vouldis, Michaelides & Milios, 2011, p. 440). In this way, from the perspective of disproportionality theory, the reason for crises is the anarchy of capitalism while the ways of eliminating crises is "the parliamentary path to State control" (Shaikh, 1978a, p. 228). However, "Crises of this kind, arising exclusively from the disproportionalities of the system, are only an expression of the anarchy of capitalism and not of the exploitative character of the relations of production that underlie this anarchy; they are resolved, therefore, by the redistribution of surplus value, without the production of additional surplus value" (Mattick, 1974, n. p.).

Another counterargument to the underconsumption thesis became popular in the 1970s. Its proponents insisted that "[a]t the very centre of Marx's account of the crisis-prone nature of capitalism stands what he called 'the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall'" (Harman, 1984/1999, p. 16). For Dobb (1937, p. 108), for instance, it seemed "clear that Marx regarded this falling profit-rate tendency as an important underlying cause of periodic crises, as well

as a factor shaping the long-term trend: as a fundamental reason why a process of accumulation and expansion would be self-defeating in its effects, and hence would inevitably suffer a relapse". This fall in the rate of profit "is caused not by a fall in aggregate demand, but rests, instead, on two different mechanisms: (a) the rising organic composition of capital …, and; (b) the profit squeeze" (Basu, 2017, p. 7) – to which we may add a third, (c) a labour-force deficit. Scholars tend to pay more attention to the impact of advanced capital on the profit rate, but in fact the profit rate is also related to the rate of surplus value. When a worker's ability to provide surplus labour falls, for example, when he catches COVID-19, the profit rate decreases as the rate of surplus value decreases.

The earliest and the most common explanation of the theory of falling profit rate held that the main reason for this tendency is the rise in the organic composition of capital, a viewpoint presented by Henryk Grossmann. "Grossmann's approach gave the Marxian law a mechanistic, determinist interpretation" (Milios, 1994, p. 189). He initially accepted Tugan-Baranowsky's argument that, "if only the proportions laid down by the formula as to the distribution of accumulated capital were observed, accumulation could be infinitely prolonged without crises" (Grossmann, 1922, n.p.). However, he later "abandoned this argument in favor of an account based on Marx's law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall" (Kuhn, 1995, p. 176). He distinguished four conditions that influence the number of years until "the absolute crisis": (a) the level of the organic composition ("The higher this is the smaller the number of years"); (b) the rate of accumulation of constant capital (again, a higher rate accelerates the onset of crisis); (c) the rate of accumulation of variable capital ("whose impact is … ambivalent"); whilst (d) the level of the rate of surplus value has a "defusing impact", such that a higher rate postpones the onset of crisis (Grossmann, 1929/1992, p. 98).

Some variation on the theme of a falling rate of profit or idea of a ‘profit squeeze’ had become the main alternative to underconsumptionist theories by the last quarter of the twentieth century (Weeks, 1979, p. 259). This school of thought has its origins in Dobb’s (1942) work, which held that “it is rising wages which ultimately cause crises; a rising organic composition appears in this analysis as an offsetting factor to an already falling rate of profit, not as a cause of the fall itself” (Shaikh, 1978b, p. 246). This conception was well developed in the 1970s by Glyn and Sutcliffe (1972), who argued that organized trade unions in Britain had increased the bargaining power of the working-class, resulting in wage growth outpacing productivity growth. However, as a result of international competition, it is impossible for the capitalist to pass on the increased wage cost by increasing product price, which results in the company’s profit-margin being squeezed (Wang & Cheng, 2018, p. 7). Erik Olin Wright (1975/1999, pp. 127–128) summarized the essential argument of the profit squeeze thus:

> the relative share of the national income going to workers and to capitalists is almost entirely a consequence of their relative strengths in the class struggle. There is therefore no intrinsic reason for wage struggles to be limited, even in the long run, to demands that real wages rise as rapidly as productivity. To the extent that the working class develops a strong enough labor movement to win wage increases in excess of productivity increases, there will be a tendency for the rate of profits to fall (to be “squeezed” by rising wage bills). Such a decline in profits results in a corresponding decline in investments and thus in even slower increases in productivity. The end result is economic crisis.

Following in the footsteps of Kozo Uno (1953), Makoto Itoh rebutted profit-squeeze theory, arguing: “if the power of the trade unions to squeeze the rate of profit through class struggle is generalized into the basic factor causing

crisis … it may become difficult to explain the cyclical and acute character of crisis. This basic principle of cyclical crisis should be clarified on the empirical basis of the mid-nineteenth century, when trade unions were not yet *generally* established" (Itoh, 1980, pp. 133–134).

To conclude, although all these accounts clearly owe something to Marx and often claim to be a faithful rendering of his ideas, they typically (or tend to) emphasize whatever they think is the most important factor, while other factors are relegated to having only a secondary role. Accordingly, Marxist crisis theory is fragmented. Perhaps this is because Marx's crisis theory is too scattered, or because Marxists adopt different strategies facing different accumulation structures in different periods, or simply because different authors' subjective understanding of Marx's original work varies – but, whatever the case may be, there is virtually no consensus on what Marx's crisis theory actually entails. Therefore, "for a long time, the discipline of economics could not solve the problem of crisis because economists only looked for the cause of the crisis from a particular field of social economy – production, exchange or distribution. The crisis is generated on the basis of the overall social and economic phenomena, so the crisis cannot be limited to a specific area of the social economy" (Tugan, 1989, p. 682). In consequence, we are better advised to consider Marx's own writings carefully.

3. Marx's Theory of Crisis

Although Marx himself did not have time to systematically elaborate his theory of crisis, there are reasons to believe that the theory of crisis plays a particularly important role in his understanding of the operation of capital and the capitalist mode of production. Marx (1857/1973, p. 108) regarded crisis, in conjunction with the world market, as one of five sections of his political economy. As we know, Marx's *Capital* is the explanation of the law of operation of the capitalist

mode of production. Thus, a Marxist theory of crisis should abandon the insufficiently dialectical character of accounts of the declining profit rate, insufficient consumption, overproduction and disproportion, and analyse the cause of crisis phenomena in the overall process of the capitalist mode of production. From this perspective, the causes of crisis in Marx's theory have three dimensions: possibility, necessity, and reality.

The first premise in considering why crisis is possible is to recognize that capital is a constantly moving process. Marx (1863/1968, p. 503) stated that "the crisis is precisely the phase of disturbance and interruption of the process of reproduction". Since the crisis represents the interruption of the process, the normal reproduction of either a single capitalist firm or capitalist social production as a whole is therefore a process. "[V]alue is here the active factor in" this "process, in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it at the same time changes in magnitude, differentiates itself by throwing off surplus value from itself; the original value, in other words, expands spontaneously" (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 165). "Value therefore now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such capital" (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 166). Value alternately takes the form of money and commodity, which means that whether it is expressed as M-C-M' or C-M-C', it must go through two moments of buying and selling. Only by buying variable capital, including living labour, and constant capital such as raw materials and machinery, can more value be produced. At the same time, only after this kind of value is put back on the market can the capitalist really obtain (realize) his part of the value.

Marx believed that the possibility of crisis came from commodity exchange mediated by money. Unlike barter, commodity exchange urges capitalists first to exchange their goods for money, and then use the money to buy materials

for reproduction. This dichotomy of purchase and sale arouses what Keynes termed ‘liquidity preference’.

> At a given moment, the supply of all commodities can be greater than the demand for all commodities, since the demand for the *general commodity*, money, exchange-value, is greater than the demand for all particular commodities, in other words the motive to turn the commodity into money, to realise its exchange-value, prevails over the motive to transform the commodity again into use-value. (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 505)

At the same time, in this further development of the separation of buying and selling, “[t]he appearance of the two equivalents, commodities and money, at the two poles of the process of sale, has ceased to be simultaneous” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 146). At this time, money not only functions as a means of circulation but also as “a measure of value in the determination of the price of the commodity sold” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 146). Moreover, the “imaginary or ideal money” (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 105) usually establishes the relationship between claims and debts between buyers and sellers through securities, to perform the function of a means of payment. In this way, the buyer can obtain the required good first and then pay the money. The seller can again purchase the raw materials needed for reproduction from other capitalists through the securities. However, in a crisis, if a capitalist in the payment process fails to sell his goods to consumers to obtain money, the disruption of the capital circulation process will interrupt the turnover of all capitalists exchanging through the same securities at the same time. Thus, the “possibility of crisis is … demonstrated, and further developed, by the disjunction between the (direct) process of production and the process of circulation” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 507). In short, the possibility of crisis is embodied in “the metamorphosis of the commodity itself, the falling asunder of purchase and sale” and “the function of money as

a means of payment" (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 510). However, the possibility of crisis does not explain the uniqueness of crisis under the capitalist mode of production, which differs from other modes of production; nor does it explain the cause of the crisis: if there is merely a possibility rather than a necessity, the occurrence of the crisis is accidental.

Marx believed that the capitalist mode of production makes crisis not just possible but inevitable. "The contradictions inherent in the movement of capitalist society impress themselves upon the practical bourgeois most strikingly in the changes of the periodic cycle, through which modern industry runs, and whose crowning point is the universal crisis" (Marx, 1873/1996, p. 20). From the perspective of dialectics, "[t]he fundamental cause of the development of a thing is not external but internal; it lies in the contradictoriness within the thing" (Mao, 1937/1965, p. 313). In general, Marx (1894/1998, p. 248) thought that the contradiction of the capitalist mode of production involves, on the one hand, "a tendency towards absolute development of the productive forces, regardless of the value and surplus value it contains, and regardless of the social conditions under which capitalist production takes place; while on the other hand, its aim is to preserve the value of the existing capital and promote its self-expansion to the highest limit". Therefore, on one side of the contradiction is a growth in productivity accompanied by the continuous development of the division of labour and continuous improvement of the instruments of production; on the other is the increasing poverty of the proletariat, which has become relative surplus population under the mode of production due to the extraction of surplus value which is the basis of the preservation and self-expansion of capital. As distinct from Engels' deployment of the concept of the 'anarchy of production' in *Anti-Dühring* and the falling rate of profit in editing Marx's manuscript of the third volume of *Capital* to explain capitalist crises, Marx explained the inevitability of the crisis as being caused

by the contradictory movement of the forces of production and relations of production under the capitalist mode of production at the most abstract level. But the problem is that this overly abstract explanation tends to slide towards either Messianism or Revisionism. It is still necessary to explain the reality of crisis, that is, “why the phases of the process come into such conflict that their inner unity can only assert itself through a crisis” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 502). Contemporary Marxists have conceived explanations centred on the historical-geographical specificities of different capitalist modes of production by embedding economic accumulation into particular social structures. David M. Kotz (2010, p. 364) adheres to this social structure of accumulation theory and has argued that, “in individual capitalist countries and in global capitalism as a whole, a sequence of relatively durable institutional structures can be identified, each lasting for several decades” (Kotz, 2010, p. 364). Similarly, Bob Jessop (2000, p. 327), in his articulation of a “doubly heterodox regulationist viewpoint”, stated that “specific accumulation regimes and modes of regulation are typically constructed within specific social spaces and spatio-temporal matrices”.[30] Because the contradiction between capitalist forces of production and relations of production will have different manifestations at different stages of production based on different actual conditions, it forms the real cause of crises, such as a falling rate of profit, disproportion, underconsumption, and overproduction.

Engels and Lenin both interpreted this contradiction as the conflict between socialized production and capitalist appropriation. Engels and Lenin correctly described the main features of capitalist contradiction, but in a one-sided way. Although the improvement of the instruments of production, division and cooperation of labour all promote the development of the forces of production, the expansion of division and cooperation is a change in the scope of the

[30] For the difference between social structure of accumulation theory and regulation theory, see Kotz, 1994, pp. 85–97.

relations of production. On the one hand, division and cooperation qua relations of production rely on the level of development of the forces of production. “[W]ith the introduction of machinery the division of labour inside society has increased, the task of the worker inside the workshop has been simplified, capital has been concentrated, the human being has been further dismembered” (Marx, 1847/1976, p. 188). On the other hand, their role in promoting productivity is the effect of relations of production. Marx held that the "[d]ivision of labour and private property are, after all, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 46). Meanwhile, social production itself is synonymous with the division of labour and collaboration. “The need for exchange and for the transformation of the product into a pure exchange value progresses in step with the division of labour, i.e. with the increasingly social character of production” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 146). Therefore, socialized production and capitalist appropriation are twin contradictory aspects of capitalist relations of production. This means that, on the one hand, with the expansion of the division of labour and exchange, the labour process itself transforms private labour into social labour, and, on the other hand, the products of this social labour are privately owned by the capitalists. Therefore, the production process manifests itself as a single capital turnover controlled by the capitalist in a particular enterprise and the exchange of the capitalist's products in society as a whole that is beyond the control of any individual capitalist. Since the capitalist can only control and organize his own production, he does not know the exact situation of enterprises competing with him in society. Therefore, “[t]he contradiction between socialized production and capitalistic appropriation now presents itself as an antagonism between the organization of production in the individual workshop, and the anarchy of production in society generally” (Engels, 1877/1987, pp. 260–261).

This opposition between the organization of production in individual factories and the anarchy in the capitalist mode of production as a whole implies the first reality of the capitalist crisis: the disproportion in different sectors (Tugan, 1894/1982, pp. 288–289). What makes Marx's conception of disproportion different from Tugan's and others' is that Marx thought disproportionality is one of the appearances of capitalist contradiction. In other words, Marx regarded the disproportion and anarchy as the internal character of capitalism which caused an abnormal equilibrium process. By contrast, "Tugan sees equilibrium as the norm and crises a deviation from it, albeit recurring and periodical" (Besomi, 2006, p. 147). Due to the development of the forces of production and the expansion of the division of labour, capitalist production is increasingly divided into departments. Since production is anarchic in the entire capitalist system and the output of various production sectors is constantly disproportional, Marx believes that the process of compulsory balancing of this disproportion leads to crisis. "[U]nder capitalist production the proportionality of the individual branches of production springs as a continual process from disproportionality, because the cohesion of the aggregate production imposes itself as a blind law upon the agents of production, and not as a law which, being understood and hence controlled by their common mind, brings the production process under their joint control" (Marx, 1894/1998, pp. 255–256). This is effectively the point Hilferding (1910/1981, p. 256) seizes upon in stating that "the proportional relations between the capital goods and the consumer goods industries as a whole must also prevail in each separate branch of production.… [A] crisis can occur even in the case of simple reproduction if the proportions are violated".

A crisis may be explained not only as "the result of a disproportion of production in various branches of the economy and as a result of a disproportion between the consumption of the capitalists and their accumulation", but also with respect

to “the consuming power of the non-producing classes” (Marx, 1894/1998, pp. 482–483). The improvement of the instrument of production or the adoption of machines not only enabled medieval craftsmen to be replaced by more replaceable wage labour but also promoted the replacement of workers by machines. On the other hand, the worker depends on the production system of modern mechanical industry and the capitalist who survives by extracting the worker’s surplus value. Under such conditions, wage labourers' consuming power is restricted. First, as the productivity of means of subsistence improves, the socially necessary labour to produce these necessities will decrease and the real wages of workers will also decrease. Second, due to the substitution of machines for workers, more and more workers have become relatively surplus. Third, “for an extraordinarily large number of branches of production – all those that do not supply articles for direct consumption – the mass of those who participate in production are entirely excluded from the purchase of their own products” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 518). “The under-consumption of the masses is therefore also a prerequisite condition of crises, and plays in them a role which has long been recognised”; “the under-consumption of the masses… is not a new phenomenon. It has existed as long as there have been exploiting and exploited classes” (Engels, 1877/1987, p. 272). On the one hand, underconsumption causes crisis under the capitalist mode of production as determined by the mode of extraction of surplus value. On the other hand, it needs to be connected with overproduction. “It is the unconditional development of the productive forces and therefore mass production on the basis of a mass of producers who are confined within the bounds of the necessary means of subsistence on the one hand and, on the other, the barrier set up by the capitalists’ profit, which [forms] the basis of modern over-production” (Marx, 1863/1968, p. 528). Therefore, the overproduction of capital and commodities and the insufficiency of labour's consumption capacity, as the

realistic manifestation of contradiction between productive force and production relation, provides the possibility for capitalist crises.

Not only is there a real manifestation of contradiction between forces and relations of production and within the relations of production, but the contradictory development of productive forces also has its real manifestation. The “limitations of the capitalist mode of production come to the surface”, Marx (1894/1998, p. 257) says, “[i]n that the development of the productive power of labour creates out of the falling rate of profit a law which at a certain point comes into antagonistic conflict with this development and must be overcome constantly through crises”. Marx had a clear account of the falling rate of profit: “it is a law of capitalist production that its development is attended by a relative decrease of variable in relation to constant capital, and consequently to the total capital set in motion. This continual relative decrease of the variable capital vis-à-vis the constant, and consequently the total capital, is identical with the progressively higher organic composition of the social capital in its average” (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 210). Therefore, the organic composition of capital, c:v, also rises with increases in productivity, while, on the premise that the rate of surplus value remains unchanged, the profit rate p=s/c+v will decrease accordingly. What needs to be clarified is that some versions of the theory of the falling rate of profit describe this tendency as the result of the rise of technical composition (Lebowitz, 2009, p. 134). However, in Marx’s view, the organic composition and technical composition of capital have subtle differences (see Table 1).

Constant Capital: c	Variable Capital: v	Surplus Value: s	Organic Composition: c/v	Rate of Surplus value: s/v	Technical Composition: c/v+s	Profit Rate: s/c+v
300	100	100	3.00	100.00%	1.50	25.00%
500	150	150	3.33	100.00%	1.67	23.08%
500	250	250	2.00	100.00%	1.00	33.33%
500	150	250	3.33	166.67%	1.25	38.46%
500	250	150	2.00	60.00%	1.25	20.00%
500	150	140	3.33	93.33%	1.72	21.54%
500	150	180	3.33	120.00%	1.52	27.69%
500	150	190	3.33	126.67%	1.47	29.23%
600	150	180	4.00	120.00%	1.82	24.00%

Table 1 The Varying of Profit Rate in Relation to the Organic and the Technical Composition of Capital and the Rate of Surplus Value. Source: The Author.

When Marx discusses the rising organic composition of capital and the falling rate of profit, he presupposes that the rate of surplus value remains unchanged. As long as the rate of surplus value remains unchanged, the technical composition does have the same tendency as the organic composition and the opposite tendency to the profit rate. However, when the increase in organic composition is fixed, as the increase in the rate of surplus value expands, the increase in technical composition will gradually decrease until it is less than the original technical composition. Therefore, the varying of technical composition and organic composition are not exactly the same. At the same time, the tendency of technical composition cannot determine the change of profit rate since it is affected by the two variables of organic composition and rate of surplus value. The effect of the increase or decrease of technical composition compared with the initial ratio on the tendency of the profit rate is arbitrary. The varying direction of the rate of profit depends on the ratio of the change in the organic composition and the rate of surplus value when the rate of surplus value is no longer unchanged. Therefore, when discussing the falling rate of profit,

the technical composition and the organic composition cannot be used as synonyms.

The question is, if the decline in the profit rate is an inevitable result of the increase in productivity, does the decline of the profit rate necessarily lead to crisis? Marx thought that the crisis caused by the contradiction between the forces and relations of production is an abstract necessity, but the decline in profitability as a real trend may not always be apparent as a result of certain countervailing influences: there are "some counteracting influences at work, which cross and annul the effect of the general law, and which give it merely the characteristic of a tendency" (Marx, 1894/1998, p. 230). These factors include the increasing intensity of exploitation, depression of wages below the value of labour-power, cheapening of elements of constant capital, relative overpopulation, foreign trade and the increase of stock capital. Therefore, only when capital's aforementioned means of maintaining profitability fails does the downward trend of the rate of profit become a realistic possibility.

4. Contemporary Capitalist Mode of Production and Its Crisis

After experiencing a huge recession caused by the pandemic, the world economy began to show an overall but internally uneven recovery in the first quarter of 2021. Using Marx’s crisis theory to examine this process requires two issues to be addressed. One is the correlation between the recession caused by the pandemic and the capitalist system, and the other is the contradiction and unsustainability of this recovery, namely the reason why this economic growth still contains the possibility of crisis. The World Bank is right to say that this economic crisis is triggered by the pandemic. COVID-19 is indeed a cause of the current crisis as a factor external to capitalism, comparable to the meteorological influence cited by Jevons. However, the virus per se could not cause a global economic crisis. The pandemic is the result of the virus passing

through the accelerated capitalist mode of production and its world system. David Harvey (2020, p. 113) stated that

> [f]or Marx, economic instability and crises are primarily produced by the ever-present contradictions between different 'moments' within the economic system. External shocks can and do occur, of course. … But it is internal blockages at any point in the circulation of capital … that directly spawn crises of accumulation, resulting in sometimes massive devaluations of capital.

The dichotomy of purchase and sale mediated by money and securities provided the possibility of the crisis while the lack of demand due to unemployment, reduction of wages and lockdown provided the reality, which eventually leads to a slump in the financial market, and the bankruptcy of enterprises. It is true that the stock markets, at least in the U.S., were basically back to their pre-Covid levels at the end of the second quarter of 2020. However, this revitalization is driven by the central banks' ceaseless money printing and the bond issuance of the corporate sector and government, adding to the already high stock of debt. Although all states have adopted fiscal policies to provide subsidies to labourers, this is still chicken feed compared to the loss of unemployment. As Harvey (2018b, n.p.) argued, value created in production is potential value, the "value is lost if there is no demand for it in the market". Therefore, as soon as governments stop their quantitative easing policies, the financial market will face a greater possibility of crisis. Moreover, in addition to the three dimensions of crisis theory that Marx elaborated, the current capitalist mode of production and the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic confirm the fourth dimension of crisis theory: severity. In this sense, it is still a crisis within a specifically *capitalist* mode of production, as the particular way in which economy and human life are determined is capitalist

rather than feudal or Asiatic, and the way in which equilibrium has been sought is very clearly capitalist, too. This is, therefore, the first time that a world *capitalist* economic crisis has been caused by those triggers such as crop failures, plagues, and natural disasters, more commonly regarded as causes of pre-capitalist crises. Although the above factors did not disappear from the face of the earth after capitalism became the dominant global mode of production, they have never arisen in such a way as to present a challenge of this magnitude to the capitalist world system.

Due to the high infectivity of the virus, the relatively high fatality rate, and the lack of effective treatment and vaccine in the early stage of the pandemic, governments around the world have effectively had to attempt to prevent the spread of the disease through long-term quarantine measures to prevent the death of the population. These measures have caused the inevitable interruption of the capitalist production process. “Capital is value in motion and any pause or even slowdown in that motion for whatever reason means a loss of value” (Harvey, 2017/2018, p. 74). The quicker the capital accumulation process is, the more vulnerable the process is, as the contradiction in the capitalist mode of production will be realized more rapidly in a given period of time. In this way, the global extent of the impact of the crisis is related to capital’s annihilation of space with time. Moreover, when capital accelerates the spatial circulation of capital and labour through improved transportation and communication methods, the spread of viruses throughout the world is also accelerated.

The contradictions within the capitalist mode of production are certainly the fundamental cause of the economic crisis, but the motion of value and the reproduction process of capital do not happen in a vacuum. Most classic Marxist interpretations of crisis abandon the dimension of space, only

describing the continual self-proliferating and self-destroying process of capital accumulation over the duration of time. The theory of imperialism represented by Rosa Luxemburg may be an exception, but this view was quickly submerged in the attack on underconsumptionism. In other words, discussion of the spatial process is separate from the social process among classical Marxists. This dualistic tendency is also consistent with the non-Marxist mainstream views of the time. Human geography was defined as “the explanation of spatial structure by intrinsically spatial processes” while classical sociology after Durkheim is defined as “the explanation of social structures by intrinsically social processes” (Gregory & Urry, 1985, p. 2). Marx did not give spatiality special treatment any more than did his contemporaries and epigones. As Harvey observed, “Marx, Marshall, Weber, and Durkheim all have this in common: they prioritise time and history over space and geography and, where they treat of the latter at all, tend to view them unproblematically as the stable context or site for historical action” (Harvey, 1985, p. 141). Marx (1867/1996, p. 251) quoted from Reports of the Inspectors of Factories for the half year when he said of the working day that “[m]oments are the elements of profit”. By contrast, space is the barrier of value realization that the capital attempts to demolish. “[W]hile capital must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e. to exchange, and conquer the whole earth for its market, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another” (Marx, 1857/1973, p. 539).

Nonetheless, this kind of thesis, that time annihilates space, already contains a kind of time-space structure of capital and of the dialectical relationship between time and space. On the one hand, the construction of production facilities, the transportation of raw materials, the flow of labour, the production and circulation of commodities, all these events involved in the capitalist production process share a portion of time and space. The annihilation of space

with time is not to eliminate space, which is an impossible task, but to accelerate the production and circulation of capital through the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of the space. In recent decades, capitalism has become more and more proficient in continuously increasing productivity, accumulating and preserving surplus value, and attenuating (if not resolving) its internal contradictions through continuous occupation, production and creative destruction of space (Lefebvre, 1973/1976, p. 21). On the other hand, the process of capital accumulation is wrapped in the larger flow of time and space. From the perspective of process philosophy, every event, or process, "extends over other events, and every event is extended over by other events" (Whitehead, 1920/2015, p. 39). As a result, narrowing the extension of events or process can only obtain smaller events or process. The smallest limit of the event, which is abstract rather than real, is called the event-particle by Alfred North Whitehead. This kind of event-particle is an abstraction that occupies a moment in time and a certain position in space. Therefore, the epistemologically computable time and space are abstracted from the extension and duration that essentially follow the unfolding of the process. In this way, "time and space are not separate from the processes by which the physical and social worlds operate and the very relations between objects (and subjects)" (Urry, 2000, p. 107). Not only that, but the events of the capitalist production process also change the time-space extension that subsequent events will occupy due to the changes in the forces and relations of production. As Harvey (2017/2018, p. 131) states, "[t]he circulation and accumulation of capital occurs in a specific organisation of space and time even as it simultaneously defines and redefines the times and spaces within which it moves".

That time annihilates space not only shows that capital has a certain time-space structure, but also that time and space are variable. In an abstract sense, the annihilation of space with time is achieved through an acceleration of the pace

of social processes and the speed of society as such. Bauman (2000/2006, p. 9) agreed that “[t]he very idea of speed (even more conspicuously, that of acceleration), when referring to the relationship between time and space assumes its variability”. Whitehead (1920/2015, p. 123) likewise explained that “our congruence determination embraces both times and spaces in one universal system, and therefore if two arbitrary units are chosen, one for all spaces and one for all times, their ratio will be a velocity which is a fundamental property of nature expressing the fact that times and spaces are really comparable”.

People in Marx’s era experienced the acceleration in their daily lives in a concrete sense. Such acceleration was the result of developments in transportation and communication, in particular. “‘Annihilation of time and space’ was the topos which the early nineteenth century used to describe the new situation into which the railroad placed natural space after depriving it of its hitherto absolute powers” (Schivelbusch, 1977/1986, p. 10). As a result of the invention of the steam engine and the improvement of communication technology, commuting, travel and cargo transportation via railways and steamships have all become possible. From human legs to horse-drawn carriages, from steam locomotives and steamships to jet airliners, traversing the same distance requires less and less time. Phileas Fogg, the protagonist in the novel by Jules Gabriel Verne, took 80 days to complete a round-the-world trip in 1872. Today, taking into account the transfer and rest issues, it would not take more than 80 hours to travel around the earth in a civil aircraft. Modes of rapid transportation such as the railway, which arose with the development of capitalist productive forces, “did not appear embedded in the space of the landscape the way coach and highway are, but seemed to strike its way through it” (Schivelbusch, 1977/1986, p. 37). As one contemporary commentator put it:

“Space is killed by the railways, and we are left with time alone” (Heine, 1854, in Schivelbusch, 1977/1986, p. 37).

This sense of time-space is referred to as time-space compression by Harvey. “Time and space are compressed and fused as a consequence of transnational economic and technological developments, which produce and are dependent on the speedy transfer of goods and information” (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004, p. 746). In terms of the capitalist accumulation process, the acceleration is manifested in the circuit of capital. In the sphere of production, the annihilation of space with time is reflected in the decentralization of production, particularly since the 1970s. In Marx’s era, production was often carried out at a fixed location, and the use of new technologies only brought about temporal changes, that is, shortened the necessary labour time for production. However, since the 1970s, capital has been able to adopt a more flexible spatial organizational form, as a consequence of the development of transportation and information technology. Due to the increase in the spatial mobility of raw materials, labour, and information, the space occupied by a production process has expanded on the one hand. On the other hand, the distance between plots of space organized by production is reduced due to the shortening of the time of movement. “Speed up was achieved in production by organisational shifts towards vertical disintegration – sub-contracting, outsourcing, etc.” (Harvey, 1990/1992, p. 284). By contrast, the phase of value realization is when and where the annihilation of space by time to which Marx referred happened. “The nineteenth century’s preoccupation with the conquest and mastery of space and time had found its most general expression in the concept of circulation, which was central to the scientistic social notions of the epoch” (Schivelbusch, 1977/1986, p. 194). The logic is very simple. If the product can be sold faster, the value produced can be realized faster, thence the capitalist can obtain the pre-invested capital and surplus value to re-invest them in the next capital

circuit. Therefore, the shorter the value-realization process, the more capital turnover is completed in a year, and the more surplus value is obtained. Today, this dream of the capitalist has come true owing to the development of high-speed railways and aviation, the transition from the commodity consumption to service consumption, the purchase and sale of internet virtual products, and the abundance of financial tools. The distance between the place of production and the place of consumption is no longer a problem. Products and services can reach their markets at an unprecedented speed. In this sense, the turnover of capital has been much accelerated. It not only creates more surplus value for capitalists but also provides greater possibilities for the outbreak of a capitalist crisis.

The economic recession in 2020 seems to have passed away in 2021, at least in advanced economies due to the massive programme of vaccination, according to the IMF projection published in April 2021. However, the tendency towards crisis still lies in the world capitalist mode of production. Firstly, the recovery is remarkably uneven. States like the US, the UK, Canada, China and Israel enjoy economic recovery while smaller and poorer countries, including many in South and Southeast Asia suffering from the delta variant of Covid-19, could not secure sufficient vaccines through COVAX, due to their lesser use-value to the capitalist global system and lower ownership of value. Although vaccines are generally regarded as common wealth and shared by all humanity, the companies that owned the vaccines listed by the WHO for emergency use are based in the world's major economies. They either make profits by selling vaccines, or gain political benefits through neo-imperialist means of vaccine diplomacy. This uneven economic recovery and pandemic mitigation will have a countereffect on the success of major economies, including but not limited to the endless emergence of new variants that may cause immune escape and other infections that may erupt in the future in underdeveloped countries. India,

despite having experienced two decades of economic boom and becoming the sixth largest economy in the world, is swallowing the bitter fruit yielded by its dense population, huge gap between rich and poor and fragile public health management system. The delta variant has not only hindered the economic recovery of India projected in the first quarter of 2021 but also affected the whole of South and Southeast Asia. Secondly, the economic recovery of advanced economies is unsustainable. The economic recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has occurred in the context of an already contradictory capitalist mode of production. “[A]verage profitability was already very low before the pandemic, and in some countries, it was the lowest level since the end of the Second World War” (Roberts, 2021b, n.p.); a consequence of the capitalist economy having been largely financialized and rentierised. “Over the past few decades, several analysts have observed a relative shift in capital accumulation strategies, from the primacy of production of surplus value by expanded reproduction… toward increased foregrounding of the circulation of money and profit through non-productive forms of value appropriation” (Andreucci et al., 2017, p. 1). In this sense, the so-called increased wage of labourer is snatched back through energy and credit card bills, mortgage payments or housing rent, while a large portion of surplus value produced in the production sector is taken away in the form of debt interest, dividends and land rent. During the pandemic, the shift from actual social interaction to online interaction enhanced the power of Internet giants such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft (cf. Pirone, 2021, p. 2), who can use their monopoly on cyberspace and intellectual properties to obtain more rent than ever before. Therefore, the tendency of the falling rate of profit and underconsumption has been underlying factors in the current capitalist mode of production that will emerge at some point in the future. Under such circumstance, it is not surprising that “the money injections by the Federal Reserve and other central banks, mainly achieved by ‘printing money’ and purchasing huge quantities of government and corporate

bonds, as well as making loans and grants, have ended up, on the whole, not in the hands of businesses and households to spend, but in the deposits of banks and other financial institutions" (Roberts, 2021a, n.p.).

Massive reconstruction of infrastructure by government may mitigate the tendency toward crisis. However, this demands a particularly strong government, something along the lines of the Roosevelt administration, which is impossible in the near future, with the possible exception of far-right neo-fascist authorities, due to the 40-year development of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has created an unprecedentedly active market and 'negative government,' which is only active in terms of assisting the normal operation of the market: such negative government is the culprit responsible for the severity of the crisis globally. As Richard Wolf stated in conversation with Lyon-Callo (2020, 573), "even in a capitalist country, if you have a culture that says the government isn't some kind of fundamental evil, … it can come in and make the compensation for capitalism's failure". Besides, the failure of capitalist governments to deal with the pandemic before vaccines are proved effective has revealed itself to be ineffective in dealing with the crisis of economy and public health. Herd immunity, a Malthusian response to COVID-19, appeared to have been adopted by the Trump administration in the US, after the UK's initial moves in this direction were aborted. This anarchistic attitude to dealing with the epidemic is mainly reflected in the lack of rigorous implementation of isolation measures and weak detection. An age-old principle can be invoked to slow down the spread of unknown infectious diseases today. In 1976, Dr Jean-Francois Ruppol recommended to residents of the Ebola outbreak area the local experience of dealing with smallpox for many years. "Whenever there was an epidemic of smallpox, people who were suspected of having the disease, and their young children, were placed in a hut that was constructed outside the village. The hut was stocked with a supply of water and food, while any physical

contact with the victims was forbidden" (Preston, 2019, p. 198). In 1976, this method effectively prevented Ebola from spreading as widely as it did in 2014. In relation to COVID-19, after the panic of the first few weeks, China quickly established two new hospitals in Wuhan and coordinated existing hospital beds to treat critically ill patients, establishing further field hospitals by using stadiums, convention centres, and other places to treat mildly ill patients, rather than leaving the infected people at home to accelerate community and family transmission. These measures quickly and effectively reversed the epidemic in Wuhan and even the country as a whole. The ancient rule relies on large-scale testing today, because the symptoms of some infected people are not obvious, and they are easily confused with the symptoms of influenza and other diseases. In some countries, the application for testing requires that the symptoms have been severe to some extent, and even those who are detected as infected are still released to return home. In this sense whether the governments could slow down capital circulation and create more distance between bodies and commodities is critical to saving not only lives but also the capitalist system. Reopening the capitalist economy before the crisis could be controlled is like taking drugs. Moreover, the abandoned proletariat should not forget Marx's words that the capitalist state is the instrument of class domination, which will be overturned by communist revolution. In this sense, no matter whether the government economic stimulus works or not, the hallucination generated by the temporary recovery of stock market and employment rate will probably be followed by either a chronic recession or a sudden strike by the revolution of the abandoned proletariat.

Chapter 5: Anti-racism and Anti-capitalism: on the Marxist Theory of Revolution

1. The Underlying Cause of Racism

Black Lives Matter (BLM), a social movement created in 2013 “after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder in Florida of… Trayvon Martin” (Rickford, 2015, p. 35), and revived by the tragic death of George Floyd seven years later, has arrived at a crossroads since Donald Trump has been voted out of his office. Adding to the police brutality, the disproportionate COVID-19 mortality rate of the minority population has overwhelmed African American people. “[A]mong cases with known race and ethnicity, 33% of persons were Hispanic, 22% were black, and 1.2% were AI/AN [American Indian and Alaska Native]. These findings suggest that persons in these groups, who account for 18%, 13%, and 0.7% of the U.S. population, respectively, are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic” (Stokes et al., 2020, p. 763). “The mortality rate for COVID-19 among African Americans is more than 2-fold higher than whites” (Tai et al., 2020, p. 1). The future of this important social movement depends largely on the Biden administration’s ability and willingness to fulfil the demands of the protesters, at least a major police reform or at most a systematic revision of American racism. It is far from obviously within reach. Whilst BLM has received extensive sympathy from mainstream liberals, it has also elicited great anger amongst nationalists, who are mostly supporters of Donald Trump. It is undeniable that African Americans have suffered from systematic racism, a problem that has persisted for more than 400 years, but whether there is an obvious path to overcome this history is another question. It is encouraging that the BLM movement has made interim achievements. However, as Harvey (2020a) pointed out in his podcast, Trump got more votes

this time than he did last time. Not only white women and the affluent population but also indeed all ethnicities strongly supported a man who is close enough to fascism. Moreover, Trump's share of the African American vote went up in 2020, even if it is still relatively small, which may indicate that the black pearl of racial solidarity is flawed because of the strata within it.

In this sense, what is no less important than the direct rebellion against police brutality is to discover the underlying cause of contemporary racism and the possible tactics for the future revolution to overcome these conditions. From a Marxist perspective, systemic racism is the result of the establishment and restoration of capitalist class power. In the era of capitalism's ascendancy,

> [t]he bourgeoisie that led the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariats and the mercenaries of the leading states from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds. The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate – to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones (Robinson, 1983/2000, p. 26).

Capitalist relations of production emerge from feudal relations of production, influenced by new forces of production and relations of intercourse. "Decisive improvements in ships and maritime technology made possible the exploration of the West African littoral and the discovery of the New World" (Rawley, 2005, p. 9). The consequence of this new force of production is that the relations of intercourse of the Europeans expanded to Southern Africa and the New World. These expanded relations of intercourse appear as "the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an

impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development" (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976, p. 485). Moreover, given the dramatic reduction of population during the Black Death and the thriving commercial mercantile activities, capitalists needed the medium of exchange, gold, domestically, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, labourers serving on the plantations abroad in the colonies. In this way, the plantation and gold mining in America impelled the enslavement of the Africans, which was exacerbated by the development of the cotton-spinning industry. Marx (1867/1996, p. 447) stated: "there is not the least doubt that the rapid strides of cotton spinning, not only pushed on with tropical luxuriance the growth of cotton in the United States, and with it the African slave trade, but also made the breeding of slaves the chief business of the border slave-states". Therefore, blacks were only blacks while slaves were only slaves before the capitalist mode of production flourished (cf. Marx, 1849/1977, p. 211). There were indeed slaves generated in the African continent resulting from wars between nations or tribes before the arrival of the European colonizers. Enslavement without a definite objective, typically following a particular event, evolved into systemic racism towards people with the same characteristics of the slaves working in gold mines or on plantations in America when the capitalist mode of production took African people into its world system through military force or deception. In this sense, the American slave plantation was "a hybrid of two systems, classic slave economy and modern capitalism, combining the worst features of both" (Haywood, 1948, cited in Haider, 2017, n.p.). Marx already accepted this hybridization argument. He commented on the plantation in *Theories of Surplus Value* that, in this type of colonial economy,

> commercial speculations figure from the start and production is intended for the world market, the capitalist mode of production exists, although only in a formal sense, since the slavery of Negroes precludes free wage-labour,

> which is the basis of capitalist production. But the business in which slaves are used is conducted by capitalists. The method of production which they introduce has not arisen out of slavery but is grafted on to it (Marx, 1863/1968, pp. 302–303).

From then on, people historically occupying a certain space and producing their lives by means of a certain pre-capitalist mode of production, are categorized as different races, and coded in terms provided by the capitalist mode of production.

The prehension of race into the process of capitalist development is not a solid structure that will exist forever. “If America had treated former slaves and their descendants as true citizens, with full protection under the law, we would have expected the legacy of slavery to gradually fade away” (Krugman, 2020b, n.p.). However, as capitalism has developed into its neoliberal stage from the 1970s onwards, racism has still flourished, albeit in sometimes latent forms. There are indeed black elites who might boast of their success via individual effort and blame the victims of the capitalist mode of production for their “sloth”. Grayson Perry in his *Big American Road Trip* (2020) painted a group portrait of African American classes. One representative of the black elite, the Miles family, living in “one of the city’s wealthiest neighbourhoods”, laughs and states that “people at our level are either more or less comfortable with either group. There are some black people that are very uncomfortable among black people”. Meanwhile, middle class and proletarian African Americans can sometimes share common anxieties and anger when dealing with social relationships with white people because of discrimination or neglect. The reality is that mayors, governors, senators, the vice-president and a president of African American decent have been elected. However, some black dignitaries are used to adhering to their class instead of their race (Frazier, 1957/1997, p. 217). Black

officials have come and gone; cities, states and the country are still operating under the law of the capitalist mode of production. Put simply, the racial problem is closely entangled with the class problem and needs careful Marxist analysis.

“The core story of U.S. politics over the past four decades is that wealthy elites weaponized white racism to gain political power, which they used to pursue policies that enriched the already wealthy at workers’ expense” (Krugman, 2020a, n.p.). Capitalism achieved its goal of minimizing the power of trades unions and the impact of the civil rights movement by designing a neoliberalist scheme blended with right-wing ideologies such as neoconservatism, populism, nationalism, and neofascism at different stages. The Trump administration hardly fitted any of those descriptions exactly, but attained nourishment from such right-wing ideologies. “Trump … had time to implement quite anti-immigrant and anti-black policies, and refused to denounce his most extreme and violent supporters, from the neo-Nazis and white nationalists in Charlottesville to the Proud Boys group” (Matthews, 2020, n.p.). This counterrevolutionary process had always been something of a slow-burn but suddenly irrupted in the 2016 election. Even before Trump, Baudrillard (2010, p. 16) had expounded the perverse logic whereby “a majority of Americans desire the presence in the White House of someone whose stupidity and banality underwrite their own conformism”. As Harvey (2020b) states, the majority of Trump’s supporters are driven by two kinds of reasons to vote for him. One is to seek an authoritarian personality (cf. Adorno et al, 1950) to attain a sense of security, while the other stems from a sense of relative deprivation. These two reasons are intertwined and incited by two groups of neoliberal principles: privatization and individualism, on the one hand; and globalization and uneven geographical development on the other. In this way, the neoliberalists built “a broad-based movement of elites and masses against the emancipation of the lower orders” (Robin, 2018, p. xi) domestically, and an

arsenal of financial capital, military forces, and ideological identity to exploit, enforce and convince other countries globally.

Since the 1970s, major developed countries in Western Europe and North America have generally reduced the protection of welfare state policies to labourers (Offe, 1984). The public sector of the social economy is increasingly being sold off to private enterprises. “Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings” (Harvey, 2005/2007, p. 65). The state no longer provides the parachutes or safety nets for individual economic activities but leaves it to the market to adjust. This retreat of state power is related to not only privatization but also globalization. The extra-territorialization of capital generated “a world in which power flows, while politics stays tied to the place; power is increasingly global and exterritorial, while all established political institutions stay territorial and find it difficult, nay, impossible, to rise above the local level” (Bauman, 2001, p. 53). In this way, “[t]he state has moved away from supporting people to supporting corporate enterprise by any means that it can, by taxation arrangements, by direct subsidies, the provision of infrastructures, and evasion of regulatory constraints” (Harvey, 2020c, p. 50). Personal choice and personal responsibility are advocated as expressions of freedom. However, in the neoliberalist scheme, “everything is increasingly criminalized because it offers a threat to the financial elite and the control they have over the country … Neoliberalism injects violence into our lives, and fear into our politics” (Giroux, 2016, cited in Bauman, 2017, p. 19). As per Eric Fromm’s (1941/1969, pp. 296–297) analysis of people yielding to fascism:

> [F]reedom has a twofold meaning for modern man: that he has been freed from traditional authorities and has become an ‘individual’, but that at the same time he has become isolated, powerless, and an instrument of

> purposes outside of himself, alienated from himself and others; furthermore, that this state undermines his self, weakens and frightens him, and makes him ready for submission to new kinds of bondage.

The exploitation of labour under neoliberalism makes the psychological analysis of subjection to fascism in World War II still convincing today. The new poor or the precariat is on the one hand repressed by the re-emphasized work ethic and panoptic gaze, and on the other hand dominated by the consumer market where more income gained in the workplace than ever before has been seduced by the immense accumulation of commodities (Clarke, cited in Southerton, 2011, p. 1254). Even if labourers can resist the temptation to buy non-essential commodities and services, the privatization of land and natural resources has led to a rapid increase in the size of household bills for rent, food and utilities. Financial capital thrives as it can extract interest both from the labourer as a consumer who needs money to reproduce herself (particularly given the dramatic rise in consumer credit and the scale of household debt) and the functioning capitalist who needs capital to operate his business. Compared to factory working in Marx's era, this new kind of exploitation, which is concealed by the increase in the absolute amount of wages, has caused workers to face a growing sense of precarity, which was amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of whether the economic crisis following the pandemic has caused labourers to lose their jobs, they more readily fall into a kind of angry mood under social distancing. "Feeling shut away at home is one of the most frequent complaints of the unemployed … unemployed man not only sees himself as bored and frustrated [but] seeing himself like that (as well as actually being so) also makes him irritable" (Kelven & Jarrett, 1985, cited in Bauman, 2005, p. 38). There are many ways to vent this anger, and nationalism, racism and the struggle against these ideologies are among them – projecting the cause of present woes onto some or other scapegoat group. Slavoj Žižek

pointed out the mechanism of this projection and displacement in his analysis of the Jew in Nazi Germany. He argued that “[s]ociety is not prevented from achieving its full identity because of Jews: it is prevented by its own antagonistic nature, by its own immanent blockage, and it ‘projects’ this internal negativity into the figure of the ‘Jew’” (Žižek, 1989, cited in Easthope & Belsey (Ed.), 2002, p. 121).

Another great “achievement” of neoliberalism is the construction of the free flow of money, commodities, labourer and ideology, creating the global production and consumption system and its malconformation – uneven geographical development. On the one hand, this relies on the political and cultural hegemony of the United States and the economic enforcement of international representative institutions including the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO. On the other hand, it relies on continuous progress in transportation and communication technologies. “[O]ur technologies have further intensified time, ultimately to the point where they reach the limit speed of ‘the time frequency of light’ (Virilio*,*1988/1994, p. 71) – at which point the “distinction of here and there no longer mean anything’ (Virilio, 1984/1991, 13)” (Clarke & Doel, 2013, p. 173). As a consequence of the reduction of transportation and communication costs, various activities are dispersed across increasingly larger geographical spaces, regional specialization and division of labour have become more significant, and space competition has become more intense (Harvey, 2014, p. 148). Therefore “[u]neven geographical conditions do not merely arise out of the uneven patterning of natural resource endowments and locational advantages, but … are produced by the uneven ways in which wealth and power themselves become highly concentrated in certain places by virtue of asymmetrical exchange relations” (Harvey, 2003, p. 32). The earth that capital flies over is a complex and diverse surface with plateaus, basins, oceans, deserts, polar ice fields and tropical rainforests, rather than an isotropic plane,

devoid of any variation. Therefore, the inflow and outflow of capital in a specific space will often create new geographic landscapes and combine with or overwrite local heritage (Massey, 1984). This kind of capital transfer will also keep the capitalist system relatively stable as a whole despite (or even because of) economic crises in some parts of it. For example, a place may experience de-industrialization or devaluation after capital leaves for another place (Harvey, 2014, p. 153). The direct consequence of this de-industrialization and devaluation on the labour force is the reduction of employment opportunities. Labourers who are in a state of insecurity and relatively deprived often shift the responsibility to immigrants and people in newly industrialized areas abroad. As Eric Hobsbawm (1990/2012, p. 157) stated,

> urbanization and industrialization, resting as they do on massive and multifarious movements, migrations and transfers of people, undermine the other basic nationalist assumption of a territory inhabited essentially by an ethnically, culturally and linguistically homogeneous population. The sharp xenophobic or racist reaction of native population in receiving countries or regions to the mass influx of ‘strangers’ has been, unfortunately, familiar.

Therefore, on the one hand, capitalism needs to create globalization to enhance the mobility of capital and labour; on the other hand, however, it is necessary for a sovereign state under the capitalist mode of production to maintain nationalism or racism in a certain degree to keep its power of territory, which sometimes appears as tariffs, anti-free trade and anti-immigration. “The limitless process of capital accumulation needs the political structure of so ‘unlimited a Power’ that it can protect growing property by constantly growing more powerful” (Arendt, 1968, cited in Harvey, 2003, p. 34). This may seem contradictory but both tendencies serve capital’s scheme to rebuild the

capitalist class power insofar as “there are wings of the capitalist class” (Harvey, 2020c, p. 53). In Jean Baudrillard’s (2010) words, once capital swallowed the world in the *Empire du Bien*, the evil of nationalism and racism began to be ventriloquized.

Nationalist sentiments are far from being unique to the United States. The rise of right-wing governments in Brazil, Poland, Hungary, Australia and other countries shows that right-wing ideology, as the *fleurs du mal* of neoliberalism have blossomed across the world. In China, the world’s second-largest economy, although less affected by racism, extreme nationalism, generated in the rapid economic growth of recent years, developed during the China–United States trade war, and galvanized by the global coronavirus pandemic, is also increasingly rampant. Similarly, during the First World War, the social democratic parties swung to their respective motherlands one after another. Nationalism thus seemed to be an insurmountable threshold for Marxists too. It was more difficult to deal with the neglect of racial issues caused by Eurocentrism. Cedric J. Robinson (1983/2000, p. 4), the author of *Black Marxism*, argued that “the European proletariat and its social allies did not constitute the revolutionary subject of history, nor was working class consciousness necessarily the negation of bourgeois culture”. This is because “the effects of racialism were bound to appear in the social expression of every strata of every European society”, where “slave labor persisted as an aspect of … agrarian production up to modern era” (ibid., p. 12; p. 28).

Therefore, although anti-racist movements like BLM have gained great influence, their enemies are still there. Racism, from a Marxist perspective, is the result of the capitalist revolution in its origin and counterrevolution against the proletariat subsequently. The success of anti-racist social movements thus remains unattainable unless they could vanquish the constrains added by the

capitalist mode of production and its contemporary neoliberal and neoconservative forms and change direction. As C. L. R. James (1963/1989, p. 283) elaborated, although neglecting “the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental”, “[t]he race question is subsidiary to the class question” (see also Bannerji, 2005). In other words, anti-racism is historically and presently connected to anti-capitalism, and thus could benefit from Marx’s analysis. Indeed, the issue of race is about as well irradiated as the far side of the moon in Marxist theory. As long as the universe is in constant motion, however, the back will turn to the front, permitting more light to be shed on the subject. In this sense, I will try to demonstrate that the particularity of anti-racism, as well as contemporary revolutionary left-wing movements, could be seen as a component of the generality of systematic capitalist contradictions in the illumination of Marxist revolution theory, in which we might “see the radically democratic impulses of inclusivity, non-sectarianism and collaboration” (Ransby, 2015, n.p.). This view does not conflict with the purpose of BLM in essence. Indeed, “In a … video from 2015, Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors reveals that she and her fellow BLM founders are ‘trained Marxists’” (Klein, 2020, n.p.). Nevertheless, this chapter is not a Marxist analysis of BLM but a reinterpretation of Marx’s theory of revolution by considering the critical issue brough to the fore by BLM: that relation between the oppressed race as one of the particular and the labourer as general revolutionaries. “Marxism is often acknowledged but circumvented, dismissed for its apparent tendency to emphasize class relations and economic materiality to the exclusion of other forms of oppression and different ways of understanding domination” (Bakan, 2008, p. 240), such as anti-racism, feminism, post-colonialism and ecologism. Although Marx was certainly tainted with limitations of his time, Marxism should not be regarded as racism, male chauvinism, western-centrism and anthropocentrism. On the contrary, Marx holds a dialectical conception of revolution that the systematic oppression of

capitalist mode of production could only be overturned by the systematic revolution in which all the oppressed are joined together as a totality. As Lukács (1923, cited in Grumley, 1989/2016, p. 127) stated, the category of totality dominates Marx's dialectics of revolution. Moreover, "[t]he emphasis is not on totality as purely universalistic, but as a contradictory totality that depends upon both difference and its opposite: the overcoming of difference through solidarity" (Bakan, 2008, p. 239).

2. Labour as Species-essence and Its Alienation

Setting aside such difference as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion etc., the problem of the Marxist theory of revolution is that there are increasing differences within the category of labourer. Engels, in his ingenious social investigation in England, depicted the miserable life of the working class. He used the miscellaneous "expressions working-men (*Arbeiter*) and proletarians, working-class, propertyless class and proletariat as equivalents" (Engels, 1845/1975, p. 304). This is because the working class in the 1840s was predominately made up of an industrial proletariat connected with manufacturing, coal and metal-ore miners, and the agricultural proletariat, which arose out of "the invention of the steam-engine and of machinery for working cotton" in the second half of the 17th century (ibid., p. 307; p. 324; cf. Malm, 2016). By contrast, the definition of the working class has been becoming increasingly heterogeneous (John, 2018).

On the one hand, the division of labour in the labour process is increasingly diversified. Marx (1864/1994, pp. 443–444) anticipated that,

> [W]ith the development of the *real subsumption of labour under capital* or *the specifically capitalist mode of production* it is not the individual worker but rather a *socially combined labour capacity* that is more and more the

> *real executor* of the labour process as a whole, and since the different labour capacities which cooperate together to form the productive machine as a whole contribute in very different ways to the direct process by which … the product … is formed, one working more with his hands, another more with his brain, one as a **manager**, **engineer** or technician, etc., another as an **overlooker**, the third directly as a manual worker …, more and more of the *functions of labour capacity* are included under the direct concept of *productive labour*, and their repositories under the concept of *productive workers*, workers directly exploited by capital and altogether *subordinated* to its valorisation and production process.

On the other hand, the labourer in the developed countries and across the globe has been stratified. “In much of the advanced capitalist world, the factories have either disappeared or been so diminished as to decimate the classical industrial working class. The important and ever-expanding labor of making and sustaining urban life is increasingly done by insecure, often part-time and disorganized low-paid labor” (Harvey, 2012, p. xiv). Meanwhile, the Asian or Latin American factories have indeed grabbed some working opportunities for the developed countries. But the other side of this fact is that both the well-paid white-collar and the precariat worker in Burger King or McDonald’s benefit from capital’s neo-imperialist accumulation by dispossession of the surplus labour of the working class in developing countries, in the forms of direct investment profit, financial speculation interest, and rent of absolute ownership of patents, for example. In Marcuse’s (1972, p. 6) words, “[t]he integration of the largest part of the working class into the capitalist society is not a surface phenomenon; it has its roots in the infrastructure itself, in the political economy of monopoly capitalism: benefits accorded to the metropolitan working class thanks to surplus profits, neocolonial exploitation, the military budget, and gigantic government subventions”. This kind of observation echoes Engels (1882/1992,

p. 322), who pointed out over a hundred years ago that “the workers cheerfully go snacks in England’s monopoly of the world market and the colonies”.

It seems that ‘working class’ is too narrow a category under the contemporary capitalist mode of production to generalize the labourer compared to its simpler form in Marx and Engels’ era. Therefore, the category that encapsulate the different people working under the capitalist mode of production in Marx’s theory is not the working class but labour ontologically (cf. Arthur, 1986; Postone, 1993). “In creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species-being” (Marx, 1844b/1975, p. 276). Therefore, labour is the species-essence of the human as a species-being (cf. Sayer, 2011, p. 81). In essence, labour is the metabolism between human and nature, the way that the human reproduces himself/herself, and thus the activity that distinguishes humans from other animals. However, labour is estranged under the capitalist mode of production as merely a means of living consistent with the precondition of becoming a worker through the process of so-called primitive accumulation in history and accumulation by dispossession today. In precapitalist modes of production, the labourer shares his/her product with the overlord, the commune, or the emperor because of the military force that ensures his/her safety, the necessity of maintaining the commune or direct physical coercion. These kinds of enforcement are external to the labourer. However, in the capitalist mode of production, the reification of the labour, the product, dominates the labourer. Labour as the species-essence of human is estranged, reified, objectified as its opponent. Nature as the inorganic body of the human being is estranged as the material for the product. In this sense, the relationship between human and nature is manifested as the relationship between human and object, and the relationship between human and human is manifested as the relationship

between things (between one thing and another). Marx termed the former *Verdinglichung* (thingification) and the latter *Versachlichung* (reification) (cf. Tairako, 2018).

The other way in which the capitalist mode of production estranges labour is that it expands the division of labour. Insofar "as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 47). Division of labour is not really a product of the capitalist mode of production. However, under the capitalist mode of production, the speed of development of the labour force is faster than in any other precapitalist mode of production. "Each new productive force … causes a further development of the division of labour" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 32). This is why the categories of labourer are increasingly fragmented. The result is that "individuals seek only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their common interest, the latter is asserted as an interest 'alien' to them and 'independent' of them, as in its turn a particular and distinctive 'general' interest" (ibid., p. 47). In this sense, the antagonism between the slave and slaveholder, the peasant and the landowner, and rural commune and the corrupt bureaucracy tends towards "the war of all against all".

Following the Hegelian formula of thesis–antithesis–synthesis, Marx thought that this estrangement or alienation could only be eliminated by the negation of the negation. However, "[i]n tying his conception of the human essence so closely to labour, Marx departs from Hegel" (Chitty, 2011, p. 485). Marx thought that the historical process is driven not by the Spirit but the human engaging in "sensuous activity, practice" (Marx, 1845/1975, p. 3). Therefore, the negation of the negation for Marx is the sublation of estranged labour, the retrieval of human species-essence, and the resurgence of free labour. On the one hand,

the enforced division of labour disappeared. On the other hand, this negation gives the labourer "individual property based on the acquisition of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production" (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 751).[31]

3. The Concept of Revolution

Notwithstanding the foregoing argument, "[t]he weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force" (Marx, 1844a/1975, 182). The way in which this negation of the negation could be achieved is the revolution by labourers exploited under the capitalist mode of production. Herbert Marcuse listed four characteristics of the Marxian concept of revolution. The revolution is (1) a "socialist revolution" (2) "initiated in the advanced industrial societies" when (3) an "economic crisis" provoked (4) "large-scale (organized) mass action of the working class" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 28).

Marcuse has good reasons to call the Marxist concept of revolution socialist. However, a Marxian concept of revolution may be slightly different. In terms of the Marxian concept of revolution, it is first and foremost a social revolution (cf. Kuang, 1983, p. 48). Engels (1844/1975, p. 469) pointed out that the "only true revolution is a social revolution, to which political and philosophical revolution must lead". Specifically, Marx held that this social revolution is a series of changes in the forces of production, relations of production, relations of intercourse, and the superstructure, built on the economic foundation, compared with the previous mode of production (cf. Marx, 1859c/1987, p. 263). Therefore, the nature of the social revolution lies in the difference between the current mode of production and the mode of production that the agent of

[31] For Lukács' interpretation of the negation of negation, see Jenkins (2018, ii).

revolution intends to establish. In Marx's era, the first political socialist revolutionary practice is the Paris Commune (cf. Marx, 1871/1986, p. 336), which is distinct from struggles over economic rights. Marx made a timely and highly praised evaluation of this event. In the introduction to this commentary, Engels summarized the reason why the event failed. Engels (1891/1990, p. 189) argued that the working class should not "go on managing old state machine", but establish their own mode of production including managerial system.

With regard to the post-capitalist mode of production, Marx was more inclined to use the term communism than socialism in his later years, although he would mix the two in his early years (Marx, 1842/1975, p. 216; cf. Tan, 2010, p. 64). In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx (1875/1989, pp. 84–87) pointed out that communism has two stages. In the first stage, the worker's income is the percentage of the total social product created by his labour after deducing the expenditures on production, reproduction, insurance, management, public services, and social welfare from the total social product. Although class difference is eliminated in this stage, labourers are still not completely equal. First, the exchange of labour products is still based on the principle of commodity-equivalent exchange, which "exists on the average and not in the individual case" (ibid., p. 86). Second, labour could only be measured by time or intensity. Third, this measurement is related to the labourer's physical or intellectual difference. Only if the communist mode of production reaches its second – and highest – stage can labour production be distributed according to the labourers' demand. Engels' reference to the post-capitalist mode of production differs from Marx's. This is not only because of his classical work on scientific socialism but also due to his negative answer when Karl Kautsky asked if it were better to substitute the title of *Die Geschichte des Sozialismus in Einzeldarstellungen* [The Monograph of the History of Socialism] with the History of Communism (Editorial commissions of Marx Engels Collected Works,

2004, pp. 584–585). Engels (1894/2004, p. 269) stated that he did “not consider the term ‘communism’ suitable for general use today; rather it should be reserved for cases in which a more exact description is required, and even then it would call for an explanatory note, having virtually fallen out of use for the past thirty years”. Moreover, the concept of socialist revolution also originates with Engels (Zhou, 2007, p. 126). He stated that when “the producing class takes over the management of production and distribution from the class that was hitherto entrusted with it but has now become incompetent to handle it, … there you have the socialist revolution” (Engels, 1875/2000, n.p.). However, the reason why Engels called communism socialism might be either a consideration of changes in the revolutionary situation or the need for the monograph on the history of socialism to describe variants of socialist theory such as utopian socialism, Proudhonism and Lassalleanism. Engels (1890/1990, p. 60) argued in the Preface to the Fourth German Edition of the Manifesto that he and Marx did not repudiate the term communism. Socialism, after Proudhonism and Lassalleanism, died out and “Continental Socialism” was accepted by the Swansea Congress of British Trade Unions, in 1887, as synonymous with communism in the Manifesto (ibid., p. 59). Therefore, Marx’s communism and Engels’ socialist mode of production are not essentially different. In terms of ownership, they both refer to the individually united societal possession of the means of production and products. In terms of dialectics, it is the revival of human species-essence in a higher form: the free labourer in itself transformed itself into the free labourer for itself.

However, when socialism in Marx and Engels’ sense is used to refer to the social formation of socialist-camp countries after World War II, the term ‘socialism’ becomes blurred. The mode of production in the Soviet Union, as well as in Maoist China, North Korea, and Vietnam, etc., is not socialist but another graft of two modes of production. Engels (1877/1987, p. 268) once

stated that the state's first truly representative act, "the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society … is … its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself". In other words, in the first stage of communism, the state would die out instead of managing labour and its relation of production. However, the state government is still performing a critical role in the political and economic management of labourers in these states. Moreover, the Soviet Union and other former Asiatic or semi-Asiatic states inherited the characteristic of the rural commune, such as paternalist state leadership, taxes instead of rent, and massive state-conducted public projects. In this sense, the mode of production in these states are hybridizations of the transitory mode of production between underdeveloped capitalist and communist society, which is the economic basis of the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" (Marx, 1875/1989, p. 95), and the Asiatic mode of production. Therefore, as the signified of socialism is displaced from the signifier of socialism, the Marxian concept of revolution is better termed communist than socialist. Nevertheless, the case of these transitory or semi-socialist states illustrated that the revolution will not necessarily happen in advanced industrial societies because the Asiatic mode of production could be in transition to the communist mode of production and step over the Caudine Forks of capitalism, although the way to surpass this transitory, grafted stage demands further study.

Marx's theory of revolution is strongly related to the theory of crisis (cf. Viparelli, 2009). Marx (1850/1978, p. 135) once argued that "A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis". Consequently, Marx's concept of revolution has long been considered to have a Messianic tendency, that is, a violent revolution in the general crisis of capitalism will deliver the transformation of the mode of production. This

tendency was also called Hegelian Blanquism by revisionists such as Eduard Bernstein (1899/1993, p. 37) or western Marxists such as Karl Korsch (1939/2009, n.p.). However, Marx's vision of the communist revolution is not a theoretical deduction of the future once and for all, but the new world discovered in the constant criticism of reality (Marx, 1843/1975, p. 142).

Compared to the bourgeois revolution of the eighteenth century, proletarian revolutions "criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course … until a situation has been created … and the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* Here is the rose, here dance" (Marx, 1852/1979, pp. 106–107). In this sense, Marx's concept of revolution is a tortuous process consisting of a series of events, a long-term resistance in the face of long-term oppression, rather than a single event. Marx "not only hoped for but expected revolutions on each downturn of the economic cycle. In 1858, the year of the *Grundrisse*, he wrote to Engels, 'On the continent the revolution is immanent' (Marx, 1858)" (Ollman, 1972, p. 7). Therefore, from the Marxian perspective on revolution, "periodic spontaneous explosions … occur when social-economic contradictions have ripened to the point where the capitalist mode of production in fact has to periodically produce such prerevolutionary crises" (Mandel, 1970/1971, p. 8).

Critics of the Marxist theory of crisis and revolution "generally point to the decline of the (Western) industrial proletariat, to improved working conditions that have ended the torturous labour-process of early industrialism, and to improved living conditions as refutations of Marx's critique of capitalist immiseration" (Fracchia, 2008, p. 62). A working-class revolution is thought to be increasingly impossible, let alone a communist revolution. However, "there has been across the capitalist world, the progression of 'relative immiseration', with the wealth of the working class growing far more slowly than that of the

capitalist class" (Hill, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, relative immiseration tends to transform into absolute immiseration due to mass unemployment and the burden of bills. Crisis does not necessarily lead to revolution, but it tends to extend the possibility of revolution. The capitalist mode of production has a chronic tendency to raise its productivity. The improvement of machinery, the chasing after relative surplus value, leads to an enlarged proportion of constant capital in total capital, which results in a falling rate of profit and a falling demand for labour. Both of these generate the possibility of the crisis. Lenin articulated the precondition of the successful working-class revolution in "Left-wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder. "It is only when the 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters)" (Lenin, 1920/1966, p. 85). On this basis, socialist revolution is still possible and could only be formed through the class struggle of dissatisfied labourer against the capitalist mode of production (cf. Marx, 1847/1976, p. 211) after they have realized that it is the surplus value their labour power produces that feeds the system, exploits, alienates and immiserates them. In this sense, "[r]evolution is not … an automatic outcome of the concentration and crisis development of capitalism; it is not caused by any final crisis or collapse of capitalism. It is … a conscious deed by the organised socialist working class" (Gronow, 2016, p. 65). Therefore, although labour and labourer are the ontological concepts that provide the basis for generalizing heterogeneous groups of race, gender, nation and culture, Marx's concept of class re-enters discussion at this point in practical terms since heterogeneous labourers must form a collective class consciousness in the revolution against all forms of exploitation by the capitalist mode of production. As Marx clearly stated in the Communist Manifesto,

“[i]f the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and as such, sweep away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class” (Marx, 1848/1976, pp. 505–506).

4. The Revolution of “The Multitude” and Militant Particularism

According to Engels (1880/1989, p. 304), “[i]n 1831, the first working-class rising took place in Lyon”, only about ten years before Marx started his career. Therefore, Marx and Engels have limited cases of revolutionary practice at hand to analyse, and thus Marx “left behind him … no … political theory of … the strategy and tactics of revolutionary socialist struggle by a working-class party for its overthrow” (Anderson, 1976/1989, p. 4). The discrediting of orthodox communist parties reinforces the difficulty in uniting labourers. What is more, although economic struggle organized by trade unions is traditionally viewed not as communist revolution but as preparation for the political struggle of the labourer (cf. Luxemburg, 1900/2008, p. 66), trade unions were indeed viewed as a powerful apparatus of class struggle until the 1970s. They declined because of the new labour force that surged into the labour market, increased machinery productivity that substitutes for human labour-power, and globally dispersed production. Moreover, given the simplicity of the proletarian category in Marx’s era, Marx conceived that “socialism was in the objective interest of the working class” (Mayer, 1997, p. 159). However, as the subdivision of the proletariat in terms of nation, gender, and race, etc., multiplied, the labourers’ organization and unity has become increasingly challenging. The fact that all labourers with a particular nationality, gender and race, etc., share the same species-essence is not enough to encourage one group of labourers to join

forces with other groups and form a unity against the very capitalist mode of production that has differentiated them in the first place. In this sense, a neoteric universal-particularism needs to be appended to the Marxian concept of revolution.

Notwithstanding the fact that Marx did not proffer a strategy for uniting diverse revolutionary subjects suited to today's class struggle, his revolutionary theory still retains a space for such an explanation. Marx and Engels "by no means claimed that" the tactics of revolution "were identical everywhere". They "know that the institutions, customs and traditions in the different countries must be taken into account" (Marx, 1872/1988, p. 255). The evolution of modes of production has never been unilinear. From the problem of relative independence of modes of production in historical geography to the problem of different transition trajectories from a precapitalist mode of production to the capitalist mode of production between the East and the West, it is clear that Marx will not reject a communist revolutionary strategy that accommodates differentiation. This tolerance has long been obscured by the appearance of Hegel's idealist dialectics. Marxists from Georgi Plekhanov to Louis Althusser and Antonio Negri argued that Spinozism could substitute Hegelian traits in Marx's philosophy in a variety of respects. From Althusser's perspective, Spinoza provided Marxism with a "model of non-transcendent causality whereby the ('absent') cause is immanent in its effects …. and a view of human action and history that was anti-subjective and resolutely non-teleological" (Holland, 1998, p. 3). In other words, "[i]n the place of the transcendent creator of Judeo-Christian orthodoxy, a God (the infinite) conceived of as prior to and external to his creations (the finite), Spinoza posited that there was only one substance (Deus sive Natura), a being absolutely infinite and self-caused (causa sui), consisting of an infinity of attributes" (Thomas, 2002, p. 96). In this light, "political organization would focus on 'the multitude', working from the

grass-roots outward (rather than ‘up’), making horizontal connections with other grass-roots groups rather than forming hierarchical pyramids” (Holland, 1998, p. 11). From the perspective of Spinozist Marxism, race, as well as gender, religion and nation, “shows the openness of the body” and mind, “the way organisms connect to their environment and establish uneven relationships amongst each other” (Saldanha, 2006, p. 22).

The revolution of “the multitude” could not be successful unless they united with each other to find strength enough, because autonomous struggles “will be confronted by states which act as the key organisational safeguard of the capitalist system” when “these struggles reach a large enough scale” (Blackledge, 2010, n.p.). In this light, Harvey (1996) has criticized traditional militant particularism, which is based on industrial-worker identity and economic rights around work sites. The new militant particularism will be based on a “revitalized conception of the labourer” that “embraces and includes the now massive informal sectors characterized by temporary, insecure, and unorganized labor” (Harvey, 2012, p. 139), and their solidarity based on living space, basically the city and the block, in addition to the traditional worksite. On the one hand, even in the traditional trade union or the communist party, there are all kinds of disputes among different fractions. The new kind of association or organization will unavoidably contain dissent. Nevertheless, this leads “to a dialogue that aims if not at an unconditional agreement, then surely at mutual understanding”, which needs “first to come, progressively, closer to overlapping” (Bauman, 2016, pp. 113–114). On the other hand, the living space where struggles take place is multileveled. “[E]ach place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations” (Massey, 1994/2001, p. 156; cf. Lefebvre, 1970/2003, pp. 77–78). Harvey summarized the character of this unity or association, which may be “hierarchical but not monocentric, corporatist but nevertheless democratic, egalitarian and horizontal, systemically nested

and federated, … internally discordant and contested, but solidarious [*sic*] against capitalist class power" (Harvey, 2012. 153). In this sense, Raymond Williams's (1989, cited in Harvey, 2000, p. 56) argument on militant particularism still works:

> The unique and extraordinary character of working class self-organization has been that it has tried to connect particular struggles to a general struggle in one quite special way. It has set out, as a movement, to make real what is at first sight the extraordinary claim that the defence and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact the general interest. (Williams, 1989, p. 249)

Therefore, if the BLM movement cannot unite with other oppressed revolutionaries such as feminists, LGBTQ+ activists, ecologists, trade unions and traditional communist parties, or at least some of them, to achieve mutual understanding and explore differentiated tactics of resisting the capitalist mode of production under the common identity of labourer, the achievement of BLM will never fundamentally change the plight of proletarian African Americans. The process of forming the unity from particular groups of the labourer is viewed by Lefebvre (2000/2015, pp. 113–114; 2000, pp. 162–163) as self-negation, which means that the class in itself must overcome the state of hostility among its internal components to become the subject. Meanwhile, if African American is the right term to refer to Black Americans, African Americans should strengthen their global network and fight not only for themselves but also for their brothers and sisters in Africa in this neo-imperialist era, since Black Lives Matter means more than Black American Lives but all Black Lives. Thus, "the way forward does not lie in the development of a racial consciousness that would lead mysteriously to a racial unity among 'black people'" (Allahar, 2015, p. 440). The world is far from the antagonism of Black and White, but rather the planet that

the Black and White, Yellow and Brown, Green and Blue (forest and water), and many other Colors reproduce themselves. The race problem is indeed critical and anti-racism is actually urgent. However, “race relations are proletarian bourgeois relations” (Cox, 1948/1959, p. 336) since they are the result of capitalist history and its contemporary development. We are therefore “far better served if we develop a” labour-based “appreciation of social inequality, both in the advanced capitalist countries … and elsewhere” (Allahar, 2015, pp. 440–441). Moreover, the failure of a revolution often fosters counterrevolutionary forces. As per Gramsci’s analysis, “[f]ascism is the proletariat’s outright defeat in a political setting where the bourgeoisie is dominant despite the intrinsic weakness of its political institutions” (Adamson, 1980, p. 621). Although Trumpism differs from fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, the storming of the U.S. Capitol showed that Trumpism as neo-fascist and racial nationalist counterrevolution did not fade away with Trump’s handing over the Presidency but became radicalized with the superstition that only this character could save the American economy and the American spirit (cf. Miller, 2021). Therefore, the success and effectivity of neo-fascism “do not lie in its capacity to dupe unsuspecting folk but in the way it addresses real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions – and yet is able to represent them within a logic of discourse which pulls them systematically into line with policies and class strategies of the right” (Haider, 2018, n. p.). Trump and Trumpism gave to his support base, society’s most precarious amongst them, a decidedly false sense of security.

Without a doubt, revolution is difficult. Gramsci’s tactics of war of position suggested a long and arduous process of taking over civil society especially, in the advanced countries, that is critical to the success of communist revolution, in addition to the armed uprising which he called a war of manoeuvre. “The defining feature of the war of position is the affirmation and development of a

new vision of the world. … Revolution disseminates a new vision … of the world that slowly leaks power away from the old vision to finally displace it" (Fernández-Savater, 2013, n. p.). Contemporary oppressed labourers are facing a more cunning capitalist mode of production that exploits and benumbs them through alienated needs (Heller, 1976; Chitty, 1993), consumer culture, interest and rent extraction, right-wing ideologies and ecological degradation, than their counterparts in Marx's era. Nevertheless, even between the 1930s and the 1940s, when fascism was rampant in Europe, European communism was revived by the struggle against counterrevolution. In any event, the success of the communist revolution must transform capitalist relations of production and intercourse. And the success of the transition from the transitory phase to the real communist mode of production needs to find a social, economic and political substitution for the capitalist law of value in the world market. No one could forecast the V-day of the communist mode of production. However, insofar as there is still a tendency and possibility for this revolution, a Marxist perspective is the better to remain cautiously optimistic for a time when "Proletarians of all countries, Unite"!

Conclusion

"There is no royal road to learning" (Marx, 1872/1996, p. 23), and the precipitous path that this thesis takes is stretching toward its peak. To say that the path of the thesis is precipitous means, on the one hand, that the title and the topic are too broad to be covered in a mere seventy to eighty thousand words. On the other hand, raking up the Marxist grand narrative looks "counter-revolutionary" when mainstream left-wing scholarship in Human Geography has turned, first, to postmodernism and, subsequently, to a variety of approaches coming in its wake.[32]To say that the path is stretching toward its peak, not only signifies that the reconstruction of the theory is reaching its final stage but also that, although some shortcomings inevitably remain, the current work has at least partially paved the way for future climbers of historical-geographical materialism.

1. Summary

This thesis has aimed to demonstrate that abundant geographical aspects are hidden in Marx's elaboration of historical materialism. In other words, Marx's historical materialism is essentially historical-geographical materialism. "According to the [historical-geographical] materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life" (Engels, 1884/1990, p. 131, cf. Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975). Therefore, the historical geography of modes of production is posited at the centre of the panorama of historical-geographical materialism. Marx's elaboration of the evolution of modes of production has been generally

[32] Recent work has begun to reassess supposedly fundamental critiques of Marxism (see, for example, Vitale, 2020).

thought to be unilinear by generations of Marxists, despite some more complex recent treatments (cf. Banaji, 2010, p. 351) and growing realization that such matters cannot “be interpreted as a rigid stages theory of social evolution” (Creaven, 2007, p. 94). The Asiatic mode of production, one of the most contentious concepts in Marxism, is wiped out in the old unilinear scheme. It is either merged with other modes of production such as the primitive, slavery and feudal modes of production listed in the *Preface* to *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy* or simply dismissed due to an alleged conceptual inconsistency with other modes of production or deviation from the empirical evidence. Although Marx held a negative attitude towards the AMP in his early years, he never denied the distinctiveness of Asian society and ultimately, in his later years, came to believe that the AMP contained the possibility of transiting to the socialist mode of production without having to pass under the capitalist Caudine Forks. Marx refused to over-generalize his analysis of the modes of production in Western Europe and to use it to describe Eastern societies. He holds that the Asiatic mode of production is characterized by communal ownership, communal labour, identification of rent and tax, and great public works undertaken by states, which make the AMP distinct from other pre-capitalist modes of production. Indeed, rural communes and communal ownership appear all over the world in the pre-capitalist era. However, as Marx argued in the *Grundrisse*, the relation between communes and their members and the property relations differ among the AMP, the Graeco-Roman mode of production and the German mode of production. Moreover, research on the origin of agriculture and sedentism show that the AMP appears later than the tribal mode of production. Therefore, the Asiatic mode of production is a valid concept in Marx’s theory of the mode of production. The concept shows geographical differences within the evolutionary path of modes of production.

The AMP chapter (Chapter 1) sketched out the historical geography of modes

of production by the historical geography of ownership. It also called for additional research on the mode of extraction of surplus labour. The difference between various social-economic epochs lies not only in “the relations of individuals to one another with reference to material, instrument, and product of labour” (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 32), but also “the mode in which … [the] surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer (Marx, 1867/1996, p. 227). The mode of extraction of surplus value connects production and distribution in the whole production process, demonstrating the decisive influence exerted by ownership. Ownership reveals unequal property relations between individuals while the mode of surplus extraction translates this inequality of property into exploitation in production.

A necessary detour through capitalist rent, or to recall Marx’s vivid analogy, the preparatory work for dissecting the ape, shows that under the capitalist mode of production, value is transformed into price of production, surplus value is transformed into average profit, and, based on transformations and capitalist competition, a portion of surplus value created by labour is appropriated by landowners owing to the use value of land in diminishing the price of production. This account enabled Marx (1863/1963, p. 40) to criticize classical political economists’ incapacity to examine surplus value, not in the particular forms of profit and rent but in its pure form. In this light, although the tax/rent couple in the AMP has similar forms – Asiatic tax/rent couple 1 and Asiatic tax/rent couple 2 corresponding to absolute rent and differential rent in the capitalist mode of production –, their modes of extraction are entirely different. The Asiatic tax/rent couple 1 is based on the dual identity of the emperor, the father of the commune and the ultimate landowner that represent acknowledgement by the commune members and his military and political power to rule the empire. The Asiatic tax/rent couple 2 is designed to maintain the survival of the Asiatic commune members. The power of the state and the emperor are limited. It has direct land

ownership but indirect political domination. The intermediate role of the gentry and class mobility through bureaucrat selection and rebellion ensures that the "structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky" (Marx, 1867/1996, pp. 363–364). The AMP (Chapter 1) and rent chapters (Chapter 2) of the thesis, therefore, made the case that the AMP is a valid concept within Marx's historical geography of modes of production and establishes a neglected geographical diversity at the heart of historical materialism qua historical-geographical materialism.

At its core, if one may speak in such terms, historical-geographical materialism does not focus on one mode of production as a static system but, rather on the dynamics of transition out of which modes of production materialize (Chapter 3). Engels (1886/1990, p. 370) criticized mechanistic materialism, arguing that its limitations "lay in its inability to comprehend the world as a process, as matter undergoing uninterrupted historical development". The reason why capitalism was born in western Europe rather than in East Asia is as controversial as the AMP, not only in Marxist circles but also amongst non-Marxist scholars. Although the recurrent debates over the issue – from the initial Dobb–Sweezy debate to, most recently, the great divergence debate – provided explanations such as trade, population, contingency and relations of production, they consistently failed to offer a satisfactory theoretical account. From the vantage-point of historical-geographical materialism, on the one hand, in the case of the AMP, the agricultural labour that increases productivity by inputting more labour power; communal ownership; the mode of extraction of the tax/rent couple; the continuous reconstruction of regime and infrastructure; and the society's relative closure compared to its European counterparts caused the AMP to pause at a pre-capitalist stage. On the other hand, in the case of the West, the development of agricultural forces of production and expanded relations of intercourse, including the discovery of the new world; trade with America and

Asia; colonialism and the enslavement of substantial proportions of the black populous; and the frequently occurring wars; propelled the collapse of the feudal relationship and led to the emergence of capitalism. In this sense, incorporating Marx's underestimated and overlooked concept of relations of intercourse, mainly expounded in the German Ideology and further elaborated in his Chronological Extracts, helps to explain this dynamic of transition; correlates the detached dialectics of forces of production and relations of production within world history and world geography; and reconciles the contradiction of internal and external driving forces.

Capitalism was born with a tendency to perish. Although the capitalist mode of production boomed for centuries, it is internally contradictory and crisis-prone (Chapter 4). From Marx's perspective, capitalist crises are generally possible due to the dichotomy of purchase and sale; inevitable given the fundamental contradiction between the growth of productivity and the impoverishment of the proletariat; and real because of the manifestations of the contradiction: the falling rate of profit as the internal contradiction of the forces of production, disproportion as the internal contradiction of relations of production, underconsumption as the contradiction between forces of production and relations of production. Moreover, the capitalist mode of production has tended to engulf other modes of production and to bring them into the remit of its world system since its initial emergence in Western Europe. Through the development of transportation and communication technologies, relations of intercourse are expanded, space is annihilated with time, and capitalist accumulation accelerated. When the accelerated, inherently contradictory capitalist process involves a deadly virus as a catalyst, the outbreak of crisis is predictable. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that capitalism has transformed the historical geography of modes of production into the world history of the capitalist mode of production. However, the crisis tendency of the capitalist

mode of production and the actualized crisis extend the possibility of revolution from the diverse groups created in their present form by capitalism, which will bring space back into the history of modes of production.

Anti-racism is perhaps the most prominent among the diversified radical movements during the global coronavirus pandemic. Black Lives Matter (BLM) reawakened the relatively slumberous awareness of the cause of racial equality coherently articulated during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Although, over time, the plight of many African Americans has become less unbearable than it once was, covert and often flagrant discrimination still exists. At the beginning of the capitalist era, the developed forces of production, expanded relations of intercourse and shortage of labour power impelled capital to enslave African people and hybridize the Graeco-Roman mode of production (characterized by slaveholding) and the modern capitalist mode of production in American and various other colonial plantations. In other words, the capitalist mode of production involves people historically living in different places being codified into different races by violent means. Fast-forwarding to the 1970s, neoliberalism, the uneven geographical development associated with globalization, and the right-wing ideologies promulgated by politicians and the media have generated precarity in terms of employment, anxiety in relation to international competition, and hostility against immigrants and other “races” more generally. In this light, the last chapter argued that antiracism should be in alignment with anticapitalism since race is itself spawned by the capitalist mode of production in the first instance. And the labourer is a more suitable subject for contemporary anti-racist and anti-capitalist revolution because labour is the species-essence of the human as a species-being. The capitalist mode of production has estranged not only humans and their species-essence by the capitalist appropriation of means of production but also relations between human beings through the increasing division of labour, international mobility of

capital and neo-imperialist accumulation by dispossession. Following the dialectics of thesis–antithesis–synthesis, alienation is to be overcome by the negation of the negation, which is discerned by Marx as the communist mode of production and thus requiring a communist revolution. The revolution will be initiated in either advanced industrial or developing societies, possibly generated by a capitalist crisis, and will not succeed unless the heterogeneous multitude unites to organize mass action under the identity of the labourer whose solitary is not hierarchical but horizontal and based on living space, basically the city and the block, in addition to the traditional workplace. In this sense, although the capitalist mode of production annihilates space with time, space as the basis of new militant particularism (cf. Williams, 1989; Harvey, 2012) will stand with all the oppressed to overturn capitalist alienation and domination, transforming capitalist relations of production and intercourse (based on wage labour and the global mobility of capital) into communist relations of production and intercourse (based on the international solidarity of an heterogeneous free labourer whose identity is allied to his or her locality)

Ranging from the tribal mode of production to the communist mode of production, the content and the narrative developed in this thesis are designed to follow a Whiteheadian revision of Marx's dialectics, elaborated in the Introduction chapter, and historical materialism, which is introduced at the beginning and remained behind the scenes in the other chapters whilst informing the direction the thesis has taken. Viewing the entire historical geography of modes of production as an event without beginning or end, the tribal mode of production, the Asiatic mode of production, the Graeco-Roman mode of production, the German mode of production, the feudal mode of production, the capitalist mode of production and the communist mode of production all appear as sub-events that proceed with lesser extension and shorter duration and contain even smaller and shorter sub-events. All the sub-

events are relational and thus creatively generate new events and constitute larger events. Thus, the historical geography of mode of production, Marx's historical-geographical materialism, is deployed in this thesis from the perspective of process and relation.

The one distinctive aspect of the Marxian approach that is not readily assimilable with the Whiteheadian approach is the smallest limit of the event in a Whiteheadian sense or human history in the Marxian sense. For Whitehead, this smallest limit is called an event-particle, which is abstract, whereas for Marx the event-particle is the labour process enacted by the sensuous human being, which is practical. Event-particles have meaning only when they are in a relationship with other event-particles. By contrast, although human beings are also social animals, that is, in relationships, human relationships are generated by labour as the species-essence of humans (Czank, 2012; Geras, 1983; Wartenberg, 1982).[33] Only when humans can labour, can they produce various relationships. In this sense, historical-geographical materialism on the one hand retains its materialist stance and on the other hand rejects idealism. This is, perhaps, the nub of Smith's (1984) critique of Schmidt (1971), who, as far as Smith is concerned, departs from the materialist basis of the *production* of nature insofar as he focuses on the *concept* of nature apart from any sense of praxis.

2. Limitations and Future Agenda

Adhering to a practical materialism that centres around human labour may be viewed by the ecologist as anthropocentric since the universal internal value implied by Whiteheadian panentheism which argues that God is in the

[33] 'One may also point to the potential significance of Heidegger in this context: see, for example, Marcuse (2005); Mei (2011); Hemming (2013); and, within the geographical literature, Wainwright (2015). For an argument asserting the importance of Heidegger for Lefebvre's (1991) The Production of Space, see Elden (2004).'

becoming of everything in the nature is degraded to the use value to humans. However, Marx's work "contains numerous, remarkable ecological insights" (Foster, 2000, p. 9) that should be considered in relations to the topics of the thesis in the future studies. The ecological issue is indeed urgent and critical. The frequency and intensity of extreme climate events have significantly increased. Natural resources have been privatized, wasted, poisoned, polluted, and depleted. Evidence shows that the Covid-19 is a virus that more than likely emerged from nature rather than being artificially created in the laboratory environment. Therefore, a renewed consideration of the status of nature and humans and their relationship is vital given the pressing nature of the encroaching ecological disaster. Properly dealing with ecological issues should be based not only on the consideration of the actual situation but is also an inherent requirement of Marx's theory of the mode of production. For Marx (1844b/1975, p. 276), [n]ature is man's *inorganic body* – nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body. Man *lives* on nature – means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature". Therefore, on the one hand, nature is an essential participant in the labour process. On the other hand, humans should not do harm to their bodies, no matter whether they are organic or inorganic, as long as humans want to maintain their existence. The capitalist mode of production is "a mode of production rooted in the exploitation of human labor and the expropriation of nature and peoples" (Foster, 2019, p. 12). Moreover, a superficial "greening" of capitalism, involving "[t]he construction of eco-bubbles and 'sustainable' enclaves for the privileged produces simultaneously the unprotected exiles and deepening socio-ecological destruction" (Swyngedouw, 2019, p. 255). Thus, an ecological crisis may cause a revolution that arouses the solidarity of the broadest range of groups, including nature as the oppressed, to overturn the exploitative and destructive

mode of production. In this sense, the revolution towards the communist mode of production needs an ecological account. Likewise, as Nancy Fraser (2021, p. 122) recently pointed out, “an ecopolitics aimed at preventing catastrophe must be anti-capitalist and trans-environmental”.

Another topic that might also have been covered more fully in this thesis but was, given the constraints of time and space, beyond its immediate scope is gender. The production of life includes both production of “one’s own in labour” and the production of “fresh life in procreation” which entails “the relation between man and woman, parents and children” (cf. Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 43). Therefore, relations of production include gender relations. Such questions as the role of domestic labour and procreation under the capitalist mode of production, diversified gender relations in terms of space and type and their alienation, and the solidarity of different genders and the same gender across different countries in proletariats are critical in seeking an alternative to the capitalist mode of production.

3. Contributions

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the thesis can claim to have made several distinctive and original contributions to historical materialism and Marxist geography. Generally speaking, it has elaborated upon and defended Marx’s stance on geography by taking the mode of production – which evolves not only historically but also geographically, covering its birth, interaction, crisis and death – as the key concept and expatiating its evolution from the perspective of historical-geographical materialism, which is based on the triad of forces of production – relations of production – relations of intercourse. Thus, differing from other Marxist geographers, this thesis has not used Marx’s historical materialism to analyse geographical issues but incorporated geography into Marx’s historical materialism. Specifically, it has revived the

discarded concept of the AMP by arguing for its distinctiveness in terms of ownership and mode of surplus extraction, and thus reoriented the Marxist theory of the mode of production to the East. When comparing the divergence of the AMP in late imperial China and feudal Europe, it has introduced Marx's Chronological Extracts, which are currently unavailable in English, to demonstrate decisively the impact of expanded relations of intercourse, in addition to the development of force of production and transformation of relation of production, on the divergence. It has also provided a timely analysis of the capitalist crisis in relation to the Covid-19 and the relationship between antiracism, anticapitalism, neoliberalism and neo-fascism in the wake of the BLM movement and the Trump administration. Above all, the main theoretical contribution is the discovery of the importance of relations of intercourse in historical-geographical materialism. The relations of intercourse, as a part of the relations of production in a broad sense, connect modes of production otherwise isolated from each other. The expansion of relations of intercourse transformed the history of a specific space into historical geography writ large, so to speak. Marx and Engels (1845a/1975, p. 67) argued that "[i]t depends purely on the extension of intercourse whether the productive forces evolved in a locality, especially inventions, are lost for later development or not. As long as there exists no intercourse transcending the immediate neighbourhood, every invention must be made separately in each locality, and mere chances such as irruptions of barbaric peoples, even ordinary wars, are sufficient to cause a country with advanced productive forces and needs to have to start right over again from the beginning". However, the destructive effect of warfare also has its positive side, ushering in modes of production from other localities to form a new mode of production. "The barbarians take the Roman Empire, and this fact of taking is made to explain the transition from the old world to the feudal system. … The feudal system was by no means brought complete from Germany, but had its origin, as far as the conquerors were concerned, in the

martial organization of the army during the actual conquest, and this only evolved after the conquest into the feudal system proper through the action of the productive forces found in the conquered countries" (Marx & Engels, 1845a/1975, p. 85). Commerce, as the other form of relation of intercourse, exerted a similar but milder effect on the local mode of production (cf. ibid., p. 67). Accordingly, trade and the discovery of America, regarded by scholars who participated in the debates as external forces that drive the transition of modes of production, are internalized in the triad of forces of production – relations of production – relations of intercourse. In this way, this concept complements Marx's explanatory apparatus when the inter-connected differential spaces are incorporated into the historical evolution of the mode of production, thus making Marx's historical-geographical materialism possible.

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