



**Karl Marx and the Taiping Rebellion**

**Anandita Thakur**

**ICS OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 60**

Karl Marx and the Taiping Rebellion  
Author: Anandita Thakur

© **Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi**

Institute of Chinese Studies  
8/17 Sri Ram Road, Civil Lines  
Delhi 110 054, INDIA  
Ph.: +91-11-23938202; Fax: +91-11-23830728  
Email: [info@icsin.org](mailto:info@icsin.org)  
Website: [www.icsin.org](http://www.icsin.org)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Anandita Thakur** is a former Research Assistant at ICS. Her master's dissertation, entitled Karl Marx and the Taiping Rebellion, studied the rhetorical capacities of Marx's articles on the Taiping Rebellion, and analysed, through these articles, the state of larger European media surrounding the rebellion, the Chinese body and the Orient in the period between 1849-1860. Her research interests lie in the work of the Chinese-American literary diaspora, post-socialist urban architecture in China, and the influence of British colonialism in China. Prior to ICS, her research experience included a research grant by the Government of Taiwan and the International Institute for Cultural Studies at National Chiao Tung University. As a part of the grant, she worked on Taiwanese New Wave Cinema, focusing in particular on the director Hou Hsiao Hsien and gendered mediations in his film, *The Boys from Fengkuei*. She has presented several awarded papers on the use and construction of the Chinese body through the work of author Marguerite Duras and Somerset Maugham for conferences at St. Stephen's College and Ambedkar University.

**Contact:** [a.thakur.editorial@gmail.com](mailto:a.thakur.editorial@gmail.com)

## **Karl Marx and the Taiping Rebellion**

### **Abstract**

This article attempts to understand Karl Marx's position on the Taiping Rebellion- by itself, and within his larger evolving discourse of the Asiatic mode of production and the Orient. Marx understands the Taiping Rebellion solely in the capacity of a peasant rebellion, as demonstrated in his article, *Revolution in China and Europe*. He is supportive of the Rebellion only to express his disapproval of it in his 1862 article, *Chinese Affairs*. A fairly drastic shift in his opinions occurs in the decade or so between the writing of the two articles, and scholars such as Aijaz Ahmed have attempted to understand the same through the paradigmatic angle of him writing within the capacity of a series of newspaper articles (with the *New York Daily Tribune*, etc.). This article attempts to shift away from this mode of analysis, in order to delve deeper within the reasons for Marx's shift in opinions- including changing circumstances within the British occupation in China, the sources from which he received his information, broadly including British envoys to China and missionary correspondence, as well as his own cultural circumstances in writing from London during this period of British involvement in China amidst the Opium wars. A certain picture of the Orient, the Oriental body and the Oriental body in juxtaposition to the European body is borne amid these political circumstances, within the space of London- such as *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, as well as exhibitions such as *Ten Thousand Chinese Things of 1844*, in addition to the several opium dens surrounding and within London at the time, and cultural works such as *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* by Thomas De Quincey, among several other discussed factors. I utilize, in these examples, the further concept of *Chinoiserie* first suggested by Anne Veronica Witchard in arriving at my formulation of how Marx came to his opinions on the Taiping Rebellion, within the larger discourse of his theories on the Asiatic mode of production, and Oriental despotism. I also compare Marx's work to the cultural presence of another author who wrote of the Taiping Rebellion at the time, Augustus Lindley, who has a vastly different opinion of the Taiping Rebellion and the British occupation than Marx.

**Keywords:** Karl Marx, Taiping Rebellion, Opium Wars, Culture, Orientalism, Chinoiserie

## Introduction

The Marxist engagement with the question of the Orient, and the Asiatic has been subject to contentious terrain in the history of scholarship surrounding Marx and Asia. Most famously, Edward Said termed Marx an Orientalist, based on the grounds of Marx reproducing the European discourse, when he supports the presence of colonialism in India, as he considered India an unchanging civilization, similar to other Oriental nations (Said 154). While Said's classification of Marx as an Orientalist appears legitimate, it must be noted that scholars such as Aijaz Ahmed (Ahmed 232) and Kolja Lindner (Lindner 27-32) have opposed this dismissal: Ahmed objects to the articles Said chooses for his analysis, saying they were written in the capacity of newspaper articles, and therefore cannot be considered a part of Marx's body of thought. Lindner argues for Marx's eventual change in opinion regarding the Orient as unchanging and ahistorical, in his later work, and thus objects to the classification of Marx as an Orientalist. I wish to focus on Marx's engagement with the Taiping Rebellion: a Hakka-Christian movement, that sprung in the Hakka province of China in order to overthrow the Qing dynasty. Marx understands the Taiping Rebellion solely in the capacity of a peasant rebellion, as demonstrated in his article, *Revolution in China and Europe*. He is supportive of the Rebellion only to express his disapproval of it in his 1862 article, *Chinese Affairs*.

It is pertinent to note the tonal shift between the two articles, and the ways in which they come to engage with the idea of the Orient, in the capacity of rhetoric. In the first article, Marx classifies the unlikelihood of a peasant revolution in China, an unchanging empire, an example of the system of Oriental Despotism. He ends the article on the note of hope, expressing the desire for the wave of revolution from China to influence Europe as well. Marx ignores the religious nature of the movement entirely, noting, in passing, the religious or spiritual being the source of most Oriental movements and therefore not being of much importance, and focuses instead on the idea of the revolution occurring at all.

Subsequently, in *Chinese Affairs*, Marx's last article on the Taiping Rebellion, Marx expresses his disapproval of the Rebellion, terming it no better than the Qing empire, and expresses, in highly visual terms, the "meek, geometrically circumscribed Mandarin body" in contrast to the "wild countenance" of the Taiping. This proves to be an interesting point of comparison, and

serves to demonstrate the intricacies and layers that Marx's engagement with China, and the question of the Asiatic. Furthermore, Marx's ignorance of the aspect of the religious in the Taiping movement, and his subsequent dismissal of the religious aspect, followed by a highly racialized description in *Chinese Affairs* may be tied to the proliferation of a series of cultural images of the Asiatic Body in display in London the 1850s.

Thus, the theoretical underpinnings of this article lie in understanding Marx as a respondent to the milieu surrounding him. I wish to deal with the question of Marx's categorization as an Orientalist, in its numerous capacities. In order to engage with this question, it becomes important to delve into the development of Marx's notions of the Asiatic economy, and his sources for the same, in tandem with his applications, insights and deviances from it.

The scholarship of Kolja Lindner hesitates deeming Marx as only an Orientalist, along with that of scholars such as Perry Anderson (Anderson 14), who while acknowledging the inaccuracies present in his information on China, point to the necessity of understanding the political as more important than the cultural, thus pointing to Marx's notions on the Orient as operating, in a certain sense, independently of the cultural milieu surrounding them. The idea of Marx as anti-colonial, as proposed by Aijaz Ahmed, as well as the question of whether Marx may be considered an Orientalist, are the central questions this article wishes to address. A central ethical concern for this article is Marx's ignorance of the religious within the Taiping movement, forming a centrality to the discourse surrounding the same. The aspect of the Oriental religion, in its "talisman"-like (in *Chinese Affairs*) formulation, opens up a series of questions with regard to what shapes Marx's notions on the Asiatic religion. In order to investigate this, I delve into the influence of Francois Bernier, amongst others, on Marx, as well as the cultural images that propagated the rhetoric of Empire in the close vicinity of Marx's location in London: these include the space of the Exhibition, such as *Ten Thousand Chinese Things*<sup>1</sup>, as well as Marx's sources of the Taiping Rebellion from China. In sum, I take the articles Marx writes on the Taiping Rebellion as the point of departure in examining Marx's notions on the Orient, as the period he writes in is also pertinent as the shaping of his discourse on the Asiatic mode of

---

<sup>1</sup> Dunn, Nathan, *Ten Thousand Chinese Things: A Descriptive Catalogue*, 1844, p.36. Accessed from: <http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b35822041.pdf>

production, and Oriental despotism, through several articles and letters written to Engels. I wish to investigate Marx as a product of his milieu, in order to address the question of his Orientalism, which is complicated further by his frequent oppositions to English control in China, as well as his skepticism and questioning of his sources, such as Karl Gutzlaff, a missionary and translator for the British government in China during the Taiping Rebellion, even as he indulges in descriptions of racial classification, commenting several times on the “*meek*” nature of the Chinese.

A second theoretical underpinning is the concept of Chinoiserie, as proposed by Anne Veronica Witchard (Witchard 17). Often used as a term to understand the use of Chinese motifs in European, Chinoiserie becomes the site of a series of transactional relations and engagements in 19th century Britain, in the space of the museum. It is distinct from the model of Orientalism, in being particular to the sphere of the Chinese engagement with Europe, revealing a series of cultural artifacts that paint the particularity of China as opposed to the monolithic capacities of the larger Orient, even as it does not dismiss the same. To begin, the article investigates the development of Marx’s conceptions on the Orient, through the Asiatic Mode of Production, as well as the inconsistencies of his arguments. Subsequently, it delves into the influences that directly shape his notion of the Asian economy, such as Francois Bernier’s text, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, *Marx in the Milieu*, elaborates on the nature of how Marx speaks about the Chinese body in his articles between 1853 and 1862. It investigates the cultural influences that Marx would have been a participant in as a scholar living in London, and the space of the Ten Thousand Chinese Things Exhibition, in conjunction to the presence of the Chinese Junk. Engaging with the concept of Chinoiserie, it also delves into the sources of Marx’s news on the Taiping Rebellion from China. To conclude, the article positions Marx within his milieu and attempts to answer and formulate the position of Marx within the discourse of Orientalism, while delving into the nature of the Orient/ Occident binary, as enumerated upon by numerous scholars. It also wishes to assert the role of the cultural within Marx’s understanding of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Bernier, Françoise, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, W Pickering, 1671. Accessed from : <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/16738/>

Orient, and thus positions Marx within a series of frames of reference, including the differences he poses to the classification of him as an Orientalist, within his articles.

### *Delineating Limits of the Asiatic*

Marx's notion of Oriental Despotism, and the Asiatic Mode of Production within the larger theory of the Modes of Production (as discussed in *Capital*, 1867<sup>3</sup>), was developed largely during his employment as a journalist for the *New York Daily Tribune* (1853-1860). Writing articles on India, China and Persia, the Asiatic Mode of Production, was first characterized by Marx by a lack of private property and, immense distance between small village communities tied together by a ruler, who has dynastically taken control over and imparted hydraulic networks and facilities amongst the people of these small, unconnected village communities. Surplus labour is offered to this ruler, the Oriental Despot, in the form of a tribute, and there is often the collusion of this entity with divinity. In an article entitled "The British Rule in India"<sup>4</sup>, Marx comments on Hanuman and Sabbala in the Indian context in order to illustrate this assertion. The association with divinity is often used by Marx to justify, or rather, amplify the unchanging nature of the Asiatic world, wherein he derives the conception of an Asiatic temperament.

For the Indian mind, in the tireless continuity of the dynastic ruler and a lack of private property, the resultant populace is endowed with a fatigued indifference to the happenings of the political realm as they are in the midst of the throes of religious fervour, wherein,

*"...they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man the sovereign of circumstances, that (they) transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, 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."*<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Marx, Karl & Engels, Fredric, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, Progress Publishers, pg. 52

<sup>4</sup> Marx, Karl, *The British Rule in India*, New York Daily Tribune, June 25 1853.

<sup>5</sup> See citation 2



The idea of an ahistorical, unchanging social structure is present when Marx speaks of China as well. In his article entitled *Revolution in China and Europe*<sup>6</sup>, he comments, on the presence of the British in China, and the resultant changes in the empire being characterized by, “*the superstitious faith in the eternity of the Celestial Empire broke down; the barbarous and hermetic isolation from the civilized world was infringed.*”

The world of the Asiatic in Marx comes to be fraught with the fissures of a topological construction that moves from Russia to China, loosely tied together by the notion of an unchanging political civilization. In the midst of this, there are critical differences in how these economies are held in relation to one another, even as Marx categorizes them within the ambit of the Oriental Despot and the Asiatic Mode of Production in his later work. For India, he is in support of British colonialism, viewing it as a necessary evil<sup>7</sup>, whereas for China, he is in support of the peasant rebellion (The Taiping Rebellion). Marx, therefore, is keenly aware of the contextual differences in the engagement with Western power that each of these countries face.

### *The Inconsistencies of Marx's Asia*

Marx's longer expositions on the economy of the Asiatic states, can be found first in an essay entitled “Pre Capitalist Economic Formations”, from 1857, wherein he speaks of most Asiatic societies deriving their sense of community, land ownership and labour through an “*all embracing unity*”,<sup>8</sup> or a leader who comes to be imbued with symbolic significance as the sole proprietor. With all land belonging to this entity, he says, “*the relationship of the individual to the natural conditions of labor and reproduction, appears to be mediated by means of a grant [Ablassen] from the total unity to the individual through the intermediary of the particular community.*”<sup>9</sup> Further in the essay, Marx terms this entity “*the despot*”, and continues to say that all Oriental despotism was the legal absence of property, and the presence of self-sustaining communities in terms of agriculture and production. He also notes the presence of common lands, and the particular importance of common systems of irrigation in Asiatic systems.

---

<sup>6</sup> Marx, Karl, *Revolution in China and in Europe*, New York Daily Tribune, June 14 1853

<sup>7</sup> Marx, Karl, *The British Rule in India*, New York Daily Tribune, June 10 1853

<sup>8</sup> Marx, Karl, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, 1857-58, tr. Jack Cohen, sourced: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/precapitalist/ch01.htm>, 30/3/19

<sup>9</sup> Also from Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations

It is important to note the similarities between this text and his earlier articles for the New York Daily Tribune, as well as his letters to Engels from 1853. This text is also released in the same year as his article on the the revolt of 1857<sup>10</sup>. That this series of formulations occurs in the form of an essay is also notable. Aijaz Ahmed suggests<sup>11</sup>, in his critique of Said's suggestion<sup>12</sup> of Marx as an orientalist, that Marx's articles on India cannot be held as his canon of categorical thought, as they were written in a journalistic capacity. While this chapter does not engage with Said's polarizing critique, Ahmed's proposition ignores the necessary relationship between the development of Marx's opinion on colonialism and the Asiatic, and the strand of thought on the epistemic of the Asian in the Marxist corpus, toggling as an active interaction between the two separate categories Ahmed proposes: the journalistic, and the corpus.

There were also differences in the conceptualization of Asian villages and their systems of production. Broadly, when speaking of the Asiatic mode of production and Oriental despotism in the essays from 1857-58 as well as his letters to Engels<sup>13</sup>, Marx means to speak of Persia, China, Peru, India and often the Slavic nation as well as Romania. China is often notably absent in his model of the Asian village and community as it possessed private property and peasant ownership. Marx notes this in his essay "Trade with China", published in the New York Daily Tribune<sup>14</sup>.

By the late 1850s, therefore, the idea of private property as being a central determinant of Oriental Despotism and the Asiatic Mode of Production already begins to see some fissures. These differences, however, between the many "Asiatic" nations that Marx writes about (the category of the Asiatic and the semi Asiatic has been elaborated upon later), which at different points includes Russia amongst China and India, come to be ignored by him often. The idea of the Oriental Despot and the Asiatic Mode of Production, increasingly, does not centralize itself around a lack of private property as much as a central leader. Even Russia, as late as 1877, is

---

<sup>10</sup> Marx, Karl, *The Revolt in the Indian Army*, New York Daily Tribune, July 1857

<sup>11</sup> Ahmed, Aijaz, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Verso 1992, p. 232

<sup>12</sup> Said, Edward W, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979, p. 154

<sup>13</sup> Notably the ones on Bernier, this has been elaborated on further later in the chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Marx, Karl, *Trade with China*, New York Daily Tribune, 1859, Dec 03

marked by Engels as yet another system of Oriental Despotism, with the Tsarist leadership assuming all power, as noted by Wittfogel<sup>15</sup>.

Marx considered the absence of private property a preliminary condition, due to the lack of agency it brings about in a people. The Asiatic Mode of Production is unchanging and ahistorical, precisely due to the public works being vested in and controlled by a singular authority. We see this in detail, in a letter from 1853, addressed to Engels, wherein he writes,

*“The stationary nature of this part of Asia, despite all the aimless activity on the political surface, can be completely explained by two mutually supporting circumstances: 1. The public works system of the central government and, 2. Alongside this, the entire Empire which, apart from a few large cities, is an agglomeration of villages, each with its own distinct organisation and each forming its own small world.”*<sup>16</sup>

It is clear from Marx’s initial articles on China and Asiatic society, namely, “Revolution in China and in Europe”<sup>17</sup>, that Asiatic society, in order to change, must be brought into the foray of proletarian internationalism as expressed in the 1848 Communist Manifesto<sup>18</sup>.

Increasingly, we see the recognition of different countries being utilized for different ends in arguments: India comes to be veiled beneath colonialism posing a necessary evil, as mentioned in “The British Rule in India” for the Chinese, the “peasant rebellion”, bereft of its religious nature, is encouraged<sup>19</sup> and Russia tend to become semi-Asiatic, and characterized by Oriental despotism when it is suitable<sup>20</sup>, and yet are also acknowledged as closest to Europe<sup>21</sup>. The Far East acquires mythical proportions in being unchanging and ahistorical, a proposition close to the

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Wittfogel, Karl, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, Vintage Books, 1957, p. 372

<sup>16</sup> ‘Marx to Engels, 14 June 1853’. Sourced from: [marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/letters/53\\_06\\_14.htm](http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/letters/53_06_14.htm)

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 4

<sup>18</sup> Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Books, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> In *Revolution in China and in Europe*, footnote 4

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 13

<sup>21</sup> In *Revolution in China and in Europe*, footnote 4

Hegelian order, and yet the presence of private property suggests otherwise<sup>22</sup>. The Mohammedan exists in simultaneity with the presence of multiple princes, and peasant rebellions<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, when considered through numerous interfaces of reference, Marx's conception of the Asiatic Mode of Production comes to be layered with ambiguity and blind spots, the most central of these being the following: how relevant is the notion of private property? How does Marx negotiate with colonialism, alternately describing it as a necessary evil in the case of India, and yet again in 1857 as the reason for the ruin of agriculture and in this a curse? In the case of China, Marx is alternately supportive of the Rebellion, and yet, 10 years later<sup>24</sup>, he acquires a distaste for it and delves into racist descriptions and categories for the Chinese body and personality. In "Chinese Affairs", he describes the "peacock-like" attire of the Taiping Rebels, a shock to the average, "geometrically circumscribed" Chinese individual. While he was critiquing what he considered the violence of the Taiping Rebellion, it is noticeable that the tendency to collude brutality with race-specific description only comes about when he is in disapproval, and when in support, the Chinese are subsumed within the body of the proletariat international<sup>25</sup>.

This also reveals to us a difference in Marx's perceptions of different nations within the broad category of the Asiatic, he continuously breaks his own classifications, posing a central difficulty- how does one fit in Marx's perception of China and Asia, and the "Asiatic", and subsequently analyze his rhetorical construction vis a vis the larger economic, racial and cultural nexus it operates in? In what ways does Marx represent and reconstruct the Oriental, through his writings? This is discussed in a detailed analysis of several of his articles, in the following chapter. In order to arrive at this, we must first delve into Marx's sources for the Asiatic.

### *Marx's Informants*

It becomes of some import to dwell on the geographic boundaries of the 'Orient' that Marx imagines and writes on- in its conceptual and geographical proximities. In order to trace his idea of the Orient- one needs to identify the key factors in his body of work that investigate the

---

<sup>22</sup> In *Trade with China*, footnote 12

<sup>23</sup> In *The Revolt in the Indian Army*, footnote 12

<sup>24</sup> Marx, Karl, *Chinese Affairs*, Die Presse, July 7 1862

<sup>25</sup> As mentioned earlier, in *Revolution in China and Europe*

vicissitudes of an Orient vs Occident capacity. Indeed, in “Revolution in China and in Europe,” this framework is hinted at already. He opens the article with what he terms as the “*axiom of extremes*”.<sup>26</sup> Alluding to the idiomatic nature of the phrase “*extremes meet*” at the beginning of his article, he goes on to comment on what he considers a curious, but unsurprising, meeting between the celestial empire, China, and Europe. Marx asserts that what was underway in China was perhaps even more significant to Europe than the happenings in Russia (where the Crimean War of 1853 was underway, which he also wrote about in April of the same year). That he points to Russia as a closer colleague vis a vis the normative comprehension of the significance of its events, with respect to Europe, already establishes for us a certain geographical and conceptual framework that “*celestial empire*” aids as well.

The development of Marx’s conception of the Orient must be looked at in conjunction with, and as a result of, the broader scholarly tradition surrounding Orientalism. The concept of the Asian ‘despot’ has come to Marx ostensibly from Francois Bernier’s text on India, “Travels in the Mogul Empire”<sup>27</sup>. I use the term “ostensibly”, as the concept of the Oriental ‘despot’ and the use of the word itself, has a long historical trajectory in Europe that reverts back to as far as Aristotle’s communications with Alexander, who in his letters to the latter elaborates upon the nature of the Persian character.

R. Koebner, in his essay entitled “Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term”<sup>28</sup>, comments on the use of the phrase ‘*Oriental Despotism*’, and traces its convoluted microhistory amidst a range of intersectional concerns. The word ‘despot’<sup>29</sup> with relation to the Orient, he argues, first emerged in European consciousness as an attempt by Aristotle’s medieval translators to convey the master-slave relationship from *Politics: Book 1*. A variety of other developments, naturally, since Aristotle, contribute to the vast project of how the concept of Asian economies and their structures came to be received and conceived in the West, and this

---

<sup>26</sup> Marx, Karl, *Revolution in China and in Europe*, New York Daily Tribune, June 14, 1853, opening paragraph

<sup>27</sup> First published in Paris, 1670-71

<sup>28</sup> Koebner, Richard: Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14, 3/4 (1951), pp. 275–302.

<sup>29</sup> Despotes, despoticus, despotizare are some translations

has been commented upon by numerous scholars, such as Dr. Rolando Minuti, in his essay, “The Concept of Oriental Despotism: From Aristotle to Marx”<sup>30</sup>.

In a letter to Engels, Marx expresses his admiration of Bernier’s work in India, saying, on 2nd June 1853, “*On the subject of the growth of eastern cities one could hardly find anything more brilliant, comprehensive or striking than Voyages contenant la description des états du Grand Mogol, etc. by old François Bernier (for 9 years Aurangzeb’s physician)*”<sup>31</sup>. Kolja Lindner, in her essay, “Marx’s Eurocentrism: Postcolonial Studies and Marx Scholarship”<sup>32</sup>, conducts an analysis of Bernier’s work, stating that it leads to no conclusive estimations about India at all, with its only noteworthy (and most picked upon) statements being the lack of private property, and the superstitious nature of the Indian people, which Bernier derived from observing the structural importance of the astrologer in Indian society. Lindner’s larger thesis, in her essay, is to tussle with the idea of whether Marx may be called an Orientalist and be dismissed in the way Edward Said argues, in his *Orientalism*. She argues instead that such a hasty dismissal is not warranted: that Marx, in his later writings, gradually comes to reject Eurocentric assumptions. It is in this context that she attempts to trace Francois Berner’s travelogues vis a vis Marx: in order to point to the factors that lead to the conception of Marx’s conception on colonialism, as an individual who had never visited these lands and only written about them.

While Lindner’s essay provides a useful insight into the transmutation of Bernier’s claims into Marx’s thoughts, there is an ignorance of the significance of Hegel’s theory of dialectical development, with specific regard to the Chinese empire and the Orient as the first stage in the development of the historical and universal spirit. In his own words, “*The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History.*”<sup>33</sup> How this concept may influence Marx, an ardent admirer of Hegel, as well as the larger European philosophical frame of reference is not paid attention to. She does not ignore the aspect of Hegel being influenced by Bernier’s writing as well, but does not point to how Marx’s conceptions of the Orient, the

---

<sup>30</sup> Minuti, Rolando, *The Concept of Oriental Despotism: From Aristotle to Marx*, EGO: European History Online, 2012-05-03

<sup>31</sup> Marx to Engels, 2 June, 1853, MECW, vol. 39, p. 332

<sup>32</sup> Lindner, Kolja, *Marx’s Eurocentrism. Postcolonial studies and Marx Scholarship*. Radical Philosophy, 2010, pp.27-41.

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, *Lectures On the Philosophy of History* 1861, p. 109.

celestial empire and the nature of the Oriental mind and society, (which he delves into both in “Chinese Affairs”, “Revolution in China and Europe”, as well as the 1853 essay on India (*The British Rule in India*)), in the very foundational sense of a dialectical progress of the world represented as a living ‘spirit’ or organism, in varying stages of development- fractured, and yet chronologically and dialectically traceable through a variety of highly specific geospatial locations, moving from East to West.

In excluding Hegel from Marx’s list of influences, when writing about the Orient the flaw is: while she provides the influence of Francois Bernier on Marx’s writings through the highly specific and directly referenced instance of Marx’s overt mention of Bernier in his essays, she is ignoring the larger civilizational assumptions he operates on, which may have been partially moulded by one of the most foundational philosophers he borrows from, when working with the model of the dialectical. He turns away from Hegel when he moves into dialectical materialism rather than the universal spirit, but the strains of historical assumptions on the Orient, the effect of the metaphysical dialectic which provides a racist historiography of development in shaping the discourse of how he reasoned his very foundational assumptions on Oriental Despotism, cannot be ignored and must instead be held in simultaneous consideration with his more contextual influences: such as Bernier’s description of Indian superstition, the lack of private property and the dominance of agriculture.

In sum, she is arguing on the basis of Francois Bernier’s direct influence on Marx, as Marx openly mentions him, but is ignoring the transmutation of metaphorical conceptions and cultural idioms that may well form the nexus of Marx’s assumptions on the Orient, even as he disagrees with Hegel on the universal spirit. In his essay entitled “A Note on Montesquieu and Marx”<sup>34</sup>, George E Levy emphasizes on Marx’s training at the University of Berlin, beginning from 1835, where the influence of Hegel (who died only five years previously) pervaded and the dialectical method was emphasized. Levy provides a useful contribution to the basis of Marx’s philosophical development, and the series of foundational determinants on the theory of race and

---

<sup>34</sup> Levy, George, A Note on Montesquieu and Marx, pg 1-6, sourced from : [https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/63679/dalrev\\_vol28\\_iss4\\_pp343\\_348.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/63679/dalrev_vol28_iss4_pp343_348.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

the Asian body in conjunction with Marx's construction of the Chinese personality, are continued in the next chapter.

### *Marx in the Milieu*

In this chapter, I wish to investigate the nature of how Marx paints and configures the Asiatic body in his writings, and subsequently, how he writes about the Taiping Rebellion with respect to his sources for the same. In order to arrive at a fuller picture of how Marx operated within the cultural milieu of his time. I will be delineating the cultural images that surround and influence Marx's conception of China in the 1850s, along with an elaboration on his sources of the Taiping Rebellion.

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on Marx's theory surrounding Oriental societies and the Asiatic Mode of Production. The inconsistencies in the same leads one to question the influences Marx would have been subject to as a German scholar in exile, working out of England, amidst the strengthening of British power and the Opium Wars in China. The strong presence of missionaries within China, as well as officers of the British government were primarily Marx's sources for the Taiping Rebellion. In "Chinese Affairs"<sup>35</sup>, in 1862, he takes note of the letters of M. Harvey, the English consul in Ningpo, to Mr. Bruce, the English ambassador in Peking, saying,

*““Since three months,” writes Mr. Harvey, “Ningpo is in the hands of the revolutionary Taipings. Just as in any other place in which these robbers have established their rule, the only consequence of it has been devastation. Do they follow other goals as well? To them it seems that the power of unrestricted and unlimited enthusiasm is actually as important as the destruction of foreign lives. It is true that this view of the Taipings does not agree with the illusions of English missionaries who tell fairy tales about ‘the salvation of China,’ the resurrection of the Empire,’ ‘the saving of the People’ and the ‘introduction of Christianity’ by the Taipings. After ten years of noisy quasi-activity, they*

---

<sup>35</sup> Marx, Karl, *Chinese Affairs*, Die Presse, July 7 1862. Accessed from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1862/07/colonialism-modernization.htm>



*have destroyed everything and produced nothing. It is true, says Mr. Harvey, that in official contacts with foreigners the Taipings show themselves to possess more frank behavior and energetic toughness than the Mandarins; but this is the whole of their catalogue of virtues.*

A set of binaries is displayed here by Marx, in conjunction to his reading of M. Harvey's letter. He distinguishes between the "*frank behaviour and energetic toughness*" of the Taipings as opposed to the "Mandarins"<sup>36</sup>. In the same article, he speaks of the dress of the Taiping Rebels, noting,

*"An important instrument of terror is the Taipings' colorful peacock-like dress. On Europeans it would have a ridiculous impression. On the Chinese it works like a talisman. These clothes give the rebels greater advantage than mobile cannon. Add to this their long, pigtailed, black or blackened hair, the wildness of their countenance, their melancholy shrieks and an affectation of anger and insanity – and it is enough to scare to death the formalistic, meek, geometrically-circumscribed average Chinese.*

The binaries Marx utilizes become clearer in this passage: the idea of the meek, geometrically circumscribed Chinese body is placed against the frank, energetic countenance of the Taiping Rebels, with their, "*long, pigtailed, black or blackened hair, the wildness of their countenance, their melancholy shrieks and an affectation of anger and insanity*". Also notable is the binary of the European body and the Chinese body, the dress works "*like a talisman*" on the latter while appearing "*ridiculous*" on the former.

When attempting to understand the binaries, it becomes important to note how Marx associates the Rebel body with the realm of the other-worldly, while the idea of the meek and geometrically circumscribed body serves as an immobile relic for the consolidation of European sensibility and rule. Thus, the dress of the Taiping Rebels appears, "*ridiculous*" on the European body, just as the meek temperament of the, "*average, geometrically circumscribed*" Chinese body fits into the

---

<sup>36</sup> One also observes the distrust the English government displays in the missionary depiction of the Rebels, indicating multiple groups of English presence with vested interest in China at the time. The effect of missionary presence in China on Marx has been noted later in the chapter.

mode of supplication that the rational European may rule over. The aspect of ridiculousness becomes synonymous to the virtue of European rationality- when we consider the aspect of the talisman, akin to the unexplainable world of religious and symbolic significance, an aspect Marx objects to as it pertains to the religious sphere. Marx purports the rhetoric of imperial control, even while ostensibly being opposed to the nature of the British presence in China. His opposition to British control is most clearly visible in his article from January 23, 1857, entitled “The Case of the *Lorcha Arrow*”.<sup>37</sup>

The incident of the *lorcha* arrow famously triggered the Arrow War, as it is often called, or the Second Opium War. Chinese officers boarded the *lorcha*, a Portuguese word for ship, in order to disrupt and arrest individuals on it, as the ship was suspected of piracy. British officers of the Guangzhou province opposed this, saying that the ship had a British ensign, and therefore the Chinese officials had no reason to bring it down. Many negotiations ensued, with much disfavour from the British government, and press in Britain actively supported the British action. Marx opposed the action, calling it ridiculous, and instead supported the view that the ship was made by Chinese individuals, and was in Chinese land. This aspect illustrates his opposition to the alienation of the worker from his labour.

Even in his very first article about China and the Taiping Rebellion, entitled “Revolution in China and Europe”, Marx supports the Rebellion, but comments on the surprise of it arising from China. He notes the circumstances that he believes influenced it, including the rise of opium consumption and the fall of the Celestial Empire, resulting in the dissolution of bureaucratic control. However, he fails to pay heed to the religious character of the Taiping movement, a unique blend of Confucian Christianity, and instead dismisses it only as a characteristically Oriental revolution, in how it arises from the religious sphere. In the same article, Marx comments on the beginnings of political stirring in Russia, expressing his surprise that the movement of proletarian internationalism was being felt more strongly in unchanging China than Russia. The body of the Asian is noted in its absence from this article, wherein Marx is only concerned with what the Rebellion spells for the larger world. In this, religion, dynastic forces and the specificity of the Hakka origin of the Rebellion are lost. The Oriental aspects of

---

<sup>37</sup> Marx, Karl, The Case of the *Lorcha Arrow*, New York Daily Tribune, Jan 23 1857. Accessed from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/01/23.htm>

dress, character and temperament are only noted conveniently when Marx is forced to acknowledge the Rebellion for its uniquely Hakka and religious character.

In another article from 1857, entitled “Persia-China”<sup>38</sup>, Marx speaks of the rise of Western power in Persia and China, often colluding the two as examples of the Orient, and speaks of, “*the jealousy, the intrigues, the ignorance, the cupidity and corruption of the Orientals*” that European colonists had to come into contact with, along with terming Chinese colonists as, “*the most meek and subservient*”. This is done in simultaneity to his notice of the British press on China and the Taiping Rebellion, he says, “*In short, instead of moralizing on the horrible atrocities of the Chinese, as the chivalrous English press does, we had better recognize that this is a war pro aris et focis, a popular war for the maintenance of Chinese nationality, with all its overbearing prejudice, stupidity, learned ignorance and pedantic barbarism if you like, but yet a popular war.*”

Between “Revolution in China and in Europe” (1853) and the final article on China, “Chinese Affairs” (1862), we see a series of different arguments that discuss the Taiping Rebellion as a popular war, as a notice to the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of the proletariat revolution in China. On the Lorcha Arrow incident (1857), we see the support of the Chinese government’s reaction amidst British disapproval and yet, in the manner of a death knell, Marx notes at the end of “Chinese Affairs”, in 1862, “*Doubtless the Taiping impersonates the devil in the manner in which he has been represented in Chinese phantasy. But only in China was such a sort of devil possible. It is the consequence of a fossil form of social life.*” Over here, once again, we see the idea of the other-world, the talismanic, emerge, in conjunction with what Marx terms in his theory on the Oriental Despot as the fossilized and unchanging nature of Oriental government. However, it comes to be signified in terms such as the “*devil*”, the “*wild countenance*” deviating from the “*meek, geometrically circumscribed*”.

The aspect of difference and deviance from Marx’s notion of international proletarianism, as espoused in his 1848 “Communist Manifesto”, results in a chastisement that solidifies the Orient

---

<sup>38</sup> Marx, Karl, *Persia-China*, New York Daily Tribune, May 20, 1857 . Accessed from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/06/05.htm>

as the Other, under the garb of political evolution. The Taiping Rebellion becomes the site in rhetoric for this particular aspect to arise and become plain.

In the following section, I investigate the particularities of how Marx came to receive news on China, living in England, and the cultural proliferation of Chinoiserie that dominated England at the time. In addition to this, I will also investigate the sources of how Marx comes to know about the Taiping Rebellion and subsequently frame his discourse on it.

The specificity of Marx's conception of the Asian body in what he terms its geometrically circumscribed form, as well as the meek countenance, the peacock-like dress and the black pigtailed meld and interact with his theory on Oriental societies and governments, as unchanging and ahistorical, as well as despotic. In "Revolution in China and Europe", we note his conception of China as the end of the world, the first stage of development, and thereby the surprise of a revolution stirring in it. He dispossesses the religious sphere, but his articles reveal the subsumption of the Chinese body as either subject to the "meek" form that would please the rational European, and when not, in the binary of a wild countenance beyond the realm of understanding.

An investigation of what causes these particularly visual images to proliferate in Marx's articles must be directed first at the cultural images that surround the English landscape in the time Marx writes. In her Introduction to the text, "Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Aesthetics and Empire in 19th Century Britain", Elizabeth Chang<sup>39</sup> analyzes the relations between China and England in the 19th century, arguing for the movement of empire to body- using James McNeill Whistler's 1864 painting, "Lange Leizen of the Six Marks", and William Rossetti's criticism of the same, wherein he speaks of the "Chinese-ness" of the European woman who occupies the frame, insisting on it even as he says her eyes lack the "proper almond shape". Chang points to the uneasy formulation, arguing that the difference in the shape of the Chinese eye and its narrowness, while in the realm of art, becomes a point of departure for a much more abstract series of distinctions, wherein the perceived size of the Chinese eye is used to theorize its population and civilization as lacking influence and civilizational intelligence.

---

<sup>39</sup> Chang, Elizabeth, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Aesthetics and Empire in 19th Century Britain*, Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 18

While countless examples persist on the formation of the Chinese Other to the visual gaze of the Empire, I wish to focus on the aspect of the “*peacock-like dress*”, the black hair, and the idea of the geometric body.

Tony Bennett<sup>40</sup> has spoken of the space of the museum, a particularly visual space, as the “*instrument of public instruction*”, and scholars such as Robert Aguiere<sup>41</sup> have argued, in the case of Mexico and Central America, as the site of the museum functioning as the reinforcement of the knowledge structure of “*informal empire*”. The idea of the museum as a space of informal empire may be tied to the Althusserian understanding of the role of art in the sphere of interpellation<sup>42</sup>, and it is important to note that *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* occurs in 1851, in London, while Marx writes in the same milieu. The Chinese section of the exhibition was quickly curated by the East India Company, and did not attract much attention.

Perhaps more interesting is Nathan Dunn’s exhibition entitled “Ten Thousand Chinese Things”, which displayed in Philadelphia and London in 1844, earning approving reviews from magazines such as *Court Magazine*<sup>43</sup>, who commend its crystallization of the Celestial Empire into an exhibition, calling it, “*the most interesting exhibition in London...and perhaps the world.*” Interestingly, the exhibition was opened again in London in 1851, at the wake of the Opium War, with the following acknowledgement,

*“The present crisis of affairs in China has awakened in the public mind a deep and powerful feeling of inquiry towards this singular and secluded people. The particular object with which the following pages are so immediately associated, proving beyond all other means, a useful and pleasing medium of conveying the information sought for; and*

---

<sup>40</sup> Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995)

<sup>41</sup> Aguiere, Robert, *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, xv–xvii .

<sup>42</sup> Althusser, Louis, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* , Notes towards an Investigation. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Verso: 1970, p.11

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, “Ten Thousand Things related to China and the Chinese,” *Court Magazine and Monthly Critic and Lady’s Magazine*, Vol. 27 (June 1843). Accessed from: Britain’s Chinese Eye, p. 194

*the copious remarks contained in former Catalogues of the Chinese Collection having been so favourably received by the public (of which upwards of 80,000 copies have been sold), the author has been induced to increase the size of the present volume by the addition of much original matter, together with information obtained by an abridgment of the latest and best authorities. The object desired in the present publication is to present to the reader, and the visitor of the Collection, the greatest amount of knowledge.*<sup>44</sup>

The number of copies sold at the museum indicate the likelihood of Marx, who lived in London at the time, attaining one. Charles Dickens, too, wrote on the exhibition, noting in a letter the sheer vastness of the Exhibition. The authenticity of the catalogue is drawn from Nathan Dunn spending close to 12 years in China (Court Magazine, p. 198). A descriptive account of the catalogue by Dunn reveals in Cases V, XIV, XLIV<sup>45</sup>, amongst others, paintings of the Chinese body and attire. Dunn, in his account, also notes the aspect of religion in China, saying, “*Many of the Chinese believe in fatalism; while ghosts, talismans, spells, charms and omens are quite common among them, besides many other branches of occult sciences are practices...by persons who exact great influence over their credulous countrymen.*”<sup>46</sup>

We can see a part of Marx’s conception of China and its religions, in addition to the Chinese form, as arising from exhibitions such as “Ten Thousand Chinese Things”. Through the space of the museum, and the exhibition, the empire comes to manifest itself in the idea of the miniature, and the crystallized that operates in the sphere of the cultural and artistic but inhabits anthropological and the civilizational. The aesthetic expressions of the Chinese body and may explain, in part, the visuality of Marx’s descriptions of and temperament even outside of his conceptualization of the Asiatic in his articles and essays.

Another noteworthy aspect that proliferated the sphere of Chinese artifacts in London was the “Chinese Junk”, a broken Chinese ship displayed on Parliament Street, between Somerset House

---

<sup>44</sup> Harvard Library Collections, 1843 Catalogue, Accessed from:

<https://blogs.harvard.edu/preserving/2015/06/03/nathan-dunn-and-his-museum-of-10000-chinese-things/>

<sup>45</sup> Entitled *Tragedians in Splendid Costume*, *Models of Chinese Boats* and *Chinese Pleasure Ground*, respectively.

<sup>46</sup> Dunn, Nathan, *Ten Thousand Chinese Things: A Descriptive Catalogue*, 1844, p.36. Accessed from: <http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b35822041.pdf>

and Westminster Abbey<sup>47</sup>, in 1851-53, a mere 1.2 miles from Marx's residence at Dean Street, Soho, in the 1850s. Often cited as a curiosity in London city tours of the time, Chang (Chang, 52) reads the presence of the "Chinese Junk" as a site for participatory site for meaning making, and yet the presence of it in simultaneity with the Opium War and the "Ten Thousand Chinese Things" exhibition suggests a claiming of control over Chinese property and artifacts, and in this sense, the idea of the Chinese body and civilization in the epistemic landscape.

Anne Veronica Witchard terms the proliferation of these visual artifacts in the English imagination as the extended project of Chinoiserie<sup>48</sup>. As a term often used for the use of Chinese motifs in Western art and imagination, for Witchard, the aesthetic aspect of Chinoiserie comes to be embedded in the narrative of empire-making, while still operating in the domain of the artistic. Indeed, a popular poem in the streets of London at the time of Dunn's exhibition, says, "*What a lot of Pekin pots and pepkins/ Mandarins with pig tails, rings and strings!/ How they all got here is quite a wonder/ China must be broken to pieces!*"<sup>49</sup>, demonstrating succinctly the effect of the project of empire-making on knowledge structures and everyday transactions.

A noteworthy aspect is the sources of Marx when writing about the Taiping Rebellion, which consisted largely of English bureaucrats and missionaries. M Harvey, the English Consul at Ningpo, is used by Marx multiple times as a source, such as in "Persia- China", and "Chinese Affairs". Marx also attended the lectures of Karl Gutzlaff, a missionary and translator during the Opium War, who was deeply ambivalent of the Taiping Rebellion, as expressed in his text, "Appeal to the Churches of Britain and America on Behalf of China"<sup>50</sup>. Both Harvey and Gutzlaff express the Rebellion in either terms of curtailment and disruption, such as in the case of Harvey, or in terms of the ambivalent and fraudulent nature of Chinese Christianity, as in the case of Gutzlaff, who further expresses the necessity of salvaging the Chinese soul into the "proper" Christian faith (Roberts 106).

---

<sup>47</sup> Keying, John, *The Chinese Junk*,," Illustrated London News, 1 April 1848, 220–22, 220. Accessed from: British Newspaper Archive

<sup>48</sup> Witchard, Anne, *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown*, Introduction, Ashgate, 2009, p. 17

<sup>49</sup> Keying, John, *The Chinese Junk*,," Illustrated London News, 1 April 1848, 222,. Accessed from: British Newspaper Archive

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, A D , Livingstone, David, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

It is important to note that Marx is critical of the British government, this is displayed to us in “The Case of the Lorcha Arrow”. wherein he dismisses the British government’s claim over the Chinese vessel, citing communication between Governor Yeh of the Chinese government and the British office, and painting the former as the logical individual. In Britain, meanwhile, a series of other caricatures proliferated, such as the writings of Thomas de Quincey, author of “Confessions of an English Opium Eater”, who conveyed his distaste for the Chinese civilization and their “*block-headed*” reaction to the Lorcha incident as an example of their civilizational incapacity<sup>51</sup>.

Marx’s conception on the Taiping Rebellion, initially supportive and subsequently dismissive occur due to the violence displayed during the Rebellion, which he then describes in culturally encoded terms of the Chinese Other, displaying the rhetoric of Empire. However, this occurs in simultaneous development with his own changing theories on the Asiatic Mode of Production and Oriental Despotism. Marx is influenced by his cultural milieu and the knowledge-building structure of the Empire, as is visible in his descriptions, and yet his own theories differ from his sources. For instance, he does not blindly adopt Gutzlaff’s reportage on the nature of religion, and instead focuses “Revolution in China and in Europe” to the aspect of a proletariat revolution overthrowing the empire.

The position of Marx’s scholarship during the period, therefore, must be marked along a series of contextual paradigms, altering the perception of his scholarship outside Said’s frame of reference<sup>52</sup> of him as an Orientalist, and Ahmed’s classification of his articles<sup>53</sup> as not displaying his formal analysis. The question of how Marx may be read: whether as a theorist who plainly replicates the rhetoric of empire, or as an individual mediating between the realms of multiple contextual configurations- from official documents in China, to the influence of his sources on the Taiping Rebellion, in addition to the culture of Chinoiserie in London- shall be investigated in the Conclusion.

---

<sup>51</sup> De Quincey, Thomas, *The China Question*, 1857, p. 450. Accessed from: <https://archive.org/details/TheChinaQuestionIn1857/page/n7>

<sup>52</sup> Said, Edward W, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979, p. 154

<sup>53</sup> Ahmed, Aijaz, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Verso 1992, p. 232



In the preceding chapters, I have elucidated Marx's conceptualization of the Asiatic: first through his own theorization of it in his texts between 1848-1862, wherein he forms his notions on the Orient, receiving his knowledge of the same from Francois Bernier, in part, as well as official bureaucratic correspondence. Marx's theoretical notions, on the nature of the British occupation in China, as well as the influence of missionaries such as Karl Gutzlaff, often arise in contrast to the popular British media of the time. This is notable in his addressal of the British government's reaction to the incident of the *Lorcha* arrow, as well as his dissection of the aspect of the religious from the work of Karl Gutzlaff- instead, he focuses on the larger nature of Oriental economies, and how this subsequently leads to the deification of the Despot, as conveyed in "Capital".<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, however, his rhetorical construction of the Orient in his articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*, and *Die Presse*, reveal a particularly visual aspect, which succeeds in replicating the rhetoric of Empire while often being opposed to the English empire in China. A number of cultural aspects that may have influenced his perception of the Asiatic body and temperament, including exhibitions such as "Ten Thousand Chinese Things", and the "Chinese Junk", amongst a tremendous number of other aspects that were produced in the discourse of Chinoiserie at the time. This has been elaborated on in considerable detail in the work of scholars such as Elizabeth Chang,( Chang 16-126) Anne Victoria Witchard (Witchard 11-230), and Han Kou<sup>55</sup>. A central question that this dissertation has attempted to negotiate and reconcile are the gaps and similarities between Marx's theories on Asiatic Society and the Orient, and his rhetorical constructions of the same in his articles.

Perry Anderson, in his text entitled "Lineages of the Absolutist State"<sup>56</sup>, notes the inaccuracies and lack of conceptual clarity that Marx exhibited when writing about China in the 1850s. However, it is noticeable that even in his introduction to the text, Anderson emphasizes that, "the

---

<sup>54</sup> Marx, Karl & Engels, Fredric, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, Progress Publishers, 1887, pp. 71. Accessed from: [https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Progress\\_Publishers](https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Progress_Publishers)

<sup>55</sup> Kou, Han, *The Great Exhibition and the Little One*, 2008. Accessed from: [https://otemae.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository\\_action\\_common\\_download&item\\_id=132&item\\_no=1&attribute\\_id=22&file\\_no=1](https://otemae.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository_action_common_download&item_id=132&item_no=1&attribute_id=22&file_no=1)

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, Perry, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, Verso World History Series, Nov. 2013 pg 418

*struggle between classes is ultimately resolved at the political- not the economic or the cultural-level of society.”* (Anderson 14)

In limiting the role of the cultural in the discourse of Marxist scholarship, Anderson displays his ideological considerations of relevance in the very beginning of his text. However, as has been demonstrated, the cultural can become the first site for the very articulation of vested interests and biases that shape the discourse of knowledge production and subsequently, even the notion of despotism, and the framing of a discourse on a particular civilization. Political subjects, and what comes to be recognized as the political, is deeply interwoven with the cultural.

Indeed, between Marx’s developing and changing notions on the Asiatic Mode of Production, the idea of private property and how important it is, and the geographical expanse of what he terms as the Orient comes to be layered with some ambiguity - and this is what makes it particularly noteworthy. In observing Marx’s Orientalism, as well as his deviances from it, a series of new formulations must be considered. Aijaz Ahmed notes a variety of evidence in order to prove that Marx was anti-colonial, in defiance to Said, but as Shad Naved notes in his essay entitled “The Colonial Encounter in Marxist Terms<sup>57</sup>”, the ‘colonial’ is not a very clear or easy formulation in Marx.

It is noteworthy that while Marx wrote on India, China and Persia, he never visited any of these lands, and his only detour out of Europe was a trip to Algiers before his death<sup>58</sup>. He was only the receptor of reportage, and was never involved in it.

The aspect of the Taiping Rebellion, and its violence is classified by him as a trait distinctly Chinese and Oriental and he invokes the idea of the “*devil*” (*Chinese Affairs*, 1862) in this formulation, while also calling the Chinese empire a “*fossil*” (*Chinese Affairs*, 1862). This ties into his notion of Oriental Despotism, but is also replete with the culturally encoded notion of the Chinese body as un-European, and echoes the descriptions of Nathan Dunn’s catalogues. This demonstrates the tied nature of the rhetorical, the cultural and the political, while also making ambiguous the question of whether Marx was only a repository of Oriental propaganda, or more.

---

<sup>57</sup> Naved, Shad, *The Colonial Encounter in Marxist Terms*, *Social Scientist*, Volume 36, No. 11, Dec 2008

<sup>58</sup> Mezzadra, Sandro, *In the Marxian Workshops: Producing Subjects*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018

Timothy Brennan notes the “*inexhaustible*” nature of Said’s Orientalism, and its presence as an “*ur-text*”, which generates a proliferation of thought as an epistemic system<sup>59</sup>. While Orientalism as an epistemic system and school of thought does provide a necessary rendering of Marx’s frameworks as racist, and provides the theoretical background for the concept of the Oriental Other, an aspect that comes to be sidelined is the development of his thought, and the deviance he exhibits with reference to the same. This must be noted in equivalent relevance to the aspect of the Oriental religion within Marx’s terms: the demonization of the Taiping Rebellion in visual terms is an attack that displays the influence of the empire-building project that many aspects of the British press, its bureaucracy and cultural institutions were actively propagating.

Critics of Said, such as O.P Kajariwal<sup>60</sup>, point to the idea of Occidentalism as monolithic and unchanging in Said’s discourse, ignoring the vast differences between different branches of Orientalist information and scholarship. Harry Oldmeadow<sup>61</sup> comments on the treatment of all knowledge production between East and West relations as a limited projection, that fails to capture the complexity and legitimacy of many accounts and experiences.

Indeed, a figure such as the British Royal Navy Officer and adventurer Augustus Lindley, who produced the first comprehensive account of the details of the Taiping Rebellion, would not entirely fit into Said’s paradigm, being the first British individual who actively spoke against the British presence in China, and spoke of the Taiping Rebellion in detail, in his account, “The History of the Ti-ping Revolution”<sup>62</sup>. Lindley published his text only four years after Marx’s final article on The Taiping Rebellion, in 1868. In it, he supports the aspect of Chinese Christianity, albeit in the condescending terms of a European individual legitimizing the devotion of the Taiping Rebels to their religion, even as he often corrects and teaches them the same. In a particularly noteworthy incident, he implores his English reader to notice the sheer

---

<sup>59</sup> Brennan, Timothy, *Places of Mind, Occupied Lands: Edward Said and Philology*. The Arab World Geographer: Vol. 7, p. 47-64, April 2004

<sup>60</sup> Kejariwal, O.P. *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past*, Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988, 221–233

<sup>61</sup> Oldmeadow, Harry. *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions*. World Wisdom, 2004

<sup>62</sup> Lin Le, *The History of the Ti-Ping Revolution*, Project Gutenberg E-Book, 2012. Accessed from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/39735/39735-h/39735-h.htm>

devotion with which a Taiping Rebel reads the Gospel, even as he repeats it to Lindley incorrectly (Lindley 468)

Lindley's account and treatment of the Taiping Rebellion is different from that of Marx, he acknowledges their religion even as feels the need to instruct them, revealing yet another dimension of British-Chinese relations in the Opium War.

The ethical and theoretical basis of this study in Marx's circumstances, influences and sources rests on the basis of Orientalism( as a field of scholarship) not being able to sufficiently encompass the entirety of multiple contexts and subject positions within the relations between the Orient and the Occident. While being subject to the visual rhetoric of Empire, Marx still displays deviances from it. In never travelling outside of Europe, however, Marx becomes, to Said, a reproducer of Western scholarship on the Orient. In "Orientalism"<sup>63</sup>, Said says, "*Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient to which he refers and on which he relies.*"

However, while the aspect of Marx's treatment of Oriental religion, and the Taiping Rebellion providing a series of binaries for him to construct his rhetoric on remains active, the vastness of opinions on the Asiatic, from Thomas de Quincey to Augustus Lindley, as well as Marx's own changing opinions and difference from public opinion must be understood as an active mediation between the classifications of the Orient and the Occident. Marx may be understood to exist in multiple contexts, between the uneasy meeting of his changing ideas, the limitations of his knowledge of China and the cultural realm of the British landscape. His own status as an exile within Britain contributes to his difference as well, with Jacques Derrida terming him<sup>64</sup>, "*a glorious, sacred, accursed but still clandestine immigrant as he was all his life*".

This is by no means an exhaustive study of the number of influences Marx may have had on his consideration of the Asiatic and the Orient. However, in pointing to the inconsistencies of his

---

<sup>63</sup> Said, Edward W, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979, pg. 20

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamu, Routledge, 2006, 219.

ideas on the theoretical model of Asia, as well as the differences in opinion he has from even his European sources, in conjunction with the figures of De Quincey and Augustus Lindley, a classification of Marx as an Orientalist reveals multiple points of departure.

## References

- A. Wittfogel, Karl, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, Vintage Books, 1957,
- Aguierre, Robert, *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005
- Ahmed, Aijaz, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Verso 1992
- Althusser, Louis, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Notes towards an Investigation. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Verso: 1970
- Anderson, Perry, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, Verso World History Series, Nov. 2013
- Anonymous, "Ten Thousand Things related to China and the Chinese," *Court Magazine and Monthly Critic and Lady's Magazine*, Vol. 27 (June 1843). Accessed from: Britain's Chinese Eye, Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995
- Bernier, Françoise, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, W Pickering, 1671. Accessed from : <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/16738/>
- Brennan, Timothy, *Places of Mind, Occupied Lands: Edward Said and Philology*. *The Arab World Geographer*: Vol. 7, p. 47-64 , April 2004
- Chang, Elizabeth, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Aesthetics and Empire in 19th Century Britain*, Stanford University Press, 2010

De Quincey, Thomas, *The China Question*, 1857, p. 450. Accessed from:

<https://archive.org/details/TheChinaQuestionIn1857/page/n7>

Dunn, Nathan, *Ten Thousand Chinese Things: A Descriptive Catalogue*, 1844, p.36. Accessed

from: <http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b35822041.pdf>

Harvard Library Collections, 1843 Catalogue, Accessed from:

<https://blogs.harvard.edu/preserving/2015/06/03/nathan-dunn-and-his-museum-of-10000-chinese-things>

Hegel, *Lectures On the Philosophy of History* 1861, p. 109.

Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006

Kejariwal, O.P. *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past*, Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988

Keying, John, *The Chinese Junk*,” *Illustrated London News*, 1 April 1848, 220–22, 220.

Accessed from: British NewsPaper Archive

Koebner, Richard: *Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14, 3/4 (1951

Kou, Han, *The Great Exhibition and the Little One*, Routledge, Nov 2008.

Lindner, Kolja, *Marx's Eurocentrism. Postcolonial studies and Marx Scholarship*. *Radical Philosophy*, 2010, pp.27-41.

Levy, George, *A Note on Montesquieu and Marx*, pg 1-6, sourced from :

[https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/63679/dalrev\\_vol28\\_iss4\\_pp343\\_348.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/63679/dalrev_vol28_iss4_pp343_348.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Lin Le, *The History of the Ti-Ping Revolution*, Project Gutenberg E-Book, 2012. Accessed from:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/39735/39735-h/39735-h.htm>

Marx, Karl, *Chinese Affairs*, Die Presse, July 7 1862. Accessed from:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1862/07/colonialism-modernization.htm>

-*The Case of the Lorcha Arrow*, New York Daily Tribune, Jan 23 1857. Accessed from:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/01/23.htm>

-*Persia-China*, New York Daily Tribune, May 20, 1857 . Accessed from:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/06/05.htm>

-, *The British Rule in India*, New York Daily Tribune, June 25 1853. Accessed from:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm>

-*Trade with China*, New York Daily Tribune, 1859, Dec 03

- *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, 1857-58, tr. Jack Cohen, sourced:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/precapitalist/ch01.htm>, 30/3/19

Marx to Engels, 14 June 1853'. Sourced from:

[marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/letters/53\\_06\\_14.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/letters/53_06_14.htm)

Marx, Karl & Engels, Fredric, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, Progress Publishers

Marx to Engels, 2 June, 1853, MECW, vol. 39, p. 332

Mezzadra, Sandro, *In the Marxian Workshops: Producing Subjects*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018

Minuti, Rolando, *The Concept of Oriental Despotism: From Aristotle to Marx*, EGO: European History Online, 2012-05-03

Naved, Shad, *The Colonial Encounter in Marxist Terms*, Social Scientist, Volume 36, No. 11, Dec 2008

Oldmeadow, Harry. *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions*. World Wisdom, 2004

Roberts, A D , Livingstone, David, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

Said, Edward W, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979,

Witchard, Anne, *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown, Introduction*, Ashgate, 2009



## ICS OCCASIONAL PAPER *Back Issues*

ICS Occasional Papers showcase ongoing research of ICS faculty and associates on aspects of Chinese and East Asian politics, international relations, economy, society, history and culture.

<b>Issue No/Month</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
No.59  Sep 2020	A Study of Colonial India's Border Making Project vis-à-vis China (1890-1947)	Vinod C. Khanna
No.58 Sep 2020	The Masked Gendered Profile of the World Exposed During the Covid-19 Era: Comparing China and India	Usha Chandran
No.57  Sep 2020	India's Envoy to China 1961-63-P K Banerjee's China Day	Kishan S Rana
No.56  Aug 2020	The Chinese Sovereign Wealth Fund	Tahera Daud
No.55  Aug 2020	China's Cyber Governance: Between Domestic Compulsions and National Security	Mrittika Guha Sarkar
No.54  Aug 2020	Traditional Cultural Ideas and Symbols, and Possibilities of Discursive Legitimacy in Contemporary China	Devendra Kumar



## PRINCIPAL SUPPORTERS TO ICS RESEARCH FUND

### TATA TRUSTS



MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



INDIAN COUNCIL OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

GARGI AND VIDYA  
PRAKASH DUTT FOUNDATION



JAMNALAL BAJAJ  
FOUNDATION

PIROJSHA GODREJ FOUNDATION

## ICS PUBLICATIONS



A short brief on a topic of contemporary interest with policy-related inputs



Platform for ongoing research of the ICS faculty and associates



Authored by the faculty, also emerging from research projects and international conferences



Draft paper of ongoing research

## ICS JOURNAL



In its 56th year, *China Report* is a refereed journal in the field of social sciences and international relations. It welcomes and offers a platform for original research from a multi-disciplinary perspective, in new and emerging areas, by scholars and research students. It seeks to promote analysis and vigorous debate on all aspects of Sino-Indian relations, India-China comparative studies and multilateral and bilateral initiatives and collaborations across Asia.

*China Report* is brought out by Sage Publications Ltd, New Delhi.

Editor  
Associate Editor  
Assistant Editor  
Book Review Editor

Sreemati Chakrabarti  
G. Balachandirane  
Rityusha Mani Tiwari  
Vijay K Nambiar



### INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES

8/17, Sri Ram Road, Civil Lines,  
Delhi 110054, INDIA  
T: +91 (0) 11 2393 8202  
F: +91 (0) 11 2383 0728

<http://www.icsin.org/>  
[info@icsin.org](mailto:info@icsin.org)

[twitter.com/ics\\_deihi](https://twitter.com/ics_deihi)

[facebook.com/icsin.delhi](https://facebook.com/icsin.delhi)

[in.linkedin.com/icsdelhi](https://in.linkedin.com/icsdelhi)

[soundcloud.com/ICSIN](https://soundcloud.com/ICSIN)

[youtube.com/ICSWEB](https://youtube.com/ICSWEB)

[instagram.com/icsdelhi](https://instagram.com/icsdelhi)