Front. Hist. China 2012, 7(3): 442–472
DOI 10.3868/s020-001-012-0023-9

FORUM

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The Strange Fate of Marxist Civil Society Discourse in Japan and China

Abstract Since the fall of the Soviet bloc and the various transformations in China since the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars in both China and other regions have begun to use the term "civil society" to denote a realm of political practice separate from the state. Even today, the Chinese philosophy professor Han Lixin uses the term to denote future possibilities for China. However, unlike earlier works on civil society that attempt to guide China through Western liberal theory, Han explicitly draws on the Japanese "civil society Marxists," such as Hirata Kiyoaki and Mochizuki Seiji. This essay in some ways mimics Han's attempt to bring together Japanese Marxist theory and contemporary Chinese reality, but claims that reexamining theories of civil society in Japan should lead us to emphasize the logic of capital in understanding Chinese society and envisioning a future for socialism. The essay introduces the complex theorization of civil society by an often overlooked Marxist, Kakehashi Akihide. Kakehashi explicitly grasps civil society in relation to more fundamental categories in Marx's work, such as the commodity form. In this way, he points the way to a deeper understanding of the dynamic of capitalism and by extension the history of particular regions of the world, such as China. However, in the 1960s and early 1970s when the "civil society Marxists" Hirata Kiyoaki and Mochizuki Seiji popularized their reading of Marx, they focused on civil society as a moment of liberation without stressing the totalizing dynamic of capitalism. The essay discusses Han's use of Hirata and Mochizuki, before returning to the problem of how thinking of capitalism as a totalizing dynamic could further illuminate issues of post-1949 and contemporary China. In short, I argue that civil society is always already imbricated in a more fundamental logic of producing surplus value, which serves to undermine the freedom that civil society is supposed to realize. Hence a true theory of human emancipation must focus on the totalizing logic of capitalism and how to overcome it.

Keywords capitalism, Japanese Marxism, civil society in China, Kakehashi

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Introduction

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, "civil society" gained new life as a trope mobilized against state power and especially against actually existing socialism. Proponents of civil society have inhabited a complex and contradictory relationship to Marxism. On the one hand, given that our modern concept of civil society owes much to Hegel and Marx, the use of civil society to criticize Marxism appears to mobilize Marxism against itself. On the other hand, in Europe and America since the 1980s, many former Marxists have chastised Marx for thinking of civil society as a merely economic sphere and for failing to highlight the significance of social movements that are autonomous from the state.[1] Marxists have countered this objection by focusing on how economic forces form the condition for the possibility of political practice in capitalist society.

The starting point of such a debate is the separation of the state from civil society, which was precisely Hegel's contribution when he criticized previous theorists who merely opposed civil to natural society. However, both Hegel and Marx had recourse to a larger dynamic that enveloped both the state and civil society. In Hegel's work, Spirit was at the root of this greater movement. One could argue that the early Marx at times inverted the Hegelian paradigm to develop a materialist version of the dynamic of Spirit. But in Marx's mature works, it is the historically specific logic of capital that unites civil society and the state and related antinomies between individual and community. This deeper perspective allows us to grasp debates about civil society at a more fundamental level, one that shows that the significance of the concept of civil society lies beyond the concept itself. In Marx's mature works, civil society is conceived as pertaining to the realm of circulation and thus could be replaced by some other mode of distribution. However, the contradictions that emerge in civil society, including the contradiction between concrete individuals in civil society and their abstract representation in the state, must be explained with reference to a deeper level, namely the level of production.

Japanese and Chinese Marxist debates about civil society go some way toward shedding light on the above questions, since the theories at issue in these debates encompass both the critique of the state from the standpoint of civil society and the attempt to understand civil society in relation to capitalism. Despite the differences in the political and economic histories of China and Japan, they have had strangely similar love affairs with Marxism. Japan was arguably the only

[1] See for example, Jean Cohen, *Class and Civil Society*.

country in which Marxism was dominant among intellectuals even though the state was anything but left-wing. Moreover, as intellectuals from each of these countries distanced themselves from Marxism, ironically sometimes through Marxism, the concept of civil society as an ideal emerged. In 1960s Japan, Marxists invoked the term "civil society" as they rethought the meaning of socialism in the face of the crisis of actually existing socialist states. In China, one of the few socialist states to survive the crisis of socialism in the late 1980s, intellectuals have drawn on civil society to combat the excesses of the state-socialist past. From this perspective, it is not surprising that scholars in China have found the Japanese Marxist proponents of civil society particularly relevant. The Japanese Marxist shift from either ambivalent or critical stances toward civil society, to thinking of it as a symbol of socialism, is evident in Mochizuki Seiji's writings in the early 1970s. The translation of this work into Chinese has given it something of an afterlife in contemporary China. Han Lixin, the translator of Mochizuki's work, has attempted to use these texts to rethink China's transition to capitalism. While neither Mochizuki's nor Han's works have been widely received or had a large impact in China, their writings are significant because they express aspects of prevalent ideology using Marxist language. In particular, they represent a receding of political imagination from the goal of overcoming capitalism and reveal an inability to make sense of the contemporary world, not to mention contemporary China and Japan.

Indeed, those who have read late 1960s Japanese debates about civil society would perhaps have a sense of déjà vu when examining how civil society is used in contemporary China. This overlap in discourse suggests that interrogating the history of the concept of civil society in Japan can provide theoretical insight into modern China. While most discussions of Marx's civil society deal with Marx's early critique of Hegel, where the term most often appears, Marxists in postwar Japan theorized civil society in relation to Marx's mature thought, in particular the logic of capital. We shall see how this perspective allows us to grasp structural change in twentieth-century China from a different angle, one made incisive by Moishe Postone. This essay will begin with early discussions of civil society in Japan and eventually deal with the work of Kakehashi Akihide, a largely overlooked Japanese Marxist, who theorized civil society from the 1930s to the 1960s and focused specifically on how to analyze this concept in relation to both Marx's critique of Hegel and the logic of the commodity form. Kakehashi did not abandon the critique of capitalism and the commodity when he adopted the concept of civil society. Indeed, the commodity form turns out to be a concept that works at a more fundamental level than does civil society or the state. Nonetheless, he held on to the concept of civil society to denote mass political practice. I show how Mochizuki and Han downplay the critique of the commodity and turn civil society into an ideal. In the final part of the essay, I will

examine how Moishe Postone's reading of capitalism, which could be understood as deepening the insights found in Kakehashi's works, provides a way to understand twentieth-century China beyond the opposition between civil society and the state.

From Japanese Criticisms of Civil Society to Civil Society Marxists

The idea of civil society has a contested history in Japan. The struggles around the concept of civil society are intimately connected to discussions about Japanese modernity, both progressive and conservative. The term *shiminshakai*, the standard translation of "civil society," was introduced to Japan in 1923 in a translation of Marx's preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*. Although *shiminshakai* was used to translate *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, the term *bürgerlich* itself was always rendered as "capitalistic" (*shihonka teki*). This ambiguity occurs in English translations as well and shows the connection between civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and capitalist society in both Hegel's and Marx's writings.[2]

Japanese intellectuals of the Showa and Taisho periods were interested in civil society in relation to the concept of capitalism and the success or failure of the Meiji Restoration. As is well known, Marxists of the Lecture Faction[3] contended that the Meiji Restoration represented an incomplete bourgeois revolution and that the task of Marxists was to first complete this revolution, which involved developing civil society and capitalism in Japan. In 1934, Yamada Moritarō and Hirano Yoshitarō, two representative scholars of the Lecture Faction, published their respective criticisms of Japanese capitalism in relation to the English model. Their discussion is an appropriate place to begin a discussion of civil society because they each focus on a certain aspect of it: civil society as an objective economic realm of the market and as enlightenment-oriented political practice. Yamada argued that Japanese capitalism remained trapped in earlier forms of

[2] For a discussion of the concept of civil society in Hegel and the early Marx, see Viren Murthy, "Leftist Mourning." In many ways, the final section of the present essay takes the analysis of civil society further and in some ways goes against the conclusions of the earlier essay.

[3] In the 1920s and 1930s, there were two major schools of Marxism in Japan, the Lecture Faction and the Labour-Farmer Faction. These schools differed in their vision of how to interpret the significance of the Meiji Restoration. Put simply, the Lecture Faction claimed that the Meiji Restoration was an incomplete revolution and thus Japan was not yet capitalist. Thus the task for Japan was to first complete the bourgeois revolution and then create a socialist revolution. This is a little bit like the scholars in China during the 1980s who claimed that China was still feudal and needed to modernize, i.e., promote capitalism. The Labour-Farmer Faction on the other hand, contended that the Meiji Resoration, although incomplete, made Japan capitalist.

production involving serfdom, which made him rank Japan below other developed capitalist countries. Hirano accepted a narrative similar to Yamada's but underscored political practice. He traced problems with the people's rights movement in the Meiji period back to incomplete capitalism and the inability to overcome feudalism. In his own words,

> The most thoroughgoing bourgeois democratic political transformation (especially in France) used the unstoppable necessity of bourgeois development to oppose the feudal system that had power and obstructed it. Moreover, in order to overthrow the system, it created a total transformation of the bourgeois system. Here the changes in favor of civil society (*shiminshakai*) involved getting rid of the rulers of the old system, a state system that was based on the interests of a few feudal lords and was thus separate from all of the citizens (*kokumin*). Through getting rid of these old rulers, the above transformations gave the state back to the independent individuals making up civil society (*shiminshakai*).[4]

In the above passage "civil society" is used interchangeably with "capitalist society," which is thought of as a positive development. Apart from the positive evaluation of capitalism, this model generalizes the English model of development and thus equates capitalism with its liberal form. Yamada constructed this argument against despotism and centralized state power and anticipated the way that people drew on civil society in the late 1960s to criticize actually existing socialist states. However, before looking more closely at pro-civil society theorists, I would like to examine the critique of civil society from both Marxist and non-Marxist perspectives.

Watsuji Tetsurō and Society of Individual Interests

Among Japanese non-Marxist critics of civil society, Watsuji Tetsurō stands out because he connected his attack on civil society to a larger critique of the modern world. Although Watsuji was not a Marxist, his work is significant in this context because his critique of civil society mimics the critique in Marx's "On the Jewish Question" that civil society atomizes and fragments society. Watsuji was associated with the Kyoto School philosophers who, during the 1930s and 1940s, famously developed a philosophical theory to overcome modernity and in particular the West. While they did not grasp modernity historically, the major thinkers of the Kyoto School, such as Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, pointed to a number of antinomies associated with modern philosophy and attempted to

[4] Hirano Yoshitarō. *Nihon shihonshugi shakai no kikō*, 154.

overcome them by rethinking the concept of totality in relation to radically reinterpreted ideals from Buddhism. Given their political orientation and their support for both the Pacific War and the invasion of China, one could not call Kyoto School philosophers left Hegelians, but one could perhaps call them anti-modern Hegelians or Eastern Hegelians since they constructed notions of Buddhist nothingness heavily mediated by German idealism and then symbolically connected such concepts to an idea of Asian resistance.

More than the philosophers officially associated with the Kyoto School, Watsuji was interested in social philosophy and launched a critique of civil society from the right, stressing the idea of community, which he associated with resistance to the West. He refused to translate the German term *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as *shiminshakai* (市民社会), a term that remains the most popular translation for "civil society" in both China and Japan today. In a well-known essay that criticizes Japanese life in the cities, Watsuji used the term "society of individual interests" (*riekishakai* 利益社会) to translate *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* to highlight that it was a bourgeois or capitalist society in which people primarily pursued their individual interests. Recall that for Hegel as well, civil society would disintegrate into various atomistic individuals if the state did not cancel and lift the contradictions in civil society to a higher level. In what was probably a response to contemporary Lecture Faction Marxists, Watsuji connected the problem of the emergence of civil society to issues that plagued Japan since the Meiji Restoration:

> In a certain sense, the Russo-Japanese War was not only a watershed event in relation to Japanese capitalism, but also a watershed event in terms of the history of the Japanese spirit. Since the Meiji Restoration, there were the contrary positions of driving out the barbarian and developing and opening the country, enlightening Korea, and Enlightenment and Development, but after the Russo-Japanese War these contradictory attitudes were unified in the idea of capitalist civilization. In other words, the mutual constraining of the awareness of communal society and the development of interest-based society was broken; there remained only a tendency toward the development of interest-society. It is not that communal society has died, but only that *awareness* (*jikaku*) of it has grown feeble.[5]

Creating a variation on a Hegelian theme, Watsuji splits the Meiji Restoration into two contradictory aspects: on the one hand there is the discourse of civilization, which is connected to capitalist atomization; on the other is the

[5] Emphasis in the original, Watsuji Tetsurō, *Keizoku Nihon seishinshi kenkyū*, 447.

nationalist, anti-imperialist discourse of repelling the barbarian,[6] which is connected to the idea of community. He highlights the lack of community caused by the atomization related to capitalism, which in his view is intimately connected to encroachment by the West. In a Hegelian manner, Watsuji contends that community remains concealed and it is just that people must become self-conscious of their own nature. In this sense, they must look beyond the appearance of a civil society of individual interests, which emerged after the Meiji Restoration. Watsuji invoked community in the hope of curtailing the fragmentation caused by a society based on individual interests. While Watsuji was no Marxist, Japanese Marxists would also attempt to analyze and overcome the fragmentation associated with capitalist society by taking their cue from Hegel.

Kakehashi Akihide

Kakehashi Akihide's discourse is more directly philosophical than that of either the Lecture Faction theorists or Watsuji, and he does not make much reference to historical events. Kakehashi combines the philosophy of the Kyoto School and his own reading of Marxism to construct a theory of civil society as representing both the fragmentary nature of capitalism and the site of political practice. He connects the concept of civil society to the commodity form and shows that even if the concept refers to the realm of circulation, it embodies contradictions that relate to the mode of production. Like Hegel, Kakehashi grounds civil society in a more fundamental movement, which he came to understand through a dialogue with the Kyoto School philosophers.

Kakehashi's career spans both the prewar and the postwar eras and although he eventually became a Marxist, his initial exposure to philosophy was with the famous Kyoto School philosophers Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime. In his early essays, he followed the lead of his famous teachers and attempted to overcome the subject-object dichotomy in the social sciences. He contended that the social sciences should not attempt to copy the object but to grasp objectivity itself, through the negation of the object by the subject. In this we see the Hegelian dimension of Kakehashi's discourse: his focus not on the immediate presentation of the object to consciousness, but on how objectivity emerges through the reflective mediating of the object by the subject. Through this process of reflection, the subject not only grasps objectivity as mediated by the subject, but also understands the subject's own freedom, which will become the

[6] This specifically refers to the term *sonnō jōi*, which implies attacking the foreign imperialists. The idea of the barbarian is partially taken from the Chinese discourse, but here Japan becomes the center of civilization.

basis for Kakehashi's vision of civil society.

In an essay written in 1937, Kakehashi develops the implications of his epistemology for a theory of capitalism by interrogating Tanabe Hajime's idea of species, which was formulated around the same time. Tanabe famously expounded a theory of the dialectical relationship between the species and the individual, in which the individual and species were opposed but at the same time, at a deeper level, the individual expressed the species. Kakehashi contends that one must place Tanabe's discussion in relation to the logic of capital. Instead of the relationship between species and individual, Kakehashi points to the dialectic between capital and labor:

> The *Sosein* (essence) of capitalist society, which is capital as a self-movement that is objectively necessary, is the expression of the wage laborer's productive labor. Moreover, capital expresses the alienated labor of the laborer. From this perspective, the wage laborer must take capital as the absolute other.
>
> Insofar as capital is concerned, as this objectified material subject is determined as a generic you (*nanji*), the wage laborer as the self [or I] is none other than the generic self as historical subject, through its awareness of the individual self. Put differently, the movement of capital, which is nothing but the objectively alienated laws of necessity, . . . can return as a material subject from the alienated state and then develop a truly free self-movement.[7]

Kakehashi propels the concepts of the Kyoto School into the context of Marx's capital and by so doing contends that capital represents the alienated power of the species. From this perspective, Kakehashi's work in 1937 already went beyond the usual reading of the early Marx, as focusing on a distinction between civil society and the state; he turns our attention to the totalizing dynamic of capital. Within the totalizing dynamic of capital lies the power to create a new community,

> Reality as the real object of consciousness is a reality that is historically free, self-negating, and social. This reality is the self-expressive world of the alienated objectivity of the wage-laboring class as historical subject.
>
> However, the real social activity of the wage-laboring classes, as the concrete self-expression of these classes and as an objective substance, negatively and hostilely weighs down on this class itself.[8]

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[7] Kakehashi Akihide, *Kakehashi Akihide kezai tetsugaku chosakushū*, 220–21.
[8] Ibid., 222–23.

Kakehashi invokes a totality that is constructed by alienated labor. He holds that workers are the subject of history and at the same time, that they are negated by their own action, which suggests that labor as capital is another subject of history—labor and capital are two sides of the same coin, but their forms of subjectivity can be different. In other words, although capital is the self-moving subject, it does not have subjectivity like Hegel's Spirit. Capital represents the drive of self-valorizing value, and, to the extent that labor creates surplus value, it must also be understood as part of capital.

Kakehashi would develop these theories with more explicit reference to Marx's concept of civil society after the war. There are of course great changes in the discursive context after Japan's defeat and in particular, although the philosophers of the Kyoto School remained revered as thinkers, aspects of Kyoto School philosophy came under attack because of their relation to fascism. In particular, in lieu of social totality, in early postwar Japan, scholars heatedly debated about various forms of democracy and about how Japan could become a democratic nation. Scholars became more interested in civil society and in particular Marx's conception of civil society. Kakehashi's work is significant in this context because, unlike those who would focus primarily on the critique of social totality as part of a critique of fascism, Kakehashi launched a critique of civil society by comparing Hegel's, Feuerbach's, and Marx's respective ideas. He attempted to affirm both sides of the concept: civil society as capitalist alienation and also as the site of political practice that could overcome the former.

In an essay entitled "The Self-emancipation of the Citizen in Civil Society," written in 1953, Kakehashi begins with a standard definition of Hegel's concept of civil society as a system of needs, a realm where individuals realize their individuality as opposed to the realms of the state and the family. At this level, his analysis of civil society does not go beyond the sphere of circulation. However, he notes that behind Hegel's description is a logic of emancipation, which is more fully developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely a logic of Spirit's self-alienation through nature and then self-discovery as subject through the process of this externalizing. From this perspective, we can see that Hegel saw civil society as part of a larger dynamic, namely the dynamic of the human spirit, and that this dynamic could not be understood merely from the perspective of civil society. In Kakehashi's view, both Feuerbach and Marx attacked Hegel's idea of the relationship between civil society and Spirit, but Feuerbach merely criticized Spirit from the standpoint of civil society. That is, Feuerbach claims that the problem of Spirit and religion lies merely in that human beings alienate their powers onto an ideal being. Thus he sets the basis of his critique human beings' sensuous lives in civil society. From this perspective, Feuerbach's ideas remain at the level of circulation. He is not able to grasp civil society as a product of alienation or as an object to be overcome.

Kakehashi points out that from his early works, Marx critically analyzed the material relations in civil society and this was the basis of his criticism of Hegel. However, he notes that Marx developed this critique most thoroughly in relation to production in *Das Kapital*:

> The analysis of the commodity as the economic cell form of modern capitalist society also implies a principle of grasping critically the humanity of the modern citizen (*kindai teki shimin*). The idea that all things are commodities or that human labor is objectified means that such things have values that are expressed in money. The dual nature of the commodity that contains the contradictory unity of exchange value and use value expresses the totalizing contradiction of the whole of capitalist society in cell form.... At the same time, the commodity form is the principle to explain the loss of humanity, the self-fragmentation and the self-alienation in the various forms in which the modern citizen is particularly concretized—for example, into the bourgeoisie and proletariat classes, into intellectual and manual laborers, in short, into modern occupations and experts. Each random commodity has a use related to its natural form and also a specific value that has no relation to its use. Moreover, from the standpoint of the original character of the commodity, commodities are the same because they are the result of the expenditure of abstract labor. They are nothing but a certain quantity. Consequently, the use of each commodity, that is its use value, becomes irrelevant; it becomes an abstract concreteness. In the world of commodities, even human beings are only abstract subjects of desire as citizens (*shimin*). The form of their particular determination as citizens, that is the abstract concreteness of their utility, refers for example to the fact that they might play an important role as "generals or as bankers" both for themselves and for others, but still this is all irrelevant from the perspective of the abstract and pure form of determination as human being.[9]

Kakehashi's comments go beyond recent analyses of Marx's relation to Hegel and their respective critiques of civil society because he highlights a crucial issue, namely that Marx's concept of the commodity imbricates civil society in a totalizing dynamic. In other words, the abstractness associated with the idea of citizen could be expressed in different ways in forms of capitalism that do not have a realm of the market and private ownership, such as post-1949 China. From this perspective, Kakehashi's analysis allows us to bring new meaning to Lenin's point that "the national state is the rule and the 'norm' of capitalism."[10]

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[9] Ibid., 236.
[10] Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," 313.

The nation-state presents a fundamental problem of representation and identity, which is based upon the commodity form. Therefore, according to Kakehashi, it is no longer, as with Feuerbach, merely a problem of attacking the abstract state from the standpoint of the concrete in civil society or vice versa; rather, Kakehashi points out that the concreteness of civil society and the abstractness of the state are rooted in production. They represent two sides of the antinomy of the commodity form and through this are dialectically connected. Kakehashi continues his analysis by reading Marx's early works in light of this connection between the commodity and political alienation:

> Here of course private particularistic interest-based relations emerge, which are opposed to public universal interest-based relations. It is not the case that on the one hand the real civil person (*shimin*) is a private individual and on the other s/he is a public citizen (*kokumin*). Rather, both of these are external representations of the fact that individuals are not completely human. It is the same human being that has this doubled contradictory character in civil society, that is, on the one hand a civil individual and on the other an individual as citizen. Taking this logic further, this is a development of the contradiction between civil society and the modern state. This is a political expression of the modern form of the human being's self-alienation. In "A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" and "On the Jewish Question," Marx systematically shows the alienation of basic social and political relations of the human world, which is the self-alienation of human relationships in politico-social forms. In these two essays, Marx criticizes the particularistic aspect of human beings as human beings who own money and commodities. That is, his critique is not limited to the people of the capitalist class. Rather, to the extent that people live in a capitalist society, they all have a common particularistic character. This is the doubled self-contradictory nature of the human being in civil society. Marx deals with this doubled character as a general object.[11]

Kakehashi here alludes to Marx's analysis of citizenship and civil society in "On the Jewish Question" and in "A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in which Marx contends that under capitalism the concrete human being in civil society is opposed to the abstract representation of this human being in the state. Kakehashi underscores this opposition's having a foundation in the antinomy between concrete use value and abstract exchange value, which is the cell form of the whole of capitalist society, and for this reason it points to a condition that transcends the antagonism between classes. It represents human alienation in

[11] Kakehashi Akihide, *Kakehashi Akihide kezai tetsugaku chosakushū*, 245–46.

general.

But at this juncture, Kakehashi makes a gesture that recalls the arguments of many Marxists who were his contemporaries, namely to think of the universal alienation and dehumanization of capitalism in relation to a transhistorical narrative of alienation. About the relationship between Hegel and Marx he comments:

> In other words, one does not seek the mere economic or mere political liberation of the human being who is politically and economically particularized and alienated. Rather, through these particularized liberations, one seeks the liberation of the human being moving toward realizing the true social human being and the complete human being. In Marx's view, the human being is a future-looking and social animal. Moreover, the human being is a species that as the master of nature attained self-awareness through sublating external necessity. Through the emergence of this origin, human beings became aware of the task of social totality. Through the development of class society, to the extent that human beings fell into self-alienation, the goal of a social and free complete human being becomes a universality to be realized in the future. However, in Hegel's view absolute spirit or the state as a concrete universal determines the particular and the essence (*Wesen*) in the past (*Gewesen*) as a complete concrete universal. It is a concept for the present. Even though Marx speaks of the same concrete universal, one must note that the logical structure is different.[12]

In the above gesture toward humanistic Marxism, Kakehashi makes the human being the standpoint of critique; the human plays a role somewhat similar to Hegel's Spirit. Just as Hegel's Spirit falls into history, in Kakehashi's narrative, after human beings gain self-awareness through overcoming nature and have a longing for community, they fall into self-alienation through creating class societies. After this, in Kakehashi's reading of Marx, the goal of a complete human being must be realized in the future. Kakehashi describes the type of society or state to be realized in the future, when people overcome self-alienation:

> However, even if the laborer must only sell his labor in the market for a limited time, this is his only property and if he does not sell this he cannot exist as a human being. Therefore, this shows that he is completely alienated as a commodity. Moreover, Marx believed that more than anything else one

[12] Ibid., 252–53.

> needed to sublate the self-alienation of the worker in civil society. Here one hopes for true freedom to be realized through mediation by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This freedom would be in a society where all the people reach a higher level.... In this socialist state or communist society, the individual as individual attains the highest level and the state is the common property of all (*res publica*) or a community in which everyone can participate.[13]

Kakehashi argues that the totality of human history is propelled by alienated labor and points to a sociality in which the antinomies of capitalist society no longer exist. The passage is one of the few places where Kakehashi mentions the dictatorship of the proletariat, but like Lukács before him, much of his analysis goes beyond common understandings of the dynamic between capital and labor. Indeed, in his description of the ideal society, the proletariat seems to be replaced by the human being. Moreover, true individual freedom does not imply opposition to the community. Rather, everyone participates in the ideal community. To some extent, this discourse echoes Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which also aimed at overcoming the antinomy between the individual and society. However, while Hegel believed that such an ideal community was to be achieved in the three-tiered structure of family, civil society, and state, Kakehashi follows Marx in contending that such a community must be realized in the future in a different type of republic.

Thus what is the relationship between civil society and the future community? Given that civil society has capitalism as its condition of possibility, the link between civil society and socialism concerns capitalism's own dialectical relation to socialism. Kakehashi makes some remarks about how civil society could become the space of political practice and in this context mentions the masses:

> The concrete universal should sublate particular externality, but this concrete universal also exists within the externality itself. Substantially, there is only alienated externality, but from the standpoint of concepts this externality… is both affirmed and negated, is both being and nothing. This concept directly shows that there is a concealed unity in the condition of fragmented externality. The particular is self-contradictory and itself is universality. This is the irresistible form that brings alienation to its completion. Therefore, in the realm of sensually given substantial externality, we directly are made aware of task, obligation, and practical compulsion. This is the structure of Marx's concrete universal. Hegel also hoped for the concrete universal in the modern world, but this was as a

[13] Ibid., 255.

> concept to be reflected on. In Marx's view, the concept needed to be sensibly intuited…. Moreover, with respect to the true political practice of the citizen who is aware of this universal as action, to the extent that the highest level of personality is substantially possible, one must precisely call this concrete universal the common space of the masses.[14]

Kakehashi begins by discussing concrete universality, but notes that in order for this to be realized, there must somehow exist within the alienated world the potential to bring about its own negation. Indeed the term alienation already implies subjects who have been alienated but have the potential to regain their subjectivity and make history. The concrete universal, symbolic of both capitalist and socialist society, is both concrete and universal. Therefore, it encompasses both the sensuous and the concept. Because both the universal and the particular are self-contradictory and point beyond themselves, by becoming aware of this movement, people intuit the task of history. This awareness in turn becomes the subjectivity that creates the space of the masses.

The potential for transformation lies within civil society, but in the collective space of the masses. We should perhaps distinguish between the masses and citizens in civil society. There has been a long discussion about the masses, but in a recent essay discussing the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake, Ikegami Yoshihiko distinguishes between the masses (*minshu*) and citizens (*shimin*). "Here I do not speak of citizens, but use the term 'masses.' This does not refer to the 'people' (*shomin*) who are torn from life and discussed individually in the media…. I refer to the figure of the masses as those who have names but are a nameless group."[15] Ikegami points to the emergence of masses learning and intellectuals learning from the masses after the earthquake and tsunami. A number of scholars have compared the effects of the earthquake with the trauma of Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, which provides the immediate context for Kakehashi's essay. The key point here is the difference between the citizen in civil society, whose imagination is limited to reigning one-sided ideologies, and the masses, who while formally within civil society emerge as a potential counterforce that could go beyond both civil society and capitalism. Kakehashi highlights that it is capitalist alienation that makes the common space of the masses possible, but the ultimate potential of these masses is that they realize what Kakehashi calls a state that is the common property of all and in which all participate. In other words, the masses are the concrete expression of the idea that Kakehashi mentioned above, which is within capitalism but points beyond it. They further realize an alternative form of community beyond capitalist

[14] Ibid., 259.
[15] Ikegami Yoshihiko, "'We Need More Salt': Reflections on the 2011 Earthquake."

alienation. This idea of the masses can be explained with reference to Sandro Mezzadra's recent discussion of the multitude and their production of the common:

> To imagine a process of political subjectivation of the multitude means to think of the production of the common as a work in progress, as the result—in terms of shared institutions, shared resources, a shared space—of a movement capable of constantly reinventing... the indissoluble unity of freedom and liberty.[16]

From Kakehashi's perspective the masses are a protean group that has the potential to go beyond the opposition between freedom and equality to the extent that they can create a world beyond capitalism.

Kakehashi's reading of Marx expresses two politically charged periods, first the interwar period of right-wing activism and then the postwar period in which intellectuals hoped for a different type of democracy. His work became popular in the 1960s, but during this time, many Marxists focused primarily on civil society as an ideal of political practice, rather than the problem of overcoming alienation and the totalizing domination of capitalism. It is this type of Marxism that is becoming increasingly popular in contemporary China.

The Civil Society Marxists of the 1960s and 1970s: Hirata Kiyoaki and Mochizuki Seiji

In Japan during the late 1960, Marxists de-emphasized totality and revolution. The civil society Marxists echoed earlier Lecture Faction Marxists' view that Japan and Asia were backward. The 1960s were a period of radical global transformation and the beginning of a crisis in the Fordist stage of capitalism, which manifested itself in a series of political movements around the world. In particular, in 1968 were the so-called Prague Spring reforms in Czechoslovakia, which was associated with "socialism with a human face." In June, Czech intellectuals published a two-thousand-word declaration demanding democratic reforms from the Communist Party. These Czech intellectuals were suppressed in what became known as the Czech Incident, which was extremely well-publicized in Japan, with vivid photographs. Consequently, Japanese intellectuals became increasingly critical of "actually existing socialism" in both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the same time, of course, in May 1968 there were the movements against the Vietnam War around the world, along with strikes in which students enthusiastically participated. In Japan as well, in July 1968 there

[16] Mezzadra Sandro, "Towards a Heterolingual Theory of the Multitude," 134.

were a number of student movements against government corruption. In January 1969, students famously entered Yasuda Hall at Tokyo University and violently took it over.

At the same time, from a larger historical perspective, the late 1960s and early 1970s represented a global transformation from Fordist to post-Fordist modes of capital accumulation. Yoshimi Shunya has called this era the post-postwar period (*posuto sengo shakai*), a time during which people shifted from working-class and Marxist politics to politics related to gender, the environment, and other new social movements.[17] Uemura Kunihiko also points out that during this time, a survey of Japanese people found that most of them considered themselves middle class.[18] This suggests that by the late 1960s many Japanese people were beginning to think of Japan as an affluent society.

In light of all this political activism and structural change, Hirata Kiyoaki published his best selling book, *Socialism and Civil Society*.[19] The book contended that both actually existing socialism and Japan needed the same thing, namely civil society. At this point, unlike in the discourse from the 1930s to the 1950s, civil society becomes a totally positive term and there was little talk about how to negate it or about how it represents a type of social domination. We have here a return of certain doctrines of the Lecture Faction school of Marxism. For example, according to Hirata, the main reason civil society did not emerge in Asia and Japan is because of their peculiar socio-cultural history:

> Japanese live on an island with one language and as one nation (*minzoku*). The family-oriented society that has formed here rejects the distinction between state and society. Rather than this distinction, above the blending of state and society it is easy to actively develop an ultra-nationalist ideology... However, before overcoming the distinction between the European formation of civil society and the Asian formation where familial society=state formation (*kazoku teki shakai=kokka kōsei*), I think that the Japanese intellectual realm must reflectively accept the basic categories of modern society.[20]

From Hirata's perspective, the goal was to promote rather than overcome civil society and so to a large extent he fell precisely into the position that Kakehashi

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[17] Yoshimi Shun'ya, *Posuto sengo shakai*.

[18] Uemura Kunihiko, *Shiminshakai to ha nanika*.

[19] There is almost no literature in English on Hirata Kiyoaki and the civil society Marxists. However, a useful introduction is Andrew E. Barshay, *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan*, chapter 6. See also the edited volume, *The State of Civil Society in Japan*, Frank J. Schwartz, and Susan J. Pharr eds.

[20] Hirata Kiyoaki, *Shiminshakai to shakaishugi*, 19.

criticized in 1953, namely, one that equates civil society and humanity. In short, civil society from this perspective tends to have a transhistorical meaning or at least a meaning that transcends capitalism. Hirata also posited an opposition between Asian and European modes of production in which only the latter could develop toward civil society.

In 1973, another Japanese Marxist, Mochizuki Seiji, would further develop some of Hirata's ideas and reinterpret the meaning of civil society focusing on Marx's texts. Mochizuki's work is particularly significant for our purposes since it is through his work that this peculiar reading of Marx as a proponent of civil society has been introduced to China. We do not need to go into the details of Mochizuki's theories, but below I take up some points relevant to our discussion.

Mochizuki was influenced by Hirata and described a narrative of history in which one goes from a primitive form of community to society (*Gesellschaft*), which includes alienation and the division of labor, to the goal of history, namely the community of the future, which entails an association of free human beings. In Mochizuki's view, civil society is a necessary stage on the way to socialism. If we understand civil society as capitalism, we could conclude that his position is similar to that of orthodox Marxists.

However, according to Mochizuki, civil society is more than capitalism. It contains a three-tiered structure. The first is a society that directly springs from production and exchange. The second is the social exchange that emerges from a system of ground rent and small-scale private ownership. The third is capitalistic civil society.[21] In this scheme, civil society encompasses pre-capitalist societies and mere exchange. Here, Mochizuki is somewhat influenced by Adam Smith, who expounds a narrative in which capitalism is continuous with earlier forms of exchange. Hence not only is civil society a necessary step on the way to socialism, it is also a model for socialist society:

> The demand to re-empower civil society is a demand to bring back the association of socialized human personality. To this extent, we can also look forward to the idea of the "free association of individuals" that the future community cannot give up. The nucleus of this structure is probably the "unity of laborers' communal labor and socialized ownership."[22]

The metaphors of bringing back and re-empowering suggest that in capitalist society itself there are remnants of an older form of association, or at least a form of association that transcends capitalism. Mochizuki explicitly points out the relationship between previous communities and capitalist civil society:

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[21] Mochizuki Seiji, *Marukusu rekishi riron no kenkyū*, 609.
[22] Ibid., 613.

> Marx critically examined the capitalist society before his eyes and grasped civil society as its foundation. To determine how civil society was the product of a long accumulation of human history, Marx went back to the original forms of commonwealth (*Gemeinwesen*). In so doing, he discovered the synthetic principle that both led to capitalist civil society and will necessarily bring about a community of civil society that will follow it.[23]

From this perspective, the determinate negation of capitalism implies reconstituting the first two spheres of civil society into a new social form. Civil society both predates capitalism and will survive it in socialism. Mochizuki reads Marx as providing a theory of history that charts a path from community to civil society back to community.

However, contrary to those who argued that Marx's categories were universal, Mochizuki claimed that Marx's theory of history had universal significance but was empirically confined to the European experience. In other words, in countries that did not have a past similar to those of European countries, and in particular Germany, the impetus to develop civil society would have to come from outside. Thus like the Lecture Faction before him, he posed the question of how civil society could develop in non-European contexts, an issue that became especially salient from the mid-1990s in China.

Reinterpreting Japanese Marxist Concepts of Civil Society in China: The Case of Han Lixin

Civil society was not a major subject of debate in China until the early 1990s. In the 1990s, in the context of the fall of the socialist regimes and the publication of the English translation of Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, scholars in Chinese studies in Europe and the United States became enamored with the prospects of civil society in China. Interestingly, in the English translation of the title of this book, the term *bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* is translated as "bourgeois society" instead of civil society. Nonetheless, this book spurred a huge discussion both in the China field and outside about whether a public sphere or a civil society existed in China, and whether one could exist in the future.

Although the discourse of civil society appears to be similar in Japan and China, the significance of the debates around the term is different because while in Japan the other of civil society was often fascism or a socialist state in other parts of the world, in China, those scholars who located sprouts of civil society in

[23] Ibid., 599.

the Qing dynasty and even earlier often suggest that China was on a path toward modernity. The work of Han Lixin to some extent is the latest version of this thesis since he is clearly an advocate of civil society in China. However, we should distinguish him from earlier advocates of civil society because of his reliance on Mochizuki Seiji's version of Marxism, which entails a partial provincialization of Europe while maintaining the normative universality of the European experience. In other words, although all countries in the world do not pass through the same modes of production, they must become capitalist before becoming socialist. That is to say, the European model is seen as unique and others may not necessarily follow it. This veers away from an earlier Chinese Marxist narrative in which Chinese history also had to follow the same sequence from feudalism to capitalism and eventually to socialism. Han mobilizes the "Asiatic mode of production" to break this monistic vision of history and contends China was stuck in an Asiatic mode of production until around 1978, with the opening and reforms.

Han contends that a common way of understanding the Chinese experience is to compare it to the Russian experience and to invoke Marx's letters to Vera Zasulich and other Russian revolutionaries. A number of contemporary Marxists, including Kevin Anderson, have recently alluded to these letters to show that Marx did not take Europe's experience as universal and allowed that certain regions, such as Russia, could draw on pre- or non-capitalist forms of community in order to realize socialism in a way that bypasses capitalism.[24] Such a paradigm dovetails with various readings of Maoism in obvious ways and has been developed by Japanese sinologists. In particular, since the 1949 Revolution, some Japanese sinologists, such as Ojima Sukema, argued that the impetus for Chinese socialism must be sought in structures of the Chinese tradition rather than in the contradictions of capital.

Han does not discuss any of this literature, but claims that when seen from the perspective of contemporary China, narratives based on Marx's letters to Zasulich or those that stress a non-capitalist route to socialism are all irrelevant. In other words, because China is more fully incorporated into the global capitalist world, regardless of how we view the revolution, it is futile to think of a non-capitalist path to socialism. For those interested in the Marxist project, the important issue is how to theorize China's path to capitalism and then how to understand the possibilities of moving from capitalism to socialism.

Han grounds his analysis firmly in Mochizuki's work and Marx's different characterizations in the *Grundrisse* of "forms which precede capitalist production." In this section, Marx discusses Ancient, Asiatic, and Germanic forms of production and claims that only the Germanic mode contains

[24] Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*.

contradictory forms of property relations which allow for the development of capitalist society. Marx summarizes the gist of his analysis in the following paragraph at the end of this section:

> The history of classical antiquity is the history of cities, but of cities founded on landed property and on agriculture; Asiatic history is a different kind of unity of town and countryside (the really large cities must be regarded here merely as royal camps, as works of artifice [*Superfötation*] erected over the economic construction proper); the Middle Ages (Germanic period) begins with land at the seat of history, whose further development then moves forward in the contradiction of town and countryside; the modern [age] is the urbanization of the countryside, not the ruralization of the city as in antiquity.[25]

In short, it is in the Germanic period that the various contradictions and characteristics associated with modern capitalist production emerge, such as the opposition between town and country, the division of labor, and the rising prevalence of exchange. For this reason, Mochizuki and Han associate this period with civil society. Han contends that from 1978, China has witnessed a contradiction between state and private ownership, a contradiction similar to the Germanic form, and he suggests that we can thus conclude that China is following a Germanic path. Thus now China can follow the path that Marx had originally envisioned, namely the path from community to civil society to community as socialist, which sublates the earlier two forms. Han contends that this is the way in which Hegel describes world-spirit moving from the East, where one man is free, to the Greek world, where a few are free, and finally to the Germanic world, where all are free.[26] Marx can then be interpreted as deferring this final goal of universal freedom to a future socialist world.

Theorizing the Transition from Revolutionary to Contemporary China in Light of the Legacy of Japanese Marxism

Han Lixin has made several important contributions to our understanding of Japanese Marxism in relation to the study of China. First, he has translated and introduced Mochizuki Seiji's works and has attempted to use them to understand China. Moreover, he has successfully pointed out the difficulties of using Marx's letters to Vera Zasulich in understanding contemporary China. However, perhaps

[25] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 479.
[26] Han Lixin, "Zhongguo de 'Riermanshi fazhan' daolu (shang)," 7–8.

because the essay cited above is only part 1 and part 2 remains to be written, there is little examination of Chinese society in relation to the concepts and categories that he mentions. In other words, regardless of whether Han's interpretation of Marx is plausible, he makes huge assumptions when interpreting China. While it is uncontestable that China today is witnessing increasing privatization and division of labor, to characterize this period as something like the Germanic period in Europe tends to repeat the ideology of the 1980s television series *The River Elegy*, which juxtaposed the Western experience to the Chinese and suggested that the Chinese should follow the Western path. Closely related to this ideology was a huge discourse contending that the early period of the PRC was feudal. For Han, the Mao period, which he does not mention, would be something like the transition from an Asiatic mode of production to the Germanic period. Using the categories that Han gets from the *Grundrisse*, the Mao period is pre-Medieval and therefore pre-feudal.

However, briefly looking at twentieth-century Chinese history would suggest other ways of drawing on Japanese Marxism and Marxism more generally. We should perhaps go further than both Mochizuki and Han in separating the logic of capitalism from the appearance of civil society. In other words, while it is probably correct to say that civil society has as its condition of possibility the capitalist mode of production, one could perhaps have capitalism without civil society. This is implicit in Kakehashi's statement that the commodity form rather than civil society is the cell form of capitalist society. Moishe Postone draws the implications of this point forcefully: "Marx's analysis of production implicitly argues that this dimension cannot be grasped in terms of the state of civil society. On the contrary, the historical dynamic of developed capitalism increasingly embeds and transforms both those spheres."[27]

Jake Werner in his contribution to this volume builds on Postone's analysis by using the term "global Fordism" to grasp a general shift from liberal capitalism, in which the market was the primary mode of distribution, to a more state-centered mode of capitalism. In the former liberal mode, the opposition between state and civil society is readily apparent, while in the latter case many of the functions of civil society appear to be subsumed under the state. However, despite this shift, which helps us understand China in the context of global transformations, one may need to make a few further distinctions to grasp the specificity of the Chinese context. Below, I make some preliminary remarks about how such an analysis could proceed.

Wen Tiejun suggests the possibility that there is a deeper dynamic at work in post-1949 China, which goes beyond the distinction between the state and civil society but nonetheless highlights the particularity of the Chinese context. In a

[27] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 58.

recent essay entitled "The Change in Strategy and Its Relation to Industrialization and Transformation into Capital (*zibenhua*)," he claims that as early as 1952 the Chinese central government "confirmed that China had to develop state-capitalist industrialization and propagated this at the level of ideology."[28] The concept of state capitalism suggests a capitalism without civil society in the usual sense of the term. Wen tells us that we should understand this transformation in a global context, but that the effects of this context were different in different regions. He argues that after the Soviet Union finished its first five year plan it attempted to bring other socialist countries into a type of global division of labor and rejected Stalinism and its focus on national development. China could not travel this path because it was still in the midst of capital accumulation for industrialization. Not only China, but other developing countries, such as Vietnam, Korea, and Romania did not join the Soviet Union's international division of labor.[29] It is at this point that there was an opposition between Marxism and revisionism. In this context, we see the importance of global inequalities in the reconstitution of capital around the world. Places where capitalism was less developed would need to use the state to promote capital accumulation. In other words, while in Western Europe and the United States one can speak of a transition from a liberal to a Fordist, state-centered mode of capitalism, in places such as China, the state-centered mode was the means to accumulate capital and promote industrialization from the outset.

We find evidence supporting Wen's analysis about how post-1949 China used the state to promote capitalism in Mao Zedong's own comments in speeches in 1950 and 1953. In a speech given in 1950, entitled "Some Policies Related to Issues Concerning Capitalist Industrialization," he opines:

> The object of struggle today is imperialism and the remnants of feudalism and its running dog the Nationalist reactionary party and not the nationalist capitalist class. We have a struggle with the capitalist class, but we must unite with it. We adopt a policy of uniting while struggling against it, with the goal of uniting in order to develop the national economy.[30]

By placing imperialism at the forefront of objects against which one must struggle, Mao highlights that global capitalism mediated the Chinese economy regardless of the question of actual trade with foreign countries. For this reason, during the Mao period the Chinese government adopted a policy of state capitalism to promote national development. Mao claimed that because the state

[28] Wen Tiejun, *Jiegou xiandaihua*, 25.
[29] Ibid., 24.
[30] Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong wenji*, 49.

was also committed to equitable distribution and to closing the gap between the countryside and the city, this brand of state capitalism was a type of socialism. In an essay written in 1953, Mao explains,

> The capitalist economy of contemporary China is for the most part managed by the people's government. This government uses different forms to connect such capitalism with the state-managed socialist economy. Thus it is a capitalist economy inspected by the people. This capitalism is not yet universal capitalism but a particular form of capitalism, that is, a new form of state-capitalist economy. It exists not primarily to produce profit for the capitalist, but to provide for the needs of the people and the state. Of course, the workers must still produce some profit for the capitalist, but this is just a small part of the profit, about one-fourth. The remaining three-fourths goes to the workers (in the form of welfare) and to the state (in the form of taxes) and in order to expand the means of production (in this there is also a small amount which is the profit for the capitalist). Therefore, this state-capitalist economy has enormous socialist characteristics and is beneficial to workers and capitalists.[31]

Mao distinguishes between the capitalist economy and the state-controlled economy and thus clearly understands capitalism at a lower level of abstraction than we are employing here. But his description allows us to pose the question of whether in post-1949 China there was production for profit or surplus value. Mao claims that the particular character of state capitalism in China consists in workers producing profit or surplus not for the capitalist but for welfare, for reinvestment, and for taxes. He summarizes this as production for the needs of the people and the state, which implies that the people produce use values rather than exchange values. This would suggest that the goal of production is wealth rather than value in Marxist terms. That is, workers produce in order to procure use values rather than for profit. However, such a description would not quite grasp that surplus is being converted into use values as part of a plan that includes the goal of expansion. From this perspective, while in liberal capitalism people procure use values through exchange on the market, in post-1949 China the distribution of use values takes place at the level of the state according to a plan that includes an increment of value. There were also of course state-owned stores, which sold products for a price that might have been under their value, but this does not preclude the possibility that value was produced.

There are tensions in this vision, which might also be specific to the Chinese case. On the one hand, it would appear that the value of labor should have been

[31] Ibid., 282.

kept high because of the underlying philosophy of post-1949 that aimed to increase the welfare of the workers. This was in some sense possible because of China's delinking from the global economy and the ability to pay workers greater real wages. But on the other hand, there was an imperative for growth related to competing with other nations, and this imperative required the extraction of surpluses, which in turn would keep real wages low. Therefore, although Mao claimed that profit goes to the workers, people in general were encouraged not to consume much. Moreover, China famously had an imperative to surpass the United States at that time, which could be interpreted as attempting to going beyond the United States in terms of the speed of creating wealth or the increased production of relative surplus value, which we will discuss below. However, this was to be done through state planning rather than by the market.

Rethinking Civil Society as Market and Mass Political Practice

The possibility of capitalism without civil society raises two issues. The first concerns developing a theory of capitalism appropriate to the transformations of Chinese society in the twentieth century. This theory of capitalism cannot be based on civil society, but only on categories that are more fundamental. The second and related question concerns how one theorizes political practice in capitalist society. The two are related because, as Kakehashi intimated, subjectivity and political practice are both constituted by the logic of capital and the commodity form. Recall that both in general usage and in Kakehashi's analysis, civil society referred to both a system of needs and the space of the masses, which represents a type of political practice.

With respect to the first question, of the various Marxist theorists we have discussed, Kakehashi, in his remarks about the logic of the commodity form running much deeper than civil society, is particularly helpful. Moishe Postone's own Hegelian Marxism can be understood as extending certain strands of this strain of Marxism with its origins in Lukács's analysis of the commodity form. However, there are several key differences between Postone's reading of Marx and other theories of capital. First, like Kakehashi he sees capital, including the alienated labor of humanity, as the subject of history, but he stresses the temporal dynamic this entails, a dynamic that represents both social domination and the possibility of overcoming capitalism. This temporal dynamic is important for understanding both the first and the second questions mentioned above. To return to Postone's statement about civil society, he notes not only that production cannot be understood merely through the distinction between state and society, but also that a deeper issue is involved: "At issue, therefore, is not the relative importance of 'the economy' and 'the state,' but the nature of social mediation in

capitalism, and the relation of that mediation to the directional dynamic characteristic of that society."[32]

There are two important points here: first, the nature of social mediation, and second, a theory of how this mediation entails a directional or temporal dynamic. With respect to the first point, we are primarily dealing with mediation by labor and in particular alienated labor, which becomes capital when it is inserted into the M-C-M' (money-commodity-money) circuit. Capital implies the production of value and this production entails mediation by labor and labor time. In capitalist society, one must exchange labor time for use values. And from the standpoint of the capitalist, surplus value is surplus labor time. In the Chinese case, the nature of this exchange may be complex in that a worker may often be directly remunerated through use values, such as housing and health care. However, if one does not work or is out of the system, it becomes difficult to procure such use values. The historical plight of China's temporary and contract laborers is evidence of this as well as of the continued importance of the steady exchange of labor power.

Through such mediation and the repeated sale and purchase of labor power, alienated labor and capital become like Hegel's Spirit. This brings us to the second point, namely that capital becomes a self-moving substance and subject that is propelled by its own contradictions; in other words, it becomes a directional dynamic. Hegel's Spirit is moved by contradictions in various levels of spirit, which implies what he calls the force of negativity. With this statement, Hegel refers to contradictions in consciousness and self-consciousness, such as those between an abstract conception of individuality and the notion of community. Such contradictions of course exist in capitalism and could be the source of a number of movements, but they are not the motor of the temporal dynamic of capitalism. In other words, as Kakehashi suggested, there often is in capitalism a hiatus between contradictions in consciousness and the contradictions of capitalism. As Postone explains, capital moves based on the contradictions related to relative surplus value and the opposition of wealth and value.

We can understand such contradictions in the following manner. In capitalist society, value is measured in terms of socially necessary labor time and capitalists procure surplus value based on the difference between the amount the worker works in order to pay for his own wage and the amount the worker works for the capitalist. In other words, if the worker receives wages of 12 yuan for 12 hours of work, but produces 12 yuan worth of commodities in 6 hours, that is, in 12 hours the worker produces 24 yuan worth of commodities, the capitalist is able to procure 6 hours=12 yuan of surplus value. Capitalists try to increase

[32] Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 58.

surplus value in two ways. First, they can increase the length of the workday. But Marx is much more interested in another way of increasing surplus value, namely relative surplus value. In this model, capitalists increase the productivity of labor and so workers now produce the value of their own labor more quickly, for example in 3 hours instead of 6 hours. Of course, what makes all of this possible is the equation of 12 yuan, 12 hours of labor, and a certain quantity of X that is produced in 12 hours. The equation of these three things is possible because of reification, seeing labor as a thing.

But the effect of this increase in productivity reduces average socially necessary labor time; in short, it decreases the value of the given object. Consequently, when a particular firm finds methods and machinery to increase productivity, it is able to sell its products under their value, because it is producing commodities faster than the socially necessary labor time. However, in order to stay in business, other firms must also increase productivity. As a result, socially necessary labor time has a tendency to decrease, and thus one must produce more commodities in a given time. As a consequence, a given labor-hour becomes denser.

As capitalist society moves increasingly to the production of relative surplus value, there emerges the possibility of producing wealth that is not mediated by value, wealth that is not measured in terms of labor time. Marx explains this possibility in the *Grundrisse*:

> The exchange of living labour for objectified labour, i.e., the positing of social labour in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labor—is the ultimate development of the *value-relation* and of production resting on value. Its presupposition is—and remains—the mass of direct labour time, the quantity of labour employed, as the determinant factor in the production of wealth. But to the degree that industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during the time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production.[33]

Here Marx highlights the difference between value, which is specific to capitalism and is measured in abstract time, and wealth, which represents the actual amount of use values produced. Postone develops Marx's insight in terms of a difference between historical time and abstract time. Abstract time refers to

[33] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 704–5.

our usual understanding of time as a series of now points and which appears independent of activity, such as the activity of production. Indeed, capitalists use abstract time in order to measure the amount of labor time and to calculate wages. Historical time on the other hand refers to the movement of the labor hour itself to greater and greater levels of productivity and the increase of the agencies that set labor in motion. This is a movement of the labor-hour, because, with increased productivity, the amount that one must produce in one hour increases. This latter movement may also appear quantitative insofar as it refers to the amount of use values produced in an hour. However, at the same time it refers to the various qualitative transformations that accompany the increase of productivity. In other words, historical time refers to the movement and the reconstitution of capital, just as Hegel's Spirit reconstitutes itself from levels such as sense-certainty and perception. Recall that in sense-certainty, Spirit could not affirm anything because it lacked the relevant categories. Then at the level of Perception, after the introduction of categories that mediate in order to grasp the object, a new set of contradictions emerges. Throughout the *Phenomenology*, there is a constant attempt of Spirit to know the outside world and to know itself. Capital's movement is not quite the same. It is also constantly incorporating what is outside; one can partially explain the history of colonialism in reference to this spatial dynamic. Perhaps more important with respect to the prospects of socialism is the temporal dynamic in which capital is constantly reconstituted with increasing amounts of science and technology and decreasing amounts of direct labor time. This allows for the possibility of a society not organized around proletarian labor. One should of course not conclude that capitalism will naturally lead to this outcome because the dynamic of capitalism is two-sided:

> Capital itself is a moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as the sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition—question of life and death—for the necessary. On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value.[34]

[34] Ibid., 706.

In other words, capitalism both creates the possibility for the realization of another form of society and precludes this possibility by positing labor time as the sole source of wealth. Political practice is required to create a world not based on labor time.

Civil Society as Political Practice

The problem in Postone's view is how to inhabit this contradictory space to effect the determinate negation of capitalism and make possible the "free development of individuals" no longer dominated by the logic of capital. At this point, we must return to the issue of political practice, which again makes a gesture in the direction of civil society, especially along the lines proposed by Kakehashi Akihide in his references to the masses. Postone refers to "new social movements," that invoke the political practices of the 1960s, in which Kakehashi, Hirata, and Mochizuki all in some way took part. However, rather than stress the universal side with concepts such as the masses, Postone focuses on minority and women's movements. These are movements that first negate abstract alienated universality and then seek to construct a new form of universalism that is not opposed to particularity. Postone explains this in language that echoes Kakehashi with a twist:

> With the overcoming of capitalism, the unity of society already constituted in alienated form could then be effected differently, by forms of political practice in a way that need not negate qualitative specificity.
>
> It would be possible, in light of this approach, to interpret some strains within recent social movements—notably, among women and various minorities—as efforts to move beyond the antinomy, associated with the social form of the commodity, of an abstract homogenous universalism and a form of particularism that excludes universality. An adequate analysis of such movements should, of course, be historical: it should be able to relate them to developments of the underlying social forms in a way that accounts for the historical emergence of such attempts to surpass this antinomy that characterizes capitalism.[35]

In capitalism, practices that presuppose oppositions of the commodity form, such as the buying and selling of commodities and labor power, constantly reproduce the contradiction between particularity (use value) and abstract universality. Recall that it was Hegel's aim as well to overcome this opposition

[35] Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 164.

with his concept of *Geist* and the modern state. Note also that the opposition between civil society and the state was also one of the particular (civil society) against the universal (the state). The above analysis has shown that although the opposition between civil society and the state is not essential for capitalism, the oppositions associated with the commodity form, such as between abstract universality and particularity, are a basic part of capitalism. Although it might be misleading to call such a space of the masses "civil society," the political space of the masses also implies activity distinct from the state form, which represents a type of abstract universality. Kakehashi used "civil society" to refer to a particular that enveloped the universal, and this was through the space of the masses. This space of the masses could refer to a group pointing beyond the opposition between universality and particularity, but it was also constituted by this opposition and needed to be mediated by the proletariat, whom Kakehashi believed could overcome such antinomies. The relationship between these various elements, minority movements, mass movements, and working-class movements are essential in Postone's work as well, but they would be articulated differently. One cannot fully develop this theme here, but to the extent that social movements aim to surpass the commodity form, they must become aware of how the commodity form and its dominance are inextricably connected to a particular form of labor and to value as measured by labor time. The only way to overcome the value form would be to become involved in movements with the creators of value, namely the working class. Thus social movements seeking to overcome the value form must eventually form alliances with and politicize in different ways working-class movements. This would perhaps eventually turn working-class movements into movements aiming at their own self-negation, which would eventually bring about the negation of capitalism.

Conclusion: The Project of Overcoming Capitalism

The negation of capitalism as the negation of the working class was not at the center of the Chinese revolution. Indeed, given that the contradiction between wealth and value had not emerged during the 1949 Revolution, Mao Zedong's task was first to develop productive forces using what he called state capitalism. This part of this story supports Han Lixin's attack on proponents of Marx's letters to Zasulich and even gestures in the direction of the Lecture Faction Marxists: socialism emerges out of the contradictions of capitalism. However, Mao at the same time intended to surpass capitalism, he hoped eventually to find a way to negate the capitalism that he was creating along with the division of labor, other aspects that we saw Kakehashi associate with civil society. Moreover, the 1960s, the period that Hirata and Mochizuki were attempting to theorize, was

the period of the Cultural Revolution, which contained many experiments to rethink labor, totality, and the division of labor and indeed to create the space of the masses. Most of these experiments failed, however, from a dialectical perspective, the failure of socialism and the development of capitalism imply once again the possibility of creating socialism this time out of the contradictions of capitalism. The contradictions that we have seen Marx mention (as cited above) have become a reality both in China and in most other parts of the world, and consequently this opens the possibility for people to create spaces of political practices geared toward constructing a world not governed by the production of value. This remains a task for our present and future.

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