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## **Intercultural Education and European Vision of the Orient: Marx on China**

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“The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.”, Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853.

This paper, the first part of a research in progress, presents Karl Marx’s representation of China in the dispatches he wrote for the *New York Daily Tribune* (1853-1860). The paper analyzes the articles on China in the context of Marx’s analysis of global capitalism. Moreover, the paper introduces Marx’s analysis on China into the educational field, particularly within the framework of “intercultural education”, a world perspective on school subjects and curricula.

In Italy and in Europe, intercultural education focuses on the inclusion of immigrants in the educational system and on a criticism of Eurocentric school subjects and curricula.

Such a perspective arises from the demands of our age, and in particular from the existence, in capitalistic Western countries, of millions of people among the “damned of the Earth”, migrants searching for better life and working conditions, carrying to our cities their burden of expectations and anger, as well as the culture of the countries they come from. J. P. Sartre once said that “The Third World is among us”. This truth is not without its consequences with regard to the issue of education – which should be, as the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has put it, a powerful means to “de-colonize the mind”.

This perspective is also to be understood within the fruitful course of research pursued by the great Palestinian-American critic Edward Said, who, in his analysis of conflict between colonizers and colonized people, always drew attention to their reciprocal relations as well, by means of the notion of “counterpoint”:

“We are dealing here with the formation of cultural identities that are to be seen not as given essences (although part of their lasting appeal is due to the fact that they appear and are considered as such), but as counterpoint groups: for no identity can exist in itself without a series of opposites, negations and oppositions – the Greeks always needed the barbarians, just as Europeans have always needed African people, Asiatic people, and so on”<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, *Cultura e imperialismo. Letteratura e consenso nel progetto coloniale dell’Occidente*, Gamberetti, Roma 1998, p.77. Ed. orig.: *Culture and Imperialism*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York 1993.

Edward Said criticizes Marx for not being immune to the orientalism of his time. There is probably some truth in the Palestinian-American critic's words (one is always, in a sense, a child of one's time), but what should be emphasized is Marx's concern with the suffering of Asiatic peoples – caused by Western colonialism – on the one hand, and on the other hand with the worldwide power of capital, which transforms and encompasses all, as the now thirty-year-old capitalistic “reforms” of modern-day China show. Colonialism, in Marx's view, is closely connected to the birth of capitalism, and it is within this framework – not that of a generic opposition between the East and the West – that Marx analyzes relations between the East and Europe, both in the present day and from a historical point of view<sup>2</sup>.

In the mid-Nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had analyzed – in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* – the historical development of the bourgeoisie, and had identified worldwide unification as one of the defining features of the rising phenomenon of capitalism<sup>3</sup>. Thus, in 1848 they described the revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie in the creation of a worldwide market which would supplant traditional economic relations:

“The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development. [...]

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. [...]

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, *and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature* [my italics]<sup>4</sup>.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Edward Said, *Orientalismo. L'immagine europea dell'Oriente*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1999, pp. 155-159 (Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1991). Ed. orig.: *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York 1978.

<sup>3</sup> “Although both Marx and Engels prepared the first drafts and the published document clearly reflected both of their viewpoints, the final text was almost certainly written by Karl Marx” (Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Introduzione a Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, Manifesto del Partito Comunista*, Rizzoli, Milano 1998, p.8).

<sup>4</sup> This statement, reminiscent of Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* (“world literature”), foreruns much of today's critical reflection and literary production.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. [...] Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.”<sup>5</sup>

Re-read more than 150 years later, these words written by the founders of scientific socialism sound truly prophetic, as they foreshadow a scenario we may well consider as almost completely realized today. As the British historian Eric J. Hobsbawm wrote, the *Manifesto* “can be read today as a concise characterization of capitalism at the end of the twentieth century”.<sup>6</sup>

What is most remarkable about Marx and Engels’s analysis is its clear understanding of the international nature that capitalism had from its very origins, a nature that is revealed through a protracted historical development which, although anticipated by a number of exchanges – not only of a commercial type – in ancient Eurasia<sup>7</sup>, will fully emerge with the conquest of the immense American, African and Asiatic markets starting from the XVI century.

From the XVI century on, the relationship linking Europe – the first cradle of capitalism – and subsequently the United States to the rest of the world became asymmetrical, to use a definition cherished by sociologists; that is, a relation based on a domination over the majority of the peoples of the Earth which has allowed capitalism to present itself, in the past and up to the present day, as the only viable model of socio-economic organization.

As the liberal historian A. Toynbee wrote in 1952:

“In the encounter between the world and the West, which has been in progress for four or five centuries now, the side that has had the most significant experience so far is the rest of the world, not the West. The West has not been affected by the world; it is the world that has been affected – severely so – by the West [...]. A Western person wishing to deal with the issue will have to try, for a few moments, to shed his or her native Western skin and look at the encounter between the world and the West through the eyes of the non-Western humanity, which is the majority. As different as the non-Western peoples may be with respect to each other when it comes to race, language, civilization and religion, if a Western person asks any of them what their opinion is of the West, the answer will always be the same: Russian people, Muslims, Hindu people, the Chinese and the Japanese people and all the others will be in perfect agreement on this point. The West, they will say, has been the chief aggressor of the modern age. And each of them will have their own tale of this aggression to tell”.<sup>8</sup>

The great geographical “discoveries” and the economic penetration of modern Europe into the rest of the planet are seen by Marx and Engels as crucial factors in the development of productive forces (workforce, means of production, work organization) and of relations of production – of a capitalistic kind – previously unheard of in human history. The revolutionary bourgeoisie, which “has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”<sup>9</sup>, represents, according to the two authors, the social class that is at the core of this process of worldwide unification. We are not dealing, then, with an abstract unification of humanity, but with a different way of organizing production and society as a whole – a way which, despite twentieth century attempts at establishing a socialist society, is still the dominant manner of production in the world today, namely, capitalism – that is, a system of relations among human beings mediated by things.

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin Books, London 2004, pp. 4-5, 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Introduzione a Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, Manifesto del Partito Comunista*, Rizzoli, Milano 1998, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient. Global Economy in the Asian Age*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Il mondo e l'Occidente*, Sellerio, Palermo 1992, pp. 11-12 (Ed. orig. *The World and the West*, Oxford University Press, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin Books, London 2004, p. 6.

It is here that we must start in order to turn to observe a specific aspect of the process of capitalistic unification of the planet described by Marx, an aspect related to the attention that the philosopher from Trier paid to China.

Two pounds per article: such were the wages paid out to Karl Marx, “our London correspondent”, for his detailed, in depth articles in the American newspaper *New York Daily Tribune*, in which topics ranged from slavery in America to the Italian Resurgence, from the Opium Wars in China to British colonialism in India, from serfdom in Tsarist Russia to the Crimean war, from Napoleon III’s (1808-1873) and Lord Palmerston’s (1784-1865) bourgeois dictatorships to the financial and commercial crises of the most important European countries.

The *New York Daily Tribune* was founded in 1841 as a newspaper belonging to the left-wing area of the American Whig party. It became well-known during the forties and fifties for its anti-slavery campaign, and during the years in which Marx and Engels wrote for it, it was the U.S. Republican Party’s official newspaper. Starting in early 1853, Marx contributed articles written in English and some were even published with no mention of the author. However, references found in the notebooks in which Marx and his wife Jenny noted the dates of completion or delivery of the articles, as well as references in Marx and Engels’s correspondence, allow us to identify their literary paternity beyond any doubt. Marx’s articles were also often subjected to more or less extensive editorial revisions.

“The *Tribune* had been founded by Horace Greeley in 1841 as a crusading organ of progressive causes, albeit with a distinctly American and Christian flavor. [...] During the period when he [Marx] wrote for it, the paper had more than 200,000 readers, making it the largest newspaper in the world at the time. [...] The *Tribune* was by far the largest publisher of Marx’s (and, to a lesser extent, Engels’s) work: in all, the paper published 487 articles, of which Marx alone wrote 350, Engels wrote 125, and together they wrote 12. The sheer volume of the work is remarkable: the *Tribune* articles together take up nearly seven volumes of the fifty-volume collected works of Marx and Engels.”<sup>10</sup>

Marx wrote 16 articles about China for the *The New York Daily Tribune*; there is one other article, entitled “Persia-China”, written by Engels at Marx’s request (letters of May 8<sup>th</sup> and May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1857). Marx also wrote three articles on China in 1860 which were never published.

The dispatches that “our correspondent from London” wrote on China for the *New York Daily Tribune* deal with a wide breadth of topics, from the Opium Wars to commercial trades, from relationships between China and Russia to the T’ai-p’ing revolt, in addition to the repercussions that British colonial policies had on the domestic policy of the United Kingdom. All this was held together by the full awareness Marx had of the necessity, for British capitalism, to subdue the two Asiatic giants, India and China. There can be no world development of Capital without the Empire.

In Marx’s opinion, the penetration of capitalism within non-capitalist societies – after a first phase of devastations and atrocities which he does not fail to condemn, exposing Great Britain’s hypocritical barbarity as a nation priding itself on its mission of bringing civilization to Asia and the world (Kipling’s “white man’s burden”) – is a necessary process in order to allow industrialization, and the consequent development of a modern working class.

We know today that such a scheme has not always worked (at least so far in history), especially when it has been applied in a dogmatic way, and that, on the contrary, the socialist revolution was essentially a peasant revolution precisely in China.

But “to think that historical materialism implied a single sequence of means of production – ‘primitive communism’-slavery-feudalism-capitalism-socialism – is to misunderstand Marx and Marxism. Marx’s letter to Vera Zasulic, in which he envisaged the possibility, indeed thought it probable, that Russia

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<sup>10</sup> James Ledbetter, *Introduction*, in Karl Marx, *Dispatches for the New York Tribune. Selected Journalism of Karl Marx*, Penguin Books, London 2007, p. xviii.

would not go through a capitalistic phase but would instead leap straight from feudalism to socialism, shows that his principle of historical materialism was more of a Hegelian than a Cartesian kind"<sup>11</sup>.

In the first article Marx wrote on China for the *New York Daily Tribune*, which was published on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1853, the role of Great Britain in China's break with tradition is clearly articulated:

"Whatever be the social causes, and whatever religious, dynastic, or national shape they may assume, that have brought about the chronic rebellions subsisting in China for about ten years past, and now gathered together in one formidable revolution, the occasion of this outbreak has unquestionably been afforded by the English cannon forcing upon China that soporific drug called opium. Before the British arms the authority of the Manchu dynasty fell to pieces; the superstitious faith in the eternity of the Celestial Empire broke down; the barbarous and hermetic isolation from the civilized world was infringed; and an opening was made for that intercourse which has since proceeded so rapidly under the golden attractions of California and Australia. At the same time the silver coin of the Empire, its lifeblood, began to be drained away to the British East Indies."<sup>12</sup>

From the very title of the article, *Revolution in China and in Europe*, Marx emphasizes the intersections that link the destinies of these two parts of the world. The awakening of ancient China, he writes, will inevitably produce an effect on the popular struggles in Europe:

"That isolation having come to a violent end by the medium of England, dissolution must follow as surely as that of any mummy carefully preserved in a hermetically sealed coffin, whenever it is brought into contact with the open air. Now, England having brought about the revolution of China, the question is how that revolution, will in time react on England, and through England on Europe."<sup>13</sup>

British colonial policies, which reached their peak in the XIX century but were to last until the second half of the twentieth century (the "black giant" of Africa, Nigeria, achieved its independence as late as 1960), embodied the most powerful expansion of capitalism on a planetary scale prior to the beginning of the United States' worldwide hegemony. During the years of Palmerston's and Gladstone's liberal governments (1850-1874), England exercised complete supremacy over the world. The Great Industrial Exposition, inaugurated in London on May the 1<sup>st</sup> 1851, represented an international tribute to the results of the British industrial revolution. "The workshop of the world" virtually monopolized commerce and confidently dominated the world's seas.

It is an already essentially globalized picture, to which the British colonies (but let us not forget the French, Dutch, Belgian, and other colonial territories) and among them India, the "pearl" of the Empire, gave a decisive contribution.

Marx clearly understood the role played by Great Britain, revolutionary in spite of itself, in the worldwide expansion of capitalism and in the destruction of the old ways of living and producing.

"It was the British intruder who broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning-wheel. England began with driving the Indian cottons from the European market; it then introduced twist into Hindostan, and in the end inundated the very mother country of cotton with cottons"<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Hosea Jaffe, *Davanti al colonialismo: Engels, Marx e il marxismo*, Jaca Book, Milano 2007, p. 67. Cfr. also, by the same author, *Marx e il colonialismo*, Jaca Book, Milano 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Revolution in China and in Europe* (June, 14, 1853), in *Dispatches for the New York Tribune. Selected Journalism of Karl Marx*, Penguin Books, London 2007, pp. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*, p. 5.

Speaking of the traditional *system of the Indian village*, which will disappear before “the working of English steam and English free trade”<sup>15</sup>, Marx exhibits no exotic nostalgia:

“We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. [...] We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery. [...] . The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution.”<sup>16</sup>.

Of course Marx is well aware of the great suffering of the Indian people, and denounces their misery in many instances in his work; at the same time, he is just as aware of the fact that the process of capitalistic transformation of the planet is inevitable and necessary in order that the more advanced phases of historical development (which he identifies with communism) may come into existence.

“The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked. [...]. The devastating effects of English industry, when contemplated with regard to India, a country as vast as Europe, and containing 150 millions of acres, are palpable and confounding. But we must not forget that they are only the organic results of the whole system of production as it is now constituted. That production rests on the supreme rule of capital.”<sup>17</sup>

To return to Marx’s China, we should mention the great attention he dedicated to one of the blackest pages in Chinese history, that is, to the British imposition of opium consumption. Ending one of his articles on the opium trade (September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1858) – a series of articles in which documental accuracy and careful historical reconstruction go hand in hand – Marx vehemently denounces the monopolistic policies with which Great Britain, ostensibly a staunch supporter of free trade, imposed opium on China.

“We cannot leave this part of the subject without singling out one flagrant self-contradiction of the Christianity-canting and civilization-mongering British Government. In its imperial capacity it affects to be a thorough stranger to the contraband opium trade, and even to enter treaties proscribing it. Yet, in its Indian capacity, it forces the opium cultivation upon Bengal, to the great damage of the productive resources of that country; compels one part of the Indian ryots to engage in the poppy culture; entices another part into the same by dint of money advances; keeps the wholesale manufacture of the deleterious drug a close monopoly in its hands; watches by a whole army of official spies its growth, its delivery at appointed places, its inspissation and preparation for the taste of the Chinese consumers, its formation into packages especially adapted to the conveniency of smuggling, and finally its conveyance to Calcutta, where it is put up at auction at the Government sales, and made over by the State officers to the speculators, thence to pass into the hands of the contrabandists who land it in China. [...]

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, *The British Rule in India* (June, 25, 1853), in *Dispatches for the New York Tribune. Selected Journalism of Karl Marx*, Penguin Books, London 2007, p. 215.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, p. 217.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, pp.218-219.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx, *The Future Results of British Rule in India* (August 8, 1853), in *Dispatches for the New York Tribune. Selected Journalism of Karl Marx*, Penguin Books, London 2007, p. 224.

The Indian finances of the British Government have, in fact, been made to depend not only on the opium trade with China, but on the contraband character of that trade. Were the Chinese Government to legalize the opium trade simultaneously with tolerating the cultivation of the poppy in China, the Anglo-Indian exchequer would experience a serious catastrophe. While openly preaching free trade in poison, it secretly defends the monopoly of its manufacture. Whenever we look closely into the nature of British free trade, monopoly is pretty generally found to lie at the bottom of its 'freedom'<sup>18</sup>.

Here, as elsewhere in his journalistic pieces, Marx displays an exceptionally scrupulous attention to detail, as he examines letters, parliamentary acts, political and economic reports, as well as studies dedicated to specific issues.

His journalistic writing also exhibits a stinging, biting, vehement style, at times ironic, venomous and penetrating, which frequently resorts to a hammering repetition of facts and names. Irreverent towards the powers that be, Marx's style is never pompously oratorical, even as it employs metaphor and imagery, colourful, emblematic and memorable expressions, as well as learned historical, economic and literary references.

Marx's articles take us back to the live historical events of the years in which they were written; they bring back to life politicians and intellectuals, obscure state officers and business leaders, diplomats and generals, ministers and MP's as skilful as quick-change artists at shifting positions in parliamentary halls. Not to mention the places he evokes: the harbours of Canton, the officers' colonial residences, seas and rivers on which warships sail...

In conclusion, reading Marx's journalistic writing reinforces our view of him as an extraordinarily modern, and lucid, analyst of global capital. Marx assigns colonialism a central role in the birth and development of capitalism, and provides a key to the understanding of history and society within a context of universal interdependence which we may, perhaps, consider more relevant to today's world than to the world of 150 years ago.

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *History of the Opium Trade* [II] (September 25, 1858), in *Dispatches for the New York Tribune. Selected Journalism of Karl Marx*, Penguin Books, London 2007, pp. 30-31.

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