

Marxism, Modernity, and Revolution: The Asian Experience

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In this paper I wish to examine how the European understanding of revolution and the birth of a new social order based on equity and social justice, as popularised by Marxism, travelled to Asia following the Russian Revolution of 1917, how it was interpreted by the Asian revolutionaries, and how the Marxian revolutionary idea, a product of European modernity, was communicated to the Asian masses. Asia's encounter with Marxism involved the two-way flow of a key European concept: how Marxism, a product of the European Enlightenment, flowed into Asia, and how it underwent a transformation and re-emerged in the form of Asian Marxism. This raises a series of questions: (a) as the modernist spirit of Marxism had to encounter the pulls of tradition and religion in colonized Asia, how did the leaders of revolutionary movements in Asia respond to it? And (b) did they substantially modify the original spirit of Marxism, which was grounded in the European Enlightenment? In that process, did Marxism lose its original fervour, or is it that a new variant of Marxism, namely, Asian Marxism, emerged out of this negotiation between the East and the West? (c) Is Marxism essentially Eurocentric in the sense that, as a product of European Enlightenment, its understanding of society and history essentialized the European categories of modernity; namely, reason and science? And if this is so, is an East–West negotiation possible? (d) In large parts of Asia, Marxism gained great popularity. Which strategy did the Asian Marxists use to make this popularity possible? Furthermore, what was it that made Marxism relevant in Asia and made it possible for the Asian Marxists to adopt appropriate strategies in different parts of Asia?

This paper is a revised version of the keynote lecture delivered on 7 October 2010 at the Cluster Conference on the “Asia-Europe in a Global Context” at Heidelberg University. My thanks go to all those scholars who made comments following my presentation.

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One possible explanation for this last central question lies in the hiatus between the promises of equity and social justice in the religious teachings of Asia (as in Christianity too) and the realities of colonial oppression. Marxism's focus on how to change the world, instead of living with the world as it was, appealed to the imagination of the socially downtrodden masses under colonialism, especially the peasantry. These questions will be examined, although not necessarily in this order, by exploring how Asian Marxism gained a foothold in Indonesia, the Arab countries, Vietnam, China, Korea, and India. Finally, I shall explore the possibility of any homogenous notion of Asian Marxism, which was born out of Asia's encounter with European Marxism, the latter presenting itself in the form of a universalist doctrine of revolution across the world. This question is especially relevant because, while Marxism that travelled to Asia from Europe was based on a kind of homogenous Russian interpretation universalized by the Bolsheviks and the European communist parties after the Russian Revolution of 1917, in Asia, despite some apparent similarities like the predominance of tradition, religion, and nationalism, the situation varied from country to country. Although most of the Asian Marxists were trained in Europe, while applying their understanding to the concrete situation in Asia they often had to accommodate the local uniqueness of the region and suitably modify the European version.

1. Asia's negotiation with Marxism involved two central issues: First, a number of front-ranking leaders of Asian Marxism, like M. N. Roy in India and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, and some of the leaders of Indonesian and Korean communism, became Marxist revolutionaries after their political, intellectual, and organizational training in Europe, that is, in the Soviet, German, French, and Dutch communist parties. For them Marxism represented an alternative, radical modernity that opposed the kind of modernity projected by capitalism. However, the most challenging question was first, how to transplant this vision of an alternative modernity to Asian soil by effecting a negotiation with traditional Asian culture, religion, and values. And second, in a number of countries like India and Indonesia, for example, the Asian Marxists, in their opposition to Western colonialism, had to encounter the challenge of nationalism that was largely grounded in the European view of modernity. In other words, the Asian Marxists had to simultaneously provide a critique of colonialism as well as nationalism, while projecting their vision of an alternative modernity. Rooted in the Marxian theory of revolution it envisaged an order conceptualised in terms of transformative categories, which aimed at the birth of a new society that would be based on the notions of equity and social justice.

Second, as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon and thereby a product of European modernity, a standard argument is advanced by the post-colonialists, following Edward Said, that Marxism is ontologically grounded in a kind of essentialism that does not provide any particular space to the non-European world. If this is truly the case, then Asian Marxism would have been vitiated in its understanding, coloured as it was by the Eurocentric spirit of Marxism. This needs to be countered on two levels. On one level Marx's alleged Eurocentrism,

which is largely based on his well-known and rather debatable proposition that British rule in India was destructive as well as regenerative, needs a revised understanding.

As Kolja Lindner has demonstrated in a recent article, there are at least two grounds upon which to contest the essentialist allegations against Marx.¹ First, in his later writings, especially in his *Ethnological Notebooks*, Marx highlighted the economic superiority of communal property over the Western notion of private property. In this he was greatly motivated by an eastern phenomenon, namely, the Russian rural commune (*mir*) with its collective style of functioning. Second, there was a distinct shift in the late Marx's reflections on India in which he no longer spoke of the regenerative role of British rule; instead he castigated, in very strong terms, the English vandalism of Indian society. On another level, Marxism travelled to Asia not so much through the writings of Marx as through Lenin, since it was Lenin's writings on colonialism and imperialism, which directly addressed the concerns of the eastern people, that provided the immediate stimulus to the Asian Marxists. This is especially significant, since from the very beginning Marxism was accessed by the Asian revolutionaries through its Russian, not its German version.

2. In light of the complexities of understanding how the concept of revolution flowed into the Asian continent and motivated Asian revolutionaries and their followers, Robert A. Scalapino's observation is worth considering. On one level the experience of parliamentarism in the west was quite dismal, as it came to be identified with corruption, special privilege, factionalism, and continuous political crisis. On another level the Asian Marxists found communism's focus on community and collective group representation akin to their own traditions and a viable alternative to individualism.² It is, therefore, a fascinating exercise to examine the varied strategies pursued by Asian Marxists who were involved in transplanting a radical modernist concept of Europe on Asian soil, keeping in mind the national and cultural specificities of those countries in which they operated.

Indonesia: Marxism was born in Indonesia in 1920 when the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), one of the oldest Marxist parties in Asia, was founded. From the very beginning it was confronted with the challenge of religious nationalism, represented by Sarekat Islam, the most important and influential force in the country voicing the ideology of Pan-Islamism in its fight against Dutch colonial rule. For the PKI the central problem was how to struggle simultaneously against Dutch colonialism and Pan-Islamism, since the latter had no place in the Marxist vocabulary, religion being an anathema. However,

¹ Kolja Lindner, "Marx's Eurocentrism. Postcolonial Studies and Marx Scholarship," *Radical Philosophy* (May-June 2010): 27–41.

² Robert A. Scalapino, "Communism in Asia. Toward a Comparative Analysis," in *The Communist Revolution in Asia. Tactics, Goals and Achievements*, ed. Robert A. Scalapino (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1965), 3–5.

from the very beginning, the PKI leadership was sharply divided on this issue. There was one section, represented by Tan Malaka and Darsono, which believed that in the fight against Dutch colonial repression Sarekat Islam had to be brought in as an ally since it had a strong popular base and contained radical elements, as evinced in its understanding that colonialism was equated with sinful capitalism. In fact, the strategy of this wing of the PKI was to convert sections of Sarekat Islam into communist bastions, namely, Sarekat Rakjat, through which the party would make inroads among the toiling masses who were deeply religious.

In other words, taking its cue from Kahin's classic study³ of Indonesian nationalism and communism, it can be argued that within the PKI this section was in favour of striking an alliance with Islam, nationalism, and Marxism. However, this position was contested by a more militant wing represented by Musso and Alimin, who rejected the idea of any such negotiation with nationalism and Islam. Interestingly, the Communist International (Comintern), while officially questioning any alliance between the PKI and Sarekat Islam, did not, in practice, oppose it, and instead indirectly lent support to the strategy of alliance between Sarekat Islam and PKI. As a consequence, in 1926, because of the adventurism of the militant wing of the PKI, an abortive communist uprising was staged, which ended in disaster. Eventually the PKI recovered ground by establishing an alliance with nationalism in Indonesia, which was represented by Sukarno and Hatta in the 1940s during the period of Japanese occupation. This strategy paid dividends, as evinced by the PKI's emergence as a formidable force in Indonesian politics during the post-war period. In other words, Marxism in Indonesia broke ground only through negotiation and cooperation with nationalism and Islam.

The Arab World: As in Indonesia, in the Arab world Marxism's central challenge was how to negotiate with Islam in the struggle against imperialism. Maxime Rodinson's seminal study⁴ of Marxism in the Middle East provides interesting clues as to why in countries like Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon Marxism appealed to the Arab masses. For a number of leaders in the communist parties of these countries, Islam came to be seen in a radical spirit. It was seen as opposing monopoly and usury and hence capitalism and wealthy oppressors. In this context Islam became the alternative democratic defender of peace. As an example, Rodinson cites Raif Khoury, a Syrian communist, who interpreted the solemn call "Allaho akbar," sounded daily from the mosque, as the following: "Do you remember, each time you hear the echo of that pristine call, that *Allaho akbar* means, in plain language: punish the greedy usurers! Tax those

³G. M. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952).

⁴Maxime Rodinson, *Marxism and the Muslim World*, Indian edition. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1980). Rodinson's study, based on original sources, demonstrates how Marxism broke ground in the Arab world by effecting a negotiation with Islam.

who accumulate profits! Confiscate the possessions of the thieving monopolists! Guarantee bread to the people! Open the road of education and progress to women! Destroy all the vermin who spread ignorance and division against the community (*omma*)!”⁵ Khaled Bagdash, a veteran Marxist and general secretary of the Syrian Communist Party, focused on the best tradition of Arab wisdom and the Arab patrimony of freedom, the underlying idea of which he sought to find in the noble Hadith: “He who helps the oppressor will have the power of Allah against him.”⁶ This, of course, does not mean, as Rodinson points out, that he adopted the religious credo. But the message to the people that the Communist Party was not opposed to the religious tradition but rather respected and honoured it, was made clear.⁷

This position was not, of course, shared by all Arab Marxists. It thus sparked a serious debate that questioned the necessity of studying Marxism in the writings of Marx and Lenin if socialism was to be found in Islam itself.⁸ Years later, in 1989, this debate was revived again when many Arab Marxists argued that it had been a mistake on the part of the Arab communists to ignore the role of Islam in the cultural heritage of the Arab world. They came in support not only of “Islamic heritage” but also of its revival, since Islam’s anti-state stance could be used against IMF and global capitalism. This was obviously contested by many others among the Arab Marxists.⁹

Vietnam: Vietnam is one of those few countries in Asia where Marxism put down deep roots almost since its inception in the 1930s. Ho Chi Minh, the architect of Vietnamese communism, was trained in France and the Soviet Union. But he developed a highly indigenous model of revolution, drawing clues from the tradition and culture of the country. Unlike the political use of Islam in Indonesia and the Arab world, in Vietnam the focus was wider. Here the strategy was to ground Marxism in the soil of the country itself, in its society and its indigenous values. This was manifest on two levels: In 1925 Ho Chi Minh founded Thanh Nien (Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League), which created and publicized the idea of a new Vietnamese society, with a focus on political liberation (national independence) and social emancipation (land to the tiller).

Later, in 1943, in a near echo of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of national-popular collective consciousness, the ‘Theses on Culture’, framed by the Indo-Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, espoused the idea of a new democracy in Vietnam that would be national, scientific, and popular. Scholarly studies on Vietnamese communism have shown that Vietnamese Marxism aimed at a critique of traditional patriotism, which focused on

⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tareq Y. Ismael, *Communist Movement in the Arab World* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 94–95.

a “sacred land” or “fatherland.” Under Ho Chi Minh’s guidance Thanh Nien introduced a new concept “Cach menh,” which meant revolution. For him this was something different from rebellion, its central emphasis being the idea that in Vietnam the masses constituted the subject, object, and instrument of revolution. Accordingly, in Vietnam it was argued that the conflict was not between “we” (the Vietnamese nation) and the French colonialists. Rather, “we” meant the revolutionary forces, namely, the workers, peasants, and allies in the revolution—the students, small merchants, and small landowners. At this point the revolution was primarily a national rather than a class question since Vietnam was not yet ready for an immediate Socialist revolution.¹⁰

Taking its cue from Lê Thành Khôi, a Vietnamese scholar from France, it can now be established that Ho Chi Minh’s remarkable ingenuity was evident in his radical reinterpretation of traditional Confucian values that were dominant in Vietnamese society—namely, humanity, justice, intelligence, courage, and integrity. Thus, humanity was identified with “sincere love and total service of comrades and compatriots.” Justice meant “to do no evil. . . ; besides the interest of the community, not to concern oneself with any particular interest.” Intelligence came to be understood as that which “helps to discern the good (of the community) from the evil (which opposes it). Courage was viewed as the “ability to endure trials and, when necessary, to sacrifice oneself for the community, for the fatherland.” And finally, integrity came to be regarded as the inclination “not to crave for positions, money and compliments of others.”¹¹

China: Like Vietnam, Marxism in China established its foothold through a largely indigenous process of Sinification, which was authored by Mao Zedong and the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). This involved a delicate negotiation between Marxism and China’s tradition and culture while invoking the ideas of modernity and revolution. This was manifest on two levels: First, as Adrian Chan’s valuable study informs us, Chen Duxiu, the founding leader of the CPC, played a pioneering role in this endeavour by popularising Marxist literature in China through vernacular newspapers. Moreover, through the formation of the New Youth Group at Beijing University he introduced the highly innovative understanding that “datong,” the Chinese synonym for the ideal of harmony, would come only after an intense class struggle between the workers and the gentry and capitalists in Chinese society.¹² Qu Quubai was another very important figure who developed a distinct Marxist cultural theory for China. He demonstrated that artists and writers, in order to be true friends of the people, must develop an oral literature, “a literature written in the spoken

¹⁰ Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

¹¹ Lê Thành Khôi, “Tradition and Revolution in Hồ Chí Minh’s Thinking,” in *International Symposium on Hồ Chí Minh. Hồ Chí Minh. Vietnamese Hero of National Liberation and Great Man of Culture* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1990), 317.

¹² Adrian Chan, *Chinese Marxism* (London: Continuum, 2003). See Chap. 3 for details.

style of the language of the proletariat which he called the language of the fields and factories, to be read aloud to the proletarian audiences. It is a genre with a long tradition in China. The aim is to entertain, encourage and arouse the audience to side with and take part in the revolution, thereby gaining their own liberation.”¹³

Second, the central question underlying the issue of negotiating tradition, modernity, and revolution (the agenda of Mao) was, to take the cue from Arif Dirlik, how to counter modernity’s strategy of targeting society without discarding the idea of modernity altogether. Thus, for Mao, the problem was not just how “to get a grip on the modern world. . .but also how to gain admission and feel at home as an autonomous subject in a world that had already been claimed as home by someone else. Marxism, ironically, had to be rendered hospitable to the Chinese experience before it could help usher in a genuinely alternative modernity.”¹⁴ The phenomenon of sinified Marxism, which was, in effect, Chinese Marxism in nationalist colours, grew out of this unique negotiation with modernity. Dirlik has, quite convincingly, identified three aspects of this negotiation: First, China’s encounter with European modernity had taught her that Chinese backwardness was a consequence of European modernity, which forced all others to be incorporated into one orbit and extinguished resistance. Thus, a better modernity was possible by drawing on its positive as well as its negative aspects. Second, although nationalism was a product of modernity it could also be used for resisting and overcoming modernity. Third, modernity meant an invasion from the outside world, and hence nationalism invoked the assertion of national identity and anti-modernism.¹⁵ Understandably, Marxism in its sinified form developed along this trajectory.

Korea: Unlike Vietnam and China, communism in Korea barely reared its head until the mid-1930s. This happened for two reasons primarily: First, from the very beginning the communist movement in Korea remained severely fragmented and faction-ridden. Second, under Japanese occupation Korean communism continued to be brutally repressed. The most representative scholarly studies¹⁶ on Marxism in Korea inform us that the turning-point in the history of Korean Marxism was in 1936, when Kim Il Song, engaged in guerrilla war against Japanese occupation forces, formed the Kwangbok-hoe (Fatherland Restoration Association) and adopted a 10-point programme. The significance of this was that an indigenous understanding of Marxism was being developed that would ultimately pay dividends. First, the idea of a broad united anti-

¹³ Ibid., 101.

¹⁴ Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 114.

¹⁵ Ibid., 116–17.

¹⁶ Two major scholarly works on the history of Korean communism are Dae-Sook Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement 1918–1948* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967) and Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea. Part 1: The Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

Japanese front was projected with the participation of the whole nation, the objective being the overthrow of Japanese military rule and the establishment of a genuine people's government. Second, in the 10-point programme, which was primarily drawn up by Kim, the emphasis was exclusively on nationalism and the establishment of democracy; there was no mention of proletarian dictatorship or Socialism. In other words, Kim's understanding was that an indigenous model of Marxism had to be introduced in Korea, with a focus not on the immediate formation of a communist party but on a blending of nationalism and communism. In the 1940s, Kim's propagation of the idea of "Juche," meaning self-reliance and building up one's own country by one's own efforts, later became the cornerstone of communism in North Korea.¹⁷

India: Marxist ideas developed in India in a somewhat different manner. In its early years, namely, in the 1920s when the Communist Party was born, the initiative came from abroad on two levels: First, the architect of Indian Marxism, M.N. Roy who, was stationed in Moscow and Berlin, guided the shaping of the communist movement in India by coordinating with different communist groups who were already operating in India through clandestine channels. But Roy's vision was heavily coloured by a Eurocentric perception of Marxism that was anchored in an understanding that barely squared with the realities of Indian social and political life. There were two main tenets of his thought: First, in India a polarisation of classes had already taken place between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat because a certain level of industrialisation had already been effected under British colonial rule. And in his understanding nationalism was already a spent force in India, and a proletarian revolution (built on the Russian model) under the leadership of the Communist Party was just around the corner. Second, after Roy's exit from the scene following his differences with the leadership of the Comintern in 1929, it was the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), headed by R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley, that became the mentor of Indian communism under the direction of Comintern. Interestingly, despite differences between the CPGB and Roy on organizational matters, the CPGB's perception of Indian communism virtually replicated Roy's understanding.

The brand of Marxism that developed in India under these circumstances did not address the issues of religion and caste, just as the peasant question remained marginal on the agenda of the Indian communists. Couched in a virtually Eurocentric framework, the issue of effecting a negotiation between Marxism and the Indian tradition thus did not figure in the programmatic understanding of Indian Marxism. The contrast between the Indian case and the experience of how Marxism broke ground in the Islamic countries, China, and Vietnam, is, therefore, quite a stark one. There were, however, two exceptions.

First, in the 1920s an alternative perception of Indian Marxism had already developed in Europe among Indian revolutionaries associated with the Berlin

¹⁷ See in this connection Bruce G. Cummings, "Kim's Korean Communism," *Problems of Communism* 23, no. 2 (March–April, 1974).

group. Headed by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and his associates, they worked out an understanding of the Indian revolution centred on the premise that no viable strategy was possible in India without addressing the issues of nationalism, caste, religion, and community.¹⁸ But this alternative perception of Marxism remained completely unknown to the proponents of official Marxism and to the Communist Party of India (CPI), as it was never documented or given any official hearing and recognition in either the CPI or Comintern. Interestingly, in the debate between Lenin and M.N. Roy in 1920 on the understanding of the colonial question in the Comintern, this formed, to a large extent, Lenin's position. He contested Roy's position and emphasised the importance of the peasant question in Indian society.

Second, between 1936 and 1947, when P.C. Joshi was the general secretary of the CPI, an effort was made to work out the political programme of the CPI in cultural terms; that is, by drawing support from India's culture and tradition. However, no theoretical substantiation of this effort was possible since, as a member of the Comintern, the CPI had to abide by the tenets of international communism in which this did not figure. This was most strongly evident in the CPI's strategy of not supporting the Quit India movement launched by the Indian National Congress in 1942. This resulted in the popular perception that the CPI was an enemy of India's freedom struggle, since its stance helped British war efforts. Although there were serious debates within the CPI on this issue, it was the CPGB and Comintern, which, following the declaration of war on the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany on 22 June, 1941, instructed all communist parties to lend every possible support to the Allied powers, namely, the Soviet Union and Britain, among others.¹⁹ Joshi also realised that in India, where the legacy of nationalism was extremely strong, it was impossible for Marxism to make any inroads without negotiation with the nationalist forces. But Joshi's position on nationalism eventually became a major issue of controversy within the CPI, and this position was contested by many other front-ranking leaders of the party. Ironically, although the period under Joshi's leadership witnessed the flourishing growth of the CPI into a mass party, in 1948 he was reprimanded and virtually hounded out of the party for his alleged softness towards nationalism and questions concerning tradition and culture.

3. What emerges from this study of comparative communism in some of the most representative Asian countries is that the Marxists in this region were to an extent successful in working out a relatively autonomous space in which they could conceptualize the idea of revolution without diluting the central thrust of the Marxian revolutionary idea. This is quite suggestive because it confirms that by accommodating indigenous tradition and culture, as evident, for instance, in

¹⁸ For materials relating to this alternative understanding see Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919–1943. Dialectics of Real and a Possible History*. Second revised and enlarged edition (Kolkata: Seribaan, 2011), Chap. 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., Chap. 4.

China, Vietnam, and in the Arab world, an alternative notion of modernity was possible. This further confirms that, ontologically, Marxism is not an essentialist doctrine that can understand the non-European world only in Eurocentric terms. Marxism, therefore, provides a space where the flow of the concept of revolution and an alternative social order from the West can be suitably modified and given an Asian 'look' by accommodating the appropriate indigenous elements. Here, of course, orthodox Marxists might counter that what has come to be known as Asian Marxism is not Marxism proper, but an Asian variant that accommodated elements which did not square with the modernist ingredients of Marxism—namely, reason and science. This is obviously a position that views Marxism as a post-Enlightenment grand narrative, conceptualized in universalist terms. The way the Asian Marxists have worked out their ideas in different regions clearly demonstrates that they contest this position in no uncertain terms

However, this does raise an important methodological question: If Marxism, an essentially European intellectual product of Enlightenment, could be somewhat successfully transmitted to Asia without compromising its philosophical and political core, is there any justification at all for "Asian Marxism" to be pitted against European Marxism? Is it not evidence of the impact of Europe on Asia instead of Asia's own journey towards Marxism? Wherein precisely lies the uniqueness of Asian Marxism? One possible response to this would be that as an ideology the universalist understanding of Marxism was certainly shared by the Asian Marxists on a theoretical level, but when translating this theory into practice there were wide variations from region to region catering to local traditions, customs, religions, political parties, national movements, social and cultural practices.²⁰ In this context, as explained above, the contributions of Mao and Ho Chi Minh become extremely relevant. Thus, in China, Vietnam, and Korea the revolutionary strategy that was adopted was based essentially on an Asian understanding of Marxism, which was quite different from the model of the Bolshevik revolution of Russia.

This is especially evident with regard to the relation between nationalism and Marxism in Asia. In Korea, Vietnam, and China, Marxism, as we have seen, assumed a strong nationalist fervour and it triumphed. In Indonesia and India, the respective communist parties failed to properly negotiate this question and they suffered losses. However, it has to be kept in mind that in Korea and Vietnam the nationalist parties were rather weak and in China the Guomindang was eventually discredited. This was not the situation in India and Indonesia, where the presence of nationalist forces was strongly visible. Perhaps the Marxists in these countries feared that an alliance with nationalism would eventually lead to their own erosion. On the question of religion in India the issue remained unaddressed, while in Indonesia and the Arab world it was recognized that Islam was a factor to be reckoned with. Again, China and Vietnam are unique examples of how efforts were made to integrate Marxism

²⁰ See in the introduction to this volume.

with indigenous values and traditions like Confucianism. While these strategies were quite indigenous and innovative, they contributed to an Asian understanding of Marxism, thereby generating the flow of a new idea from Asia to Europe.

In negotiating the issues of modernity and revolution the scenario of Asian Marxism is a varied and fascinating one. Working out the vision of an alternative modernity through the concept of revolution without succumbing to any Eurocentric, universalist framework was the central challenge before the Asian Marxists. In this difficult endeavour some were successful, while others were not.

The negotiation between Marxism and modernity vis-a-vis Asia, therefore, has always been asymmetrical, since “multidirectional flows, their repercussions, transcultural ideas, and institutions cannot be processes of equal exchange,” as was pointed out earlier in this book.²¹ As has been rightly stated, “It goes without saying that the agency of the actors is shaped and maybe even determined by the context and its political, social environment. The focus on processes and mechanisms of flow introduces a dynamic angle to the analysis of how concepts move across time and space, the interplay between agency and structure. In such a conceptualisation, reality is a constantly changing picture, the moving frame best captured through the dynamics of transculturality.”²² The complex negotiation between the classical European variant of Marxism and Asian Marxism is perhaps one of the finest manifestations of this notion of transculturality.

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²¹ See page 19 in this volume

²² As discussed in the introduction to this volume, especially pages 7–9.

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The Dynamics of Transculturality

Concepts and Institutions in Motion

Flüchter, A.; Schöttli, J. (Eds.)

2015, IX, 277 p. 26 illus., 5 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-09739-8