

MARX'S VIEW OF ASIAN SOCIETY AND HIS "ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION"

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In this article Marx's view of Asian society and his "Asiatic mode of production" are analysed. It is concluded that Marx at first regarded Asian society as a special society which was stagnant and devoid of history, but that at length he overcame this view, considered that the Asiatic mode of production was begotten out of the dissolution of primitive society and was the earliest form of class society and the specific mode of production preceding the ancient mode of production, and placed this mode of production in the series of historical stages of development. Thereafter the author sets out his own views regarding the logical structure of the genesis, development, and fall of this Asiatic mode of production.

I

As indicated by Charles Parain's words, "The periodical *La Pensée* is at present in the midst of a great controversy over the Asiatic mode of production," the question of the Asiatic mode of production has recently come up for discussion again on a world scale.¹ In Japan, too, the subject has been taken up by Professor Kiyoji Honda.²

Marx's view of Asian society, in particular the question of his "Asiatic mode of production," is a topic which has long been the object of much discussion. The pre-war controversies were developed mainly during the 1930's in the Soviet Union, China, Japan and elsewhere, and during this period they were directly related to the practical tasks and questions of strategy involved in the Chinese revolution between 1925 and 1927. Was it the society of the Asiatic mode of production that western European capitalism encountered in China, or not? Further, was the Chinese society of this time at the stage of transition from the Asiatic mode of production to capitalism, or not? After these questions had been raised, discussion took place as to what was meant by Marx's "Asiatic mode of production." The result of these discussions was that the view which held that Chinese society in the 19th century was not the society of the Asiatic mode of production emerged as predominant.

¹ "Une étape nouvelle dans une discussion fondamentale." *La Pensée*, No. 114 (1964).

² Kiyoji Honda, "Aja-teki Seisan Yōshiki no Mondai (The Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production)," *Shisō*, No. 496 (Oct., 1965), and "Aja-teki Seisan Yōshiki Sairon (A Second Discussion of the Asiatic Mode of Production)," *Shisō*, No. 501 (March, 1966).

Next, in 1939 Marx's draft of *Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen* (hereafter abbreviated as *Formen*) was published for the first time in Moscow, and when this was introduced into Japan immediately after the war discussion again developed. The overwhelmingly predominant view (to which, however, I am opposed)⁸ defined the Asiatic mode of production as a variety of, or stage in, the system of slavery, associating it with the term *allgemeine Sklaverei* in *Formen* and negated the Asiatic mode of production as a specific form of production or economic structure of society. Thus many thought that the long controversy over the Asiatic mode of production had been brought to a conclusion by the publication of *Formen*.

However, the development of world history after this time raised new questions, and controversy began again. The conditions surrounding this new controversy were the national independence movements which developed so fiercely after the Second World War among the Afro-Asian countries which had hitherto been colonial or semi-colonial. The view of Asian society current in the capitalist countries of western Europe since the 19th century was a view of a society which was backward, a society which had remained static since remote antiquity, a society in which no inherent capacity for development could be discerned. It was thought that these Asians had no history. Since the war, however, the nations of Asia and Africa, headed by China, have exhibited astonishing development and are in process of steadily building their futures, and people have been compelled to pay attention to the forms of development peculiar to these countries. Thus it has been for the purposes of elucidating the specific laws of development to be found in the histories of these various nations that Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production has come to be looked into again from a new angle. Against this background the periodical *La Pensée* put out a special number on the Asiatic mode of production in April, 1964 (No. 114), and articles on this question have frequently been printed in it since that time (Nos. 117 and 122). A new controversy over the Asiatic mode of production has developed, especially in France.

Consequently, some of them overrate the specific historical character of Afro-Asian nations and maintain that peculiar laws of development rule the Afro-Asian histories and negate or revise the general principles ruling the development of world history. I cannot agree with such a tendency. Such a tendency is inclined to coincide with the erstwhile view which regarded Asian society as stagnant, deviated and isolated from the development of world history. It is our duty to make clear the specific development in the histories of these various nations, relating them to the general rules governing world history, and to render these general rules more precise and firm. My personal interest in the Asiatic mode of production is directed, first and foremost, to the firm establishment of general rules of history in which the Asiatic mode of production shall have been correctly incorporated.

⁸ Kimio Shiozawa, *Kodai Sensei Kokka no Kōzō* (The Structure of the Despotism State in Antiquity), Tokyo, Ochanomizu-shobō, 1957.

Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production was conditioned by the level of Asian studies in the mid-19th century, and for Marx himself the theory was by no means final or complete. Since Marx's death, however, advances in the sciences of history, ethnology, archaeology, etc., have provided us with a rich store of source material. Again, Marx was vexed by the theory of Asian stagnation, but the historical realities of the period following the Second World War have now spared us from being ensnared by this theory of stagnation. It is now the time for us, under new conditions, to look into Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production anew, to carry through the task which he was unable to accomplish—the completion of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production—and to place it correctly in relation to the general rules governing world history.

II

Marx's view of Asian society and his theory of the Asiatic mode of production developed gradually over time, and his early views are not the same as those of his later years. This is because they were conditioned by the level of studies of Asia and antiquity in the mid-19th century. Consequently, in order to understand Marx's view of Asian society or his theory of the Asiatic mode of production we must make a systematic analysis of his writings from his earliest compositions to those of his later years, and must grasp them developmentally. Ferenc Tökei's recent article in *La Pensée* analyses the writings of Marx and Engels with extreme assiduity (without, however, touching on *Formen*), but in doing so the theories of Marx and Engels are not grasped along with the line of theoretical development, and early writings are treated in the same manner as those produced in later years. We would seem to be obliged to say that together with the non-inclusion of *Formen* this constitutes a great defect.

Now, in order to grasp Marx's theory along with the line of theoretical development, we list the principal works closely related to his view of Asian society and his theory of the Asiatic mode of production together with the various writings and put them in chronological order in four periods as following:

PERIOD 1

- 1668 F. Bernier, *Voyages contenant la description des états du Grand Mogol, etc.*
- 1817 T. S. Raffles, *The History of Java.*
- 1818 J. Mill, *History of British India.*
- 1831 R. Jones, *An Essay on the Distribution of the Wealth and on the Sources of Taxation.*
- 1837 W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte.*
- 1845 Marx and Engels, *Die Deutsche Ideologie.*
- 1852 G. Campbell, *Modern India.*
- 1853 Marx, *The British Rule in India, and other communications on India.*

PERIOD 2

- 1857-58 Marx, *Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen.*
 1859 Marx, *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie.*

PERIOD 3

- 1867 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. I. (first edition)
 1868 Marx, Letter to Engels (from which it appears that at this time Marx read the works of G. L. von Maurer for the first time).
 1873 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. I. (second edition)
 1875 Engels, *Soziales aus Russland.*
 1877 Engels, *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring).*

PERIOD 4

- 1877 Morgan, *Ancient Society.*
 1881 Marx, Letter to Zasulich. (draft)
 1881-82 Engels, *Fränkische Zeit.*
 1882 Engels, *Mark.*
 1884 Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates.* (first edition)
 1896 Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates.* (second edition)

Let us look at the developing of Marx's theory in these four successive periods.

Period 1. This period is centred on the year 1853, the year in which Marx first conceived a strong interest in the question of Asian society. This was the last year in which the charter of the East India Company was renewed in the British Parliament, and it was the year in which Marx published a series of eight articles on India in the *New York Daily Tribune*. Let us now look at Marx's earliest view of Asian society, centring our attention on these communications on India.

Ⓐ "English interference... dissolved these small semi-barbarian, semi-civilised communities, by blowing up their economical basis and thus produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only *social* revolution ever heard of in Asia.

Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organisations disorganised and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilisation, and their hereditary means of subsistence, 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."⁴ (Italics as in the original.)

Ⓑ "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society....

England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive and the other regen-

⁴ K. Marx, "The British Rule in India," *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853. *Marx-Engels Werke*, Bd. 9, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1954, S. 132. (Hereafter cited as *Werke*)

erating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”⁵

Further, in a letter to Engels dated 2nd June, 1853, after praising Bernier's *Voyages des états du Grand Mogol, etc.* as being a clear and pertinent work, Marx speaks as follows:

© “Bernier rightly considers that the basic form of all phenomena in the East—he refers to Turkey, Persia, Hindustan—is to be found in the fact that *no private property in land existed*. This is the real key, even to the Oriental heaven.”⁶ (Italics as in the original.)

From these quotations the following points emerge clearly. At this period Marx says, “Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history” and takes notice of the stagnation and unchangingness of Asian society. Further, he holds that the basis of this stagnant Oriental despotism is constituted by the village community and the absence of private ownership of land. This communal social structure has within it no points from which development might take place, and it can evolve only by being destroyed from without. Further, he holds that British rule was this destructive force, that it had “dissolved the semi-civilised community,” and had accomplished “the only *social* revolution” in the history of Asia, a social revolution which “laid the material foundations of Western society in Asia.” Consequently, we have grounds for thinking that at this period Marx approved of the policy of dissolving the Indian village community by means of the East India Company. A despotism based on the old village community, a society devoid of private ownership of land, a society devoid of history, a stagnant society, and one whose stagnation could be broken only by British imperialism—this was Marx's view of Asian society at this time. Such a society could be understood only as a special form of society or mode of production differing completely from the form of western Europe and found only in the geographical region of Asia. Consequently, Marx was unable to place this society in relation to the stages of development represented by primitive, ancient, feudal, and modern society, and furthermore it is probable that his views were not far removed from those of Engels,⁷ who sought the causes of Asian stagnation in the geographical conditions, in “climate and the nature of the soil” and in particular in “the great desert areas” where “artificial irrigation is the first condition of agriculture.”

The above are the earliest views of Marx in regard to the Asian society of the 19th century.

Period 2. In this period Marx's view of Asian society developed greatly.

① “It is a ridiculous prejudice which is recently spread abroad that the form of primitive communal ownership is a particularly Slavic, and most especially a Russian form.

⁵ K. Marx, “The Future Results of the British Rule in India,” *New York Daily Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1853. *Werke*, Bd. 9, SS. 220–221.

⁶ *Werke*, Bd. 28, 1963, S. 254. The English translation follows *K. Marx and F. Engels On Colonialism*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House (n. d.).

⁷ Letter from Engels to Marx, June 6, 1853. *Werke*, Bd. 28, S. 259.

This form is a primitive form which we can point out among the Romans, the Germans and the Celts, but apart from this a splendid collection of specimens of this form is still to be found among the Indians at the present day, albeit that some of the specimens exist only as ruins. A still more detailed study of the forms of communal ownership in Asia and in particular in India will show how the various forms in which the collapse of the primitive communal ownership emerges from its various forms."⁸

As we see from this quotation, Marx had picked out various forms of the community in modern India, and had discovered among the most primitive communities various forms which possessed the rudimentary beginnings of private ownership, and further, he regarded these Indian communities as being the same as the primitive form of the community among the Romans and the Germans. He conceived that the analysis of 19th century India leads to an understanding of primitive and ancient society, and thereby he succeeded in categorizing Asian society in the course of the historical development of the world. The Asiatic form spoken of in *Formen* possesses within itself the rudimentary beginnings of private ownership, and is ranged together with the ancient and German forms among the three forms of mixed private and communal ownership. Furthermore, these three forms are not merely set alongside one another, but are arranged in order as historical stages of development in the logical sense, being divided by reference to the degree of dissolution of the primitive or tribal nexus, the degree of collapse of collective land ownership and degree of development of private land ownership into (1) collective land ownership, (2) the antithetical coexistence of private land ownership and collective land ownership, and (3) collective land ownership occurring only as supplementary to private land ownership, the basic form of ownership. Further, since he describes the despotic states of Asia, the city states of classical antiquity, and the states of the feudal period as being built on the foundations of these three forms of ownership, we may take it that Marx lists these three forms of the state in successive order of development.

Thus, at the time when he wrote *Formen* Marx no longer regarded the Asian community or society as being a specific form of society completely different from that of western Europe, but had succeeded in placing it historically by including it among a number of successive developmental forms. From this was begotten the following famous passage from the Introduction to *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*.

® "In general terms, we may say that the Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production are the periods through which the economic structure of society advances."⁹

What is to be noted in this passage is the fact that here Marx used the expression "the Asiatic mode of production" for the first time. We may be justified in assuming that when he succeeded in placing Asian society in his

⁸ K. Marx, *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*. *Werke*, Bd. 13, 1961, S. 21.

⁹ *ibid.*, S. 9.

series of developmental forms he gave it the name of "the Asiatic mode of production."

However, the term "Asiatic mode of production" is not used in *Formen*, and the material is brought under the term *allgemeine Sklaverei*. We have already noted how this term was used in the controversies after the war as a basis in the literature with the help of which the view that this society was a variant of ancient slave society or one stage in the development of ancient slave society attained a predominating position. The passages in *Formen* which provided bases in the literature for this kind of view were the following:

Ⓕ "... Since the individual in this form never becomes an owner but only a possessor, he is at bottom himself the property, the slave of that which embodies the unity of the community."¹⁰

Ⓖ "Slavery, serfdom, etc., where the labourer himself appears among the natural conditions of production for a third individual or community—and where property therefore is no longer the relationship of the independently labouring individual to the objective conditions of labour—is always secondary, never primary, although it is the necessary and logical result of property founded upon the community and upon labour in the community. (This character of slavery does *not* apply to the general slavery [*allgemeine Sklaverei*] of the orient, which is so considered *only* from the European point of view.)¹¹ (Italics as in the original.)

In this passage Marx stresses the difference between Oriental *allgemeine Sklaverei* and the slave system of classical antiquity on the grounds that in the former the worker was not one of the naturally bestowed conditions for production. Further, he says that since the individual cannot stand up independently of the community he becomes the slave of the community itself (or of the despotic sovereign who personifies it), and he distinguishes the forms of rule or subjection which are based on this type of community relation from the slave system of classical antiquity. Consequently, the view which regards the Asiatic mode of production as a variety of the slave system on the basis of passages Ⓕ and Ⓖ above is a mistaken one. What is more, the term *allgemeine Sklaverei* occurs in *Formen* only in this one passage, and it is not used in any of the subsequent writings of Marx. Again, as we shall show below, in *Das Kapital* as in *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* it is spoken of as "the ancient Asiatic mode of production." Consequently we cannot agree with the opinion which would equate the Asiatic mode of production with *allgemeine Sklaverei* and consider it to be a variety of, or stage in, slave society, on the sole basis of *Formen*, a work of Marx which is no more than an early sketch.

Marx had now at last succeeded in placing Asian society in his series of

¹⁰ K. Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1953, S. 393. (Hereafter cited as *Grundrisse*.)

The English translation of quotations from this work follows Jack Cohen trans., *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1964.

¹¹ *Grundrisse*, S. 395.

developmental forms and had set it before ancient society with the name of "the Asiatic mode of production," but in regard to the internal structure of this society he left extensive parts of the question in a state of obscurity and imprecision.

Firstly, at this period Marx did not distinguish precisely between the Asiatic community which provided the basis for the class society denoted by his term "the Asiatic mode of production" (a community which possessed the rudimentary beginnings of private ownership) and the classless primitive community.¹²

Secondly, as regards the ownership of land in the Asiatic form *Formen* includes two forms of ownership, one the communal form of ownership in which there is no private ownership, the form of which it is said: "In the Asiatic form (or at least predominantly so) there is no private property, but only individual possession; the community is properly speaking the real proprietor,—hence property only as *communal property*,"¹³ and the other the ownership of land by the state or the doctrine that 'all land is the King's land,' in which a unified social body or despotic sovereign appears as "the sole owner." The view embodied in the latter of these two forms, namely, that the sole owner is a despot, is a way of thinking common to the views of Asian society represented in the works of Raffles, Mill, Jones, Hegel, and others and we may suppose that Marx took it over from these works; in particular, we may suppose Hegel to have exerted a strong influence. At any rate, the fact that the character of ownership by such despotic sole owners and the connexions in theory between such despots and the collective ownership by the community which formed the basis of the state are not made clear is one of the defects in *Formen*.

Period 3. At this time Marx had read the works of G. L. von Maurer, but was still unacquainted with Morgan's *Ancient Society*. The most important work written during this period is *Das Kapital*, and in it Marx clearly uses the expression "the ancient Asiatic mode of production," and sets it before the ancient and feudal modes of production, as one of the developmental forms in a succession of stages. For example, we may quote such passages as the following:

Ⓔ "... the various original types of Roman and Teutonic private property are deducible from different forms of Indian common "property."¹⁴

① "In the ancient Asiatic and other ancient modes of production, we find that the conversion of products into commodities... holds a subordinate place..."¹⁵

¹² For a detailed treatment of this point, see Kimio Shiozawa, *Kodai Sensei Kokka no Kōzō*, enlarged edition, Tokyo, Ochanomizu-shobō, 1962, pp. 65-67.

¹³ *Grundrisse*, S. 383.

¹⁴ *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1, Moskou, Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, 1921, Kap. 1, S. 84, foot-note to second edition in 1873. The English translation of the passages from *Das Kapital* follows *Capital*, published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.

① "Peasant agriculture on a small scale, and the carrying on of independent handicrafts, which together form the basis of the feudal mode of production, and, after the dissolution of the system, continue side by side with the capitalist mode, also form the economic foundation of the classical communities at their best, after the primitive form of ownership of land in common had disappeared, and before slavery had seized on production in earnest."¹⁶

② "Cooperation, such as we find it at the dawn of human development, among races who live by the chase, or, say, in the agriculture of Indian communities, is based, on the one hand, on ownership in common of the means of production, and on the other hand, on the fact, that in those cases, each individual has no more torn himself off from the navel-string of his tribe or community, than each bee has freed itself from connexion with the hive.... The sporadic application of cooperation on a large scale in ancient times, in the middle ages, and in modern colonies, reposes on relations of domination and servitude, principally on slavery."¹⁷

In passage ② it is clear that hunting races and the Indian community, the world of antiquity, and the middle ages are listed as historical stages of development preceding the modern period. In this passage both the hunting races and the agricultural Indian community are considered to be communal societies in which the means of production are owned in common, but we may suppose that these two are set side by side as the most ancient forms of communities practising hunting and agriculture, and it is not the case that Marx distinguishes the hunting races as representing the primitive community and the Indian communities as representing the Asian form of the community. Consequently, the distinction between the primitive community and the Asiatic community is still imprecise in *Das Kapital*.

Again, from the following and other passages we can see that along with the ancient and feudal modes of production Marx recognized a specific mode of production called "the Asiatic mode of production" and considered the expropriators of surplus labour and the forms of expropriation in these modes of production to be the tribute-receiving Oriental despotic state and the system of tribute-presentation (*Tributverhältnis*), the slave-owner and the slave system, and the feudal lord and the serf system.

③ "Under slavery, serfdom and tributary (so far as primitive communities are concerned) it is the slave owners, the feudal lord, the tribute collecting state, who are the owners, hence sellers, of the products."¹⁸

④ "...because under these earlier modes of production the principal owners of the surplus-product with whom the merchant dealt, namely, the slave-owner, the feudal lord, and the state (for instance, the oriental despot) represent the consuming wealth and luxury

¹⁵ *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1, Kap. 1, S. 85.

¹⁶ *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1, Kap. 11, S. 350.

¹⁷ *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1, Kap. 11, S. 350.

¹⁸ *Das Kapital*, Bd. 3, Kap. 20, S. 357. In this quotation the author has made some alteration in wording, i. e., serfdom has been substituted for 'feudalism' and tributary for 'vassalage'.

which the merchant seeks to trap . . ."¹⁹

In passage ④, too, we conceive that the distinction between the primitive community and the Asiatic community is imprecise, and it appears the Asiatic despotic state is thought of as being a system of rule which reigns over primitive communities and draws off surplus labour from them. From this we can perceive that at this period Marx's understanding of the Asiatic despotic state, that is, of the structure of the Asiatic mode of production, was still insufficient.

Period 4. Marx's draft of the Letter to Zasulich was composed after reading Morgan's *Ancient Society*, and since it is one of his last writings on this subject we can find in it his most fully developed view. In this draft letter the distinction between the Asiatic community forming the basis of the Asiatic mode of production and the primitive community was made clear for the first time. In this letter Marx equates the Russian community, the subject of the letter, with the Asiatic form of the community, and calls it the agricultural community. Going on to compare this agricultural community with the primitive community, he distinguishes the following three points: Firstly, the agricultural community has been emancipated from the narrow bonds of the natural kinship. Secondly, the cultivator already owns his house and garden. Thirdly, land is still owned communally, but it is redistributed among the members at regular intervals and each plot is cultivated and managed on their own accounts and the produce remains in individual hands.²⁰

Thus in Engel's *Fränkische Zeit*, written just at this time, the author holds that "in places where the state has come into being at a period when the community cultivates the land in common—as among the Asian races of Aryan stock and among the Russians—or where at the very most the land is given out to individual families for temporary use, that is to say, in places such as these in which private ownership of land has not yet been produced, the state power appears in the form of a monarchical despotism,"²¹ and shows that the Asiatic despotic state makes its appearance on the basis of older communities of the primitive or Asiatic form. In this case, too, the relations between the Asiatic or primitive communities and the despotic monarch who towers above them are not very clear. However, from these passages we can learn that about 1881–1882, immediately prior to Marx's death, Marx and Engels recognized the existence of a society of the Asiatic mode of production.

However, in Engels' *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (in particular in the largely revised second edition of 1896), which was published after Marx's death, no mention is made of the Asiatic mode of

¹⁹ *Das Kapital*, Bd. 3, Kap. 20, S. 363.

²⁰ K. Marx, "Brief an Zasulich," Konzept. *Marx-Engels Archiv*, Bd. 1, Frankfurt A. M., Marx-Engels Archiv Verlagsgesellschaft M. B. H., 1926, S. 321. The English translation follows J. Cohen trans., *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*.

²¹ F. Engels, "Fränkische Zeit." *Werke*, Bd. 19, 1962, S. 475.

production or the Asiatic despotic state. We suppose that for some reason Engels deliberately ignored the Asiatic mode of production, that is the world of the ancient Orient, and consequently the Bronze Age, when he wrote his *Der Ursprung usw.* His reasons is not clear, but I wish to affirm the fact that until his death Marx recognized the Asiatic mode of production as the earliest form of class society.

By means of the above analysis we have been able to show that Marx's view of Asian society gradually developed, that the concept of the Asiatic mode of production was posited, and that this was placed historically as being the earliest form of class society, a society based on the Asiatic community, and as being the specific mode of production preceding the ancient slave-owing mode of production. Such a view is also to be found in the articles recently published in the periodical *La Pensée*. For example, Ferene Tökei²² defines the Asiatic mode of production as "a class society based on tribal communal ownership," and concludes that "Marx and Engels thought of the Asiatic mode of production as a separate category resting on the basis of the conditions of ownership surviving from primitive society." Consequently, it seems that Tökei, like myself, regards the Asiatic mode of production as a specific mode of production preceding the ancient mode of production. However, he does not sufficiently develop the question of what structure was possessed by this specific mode of production.

III

We have already seen how Marx regarded the Asiatic mode of production preceding the ancient mode of production as the first form of class society, and I myself also agree with this, but Marx left the question of the content of the Asiatic mode of production almost entirely undeveloped. The questions of why the Asiatic mode of production is placed before the slavery mode of production; why it was inevitable that the earliest class society to be born out of the dismemberment of the primitive community should have taken the form of the Asiatic mode of production, the questions of what structure it possessed, what occasioned its collapse, and why the ancient slavery mode of production was necessarily formed out of its collapse, etc.—in sum, the total theoretical structure of the genesis, development, and fall of the Asiatic mode of production—this is something which we must build up for ourselves. I have undertaken the attempt to build up the theoretical structure of the Asiatic mode of production from this standpoint.²³ In doing

²² Ferene Tökei, "Le mode de production Asiatique dans l'oeuvre de K. Marx et F. Engels," *La Pensée*, No. 114 (Apr., 1964).

²³ Kimio Shiozawa, *Kodai Sensei Kokka no Kōzō*, enlarged edition, 1962, and "Ajia-teki Seisan Yōshiki Shakai ni okeru Kaikyū Bunka (Class Differentiation in the Society of the Asiatic Mode of Production), in *Kyōdōtai no Shiteki Kōsatsu* (Historical Examinations of the Community), A Collection of Papers in Honour of Professor Kichiji Nakamura, Tokyo, Nihon Hyōron-sha, 1965.

so I followed the method employed by Marx in *Das Kapital* on the capitalist mode of production and attempted to build up the structure of the Asiatic mode of production by ascertaining, first, what was the elemental unit of production and how the labour process involved in it was carried through, and then in what form the class differentiation among these elemental units of production developed, being prescribed by the character of the elemental unit of production, and what mode of production was formed as a result. The following is a summary.

1. The Elemental Unit of Production=The Asiatic Community

The elemental unit of production, as well as of society, is 'the Asiatic community' itself. Not the primitive community. Through the development of the various factors inherent in this community the Asiatic mode of production was built up, monarchical despotism arose, and under the rule of monarchical despotism the basis was still constituted by the Asiatic community. Since the factors involved in the development of the Asiatic mode of production are included in their primary forms within this community, the Asiatic community is both theoretically and historically the starting-point of the Asiatic mode of production. I denote by the name of the "elemental unit of production" in the mode of production concerned that unit of production which both theoretically and historically constitutes the starting-point from which the mode of production arises and which becomes the basis of that mode of production once it has arisen (the commodity in the case of the capitalist mode of production), but I believe, for the reasons given below, that the basic unit in the Asiatic mode of production was the Asiatic community itself, and not the families contained within the community. Firstly, in the Asiatic community private ownership had arisen only in respect to the *heredium* or garden, while ownership of the most important means of production, cultivated land, forest land, and moorland, appertained to the community itself, and individual families had this cultivated land allotted to them under a re-allotment system, and were only allowed to use it for a specified period.

Secondly, the Asiatic community was the unit in production and was an important unit of co-operative labour in the labour process. In particular the forms of work which were of decisive importance for the reproduction of the Asiatic community—river and irrigation works, land reclamation, etc.—were carried out by means of communal labour with the community as the unit.

Thirdly, the Asiatic community was the economic unit of reproduction, and the replacement of labour-power and of the means of production was carried out with the community as the unit, and this was carried out with the accompaniment of a division of labour within the community, a differentiation of functions more or less entirely under the conditions of natural economy.

Since, in this way, the basic unit of production was the community itself, the independence of individuals and families vis-à-vis the community was

extremely weak.

2. The Form of Class Differentiation

The basic class differentiation in society develops among the elemental units of production. Since the basic unit of production in the Asiatic mode of production is the community itself, class differentiation in society develops basically among communities. Since the minimum unit of production and of reproduction is the community itself as the elemental unit, any form of régime which splits or breaks up the community, or draws labour-power away from it, will make the reproduction of the community impossible. Consequently, at this stage the only possible régime was a form which expropriates surplus labour or surplus products from the community as the unit and without breaking up the community in any way, that is to say, the special form of presentations of tribute from one community to another. Such a kind of régime is what is meant by the Asiatic mode of production, considered as an order in which power is exercised over other communities by means of the community.

Now this class differentiation between communities is based principally on unequal development among the communities resulting from differences in levels of production due to differences in the natural conditions, but this does not mean that we can deduce the emergence of the Asiatic mode of production directly from this unequal development. In the last resort, the Asiatic mode of production, that is to say, the rule of communities by a community, emerges as the result of subjugation of one sort or another, but among communities which exist as more or less self-sufficient reproductive units having no relations with other communities unequal development, where it exists, will not be directly connected with the subjugation of other communities. For unequal development to provide an advanced community with a motive for subjugating other communities and forming permanent relations of political subordination under which surplus labour will be expropriated from these communities it is necessary that the beginnings of class differentiation should already have occurred in the advanced community to a certain degree, and that the advanced community should have had experience of the pleasures of expropriating the labour of others and should harbour a desire to do so. Thus, class differentiation under the Asiatic mode of production, that is to say, among communities, presupposes the beginnings of class differentiation developing among families within the community.

However, since the families in the Asiatic community are not independent units of production or units of economic reproduction, it is difficult to apply the concept of class differentiation to them in the strict sense. Nevertheless, as the family already owns privately the *heredium* and movable property, receives an allotment of cultivated land for a specified period, and constitutes a unit of co-operative labour in a number of kinds of work in the labour process as well, this will be the occasion of a special form of class differentiation taking place among families along the following lines.

First, since the object of private ownership arising within the community

are the *heredium* and movable property, class differentiation will appear in respect to quantitative differences in regard to *heredium* and movable property, a differentiation consisting on the one hand in the enlargement and concentration of private ownership, and on the other in the reduction and loss of private ownership.

Next, since the utilization of cultivated land typically appears in the form of a system of periodic land re-allotment, it is necessary to enlarge one's rights to receive cultivated land under this system if one is to enlarge the area of cultivated land under one's own management. However, since the periodic re-allotment of cultivated land is carried out through the rights of membership of the community, the accumulation of rights will be necessary for the accumulation of rights to receive cultivated land, and further, this will have to be carried out by accumulating members who possess the right of membership of the community, and consequently this will manifest itself in an increase in the numbers of free families. In such a process of class differentiation, those who go down will, merely by losing their movable property and *heredia*, be absorbed as labour-power within the rising families, but with their rights of membership, that is, their rights to receive cultivated land, intact. Since this is so, the *déclassé* within the community will not decline to the status of slaves, since they are not separated from their rights of membership of the community, that is, their rights on arable land. That is to say, the stratificatory differentiation which takes place in the Asiatic community manifests itself in the form of differences in the numbers of free families, and does not take the form of a class differentiation into slaves and slave-owners.

Now, when a giant family possessing notably large numbers of members and having accumulated large quantities of *heredia* and movable property emerges out of this process of stratificatory differentiation, the headship of the community will be permanently vested in this family. Further, he, the head of the community, will concentrate into his own hands all community functions—the direction of communal labour, rights over cultivated land and irrigation water, rights of administration and disposal in regard to communal property, rights over religious observances, the right of military command, etc.—and by doing so he will change from a civil servant carrying out functions on behalf of the community, a mere representative, into the ruler, and expropriator, of the community. The transformation of authority, namely the development of class differentiation within a community, requires as its prerequisite the expropriation of surplus labour based upon inequality in holdings of the means of production.

Firstly, on the basis of the accumulation of *heredia* in the hands of powerful families, the land thus acquired is loaned out to other members who have lost their *heredia*, and as a result a part of the surplus labour of the members receiving such land is expropriated by the powerful families, particularly the head of the community.

Secondly, if, as a result of stratificatory differentiation, the headship of

the community is permanently vested in a certain powerful family, the cultivated land which originally appertains to the ownership of the community will come to be owned in the name of the head as representative of the community, and in the course of time it will come to be thought of as being the land of the head. In this way the head of the community becomes "the sole and supreme owner." This is the archetype of the ideology of "the King's land" which is peculiar to the despotic states of ancient Asia. In these cases the rights of ownership enjoyed by the despotic monarch are not private ownership, but are merely thought of as being the collective right of ownership in respect to cultivated land as possessed by the community, considered as the right of ownership enjoyed by the head of the community in his capacity as representative of the community.

Now, when in this way the land of the community comes to be thought of as being the land of the head of the community the system of periodic land re-allotment operated by the community changes to the form in which the land of the head is distributed by the head, and as a result of this a part of the surplus labour of those who receive a share is expropriated by the head.

Thirdly, expropriation of surplus labour by the head of the community also occurs in other forms. The head of the community, who held rights of administration and disposal in regard to communal property and was in control of exchanges with other communities, had in his hands the communal property given in exchanges and the articles acquired by exchange, and he frequently made a part of these goods into his own private property, or appropriated as his own property or he made a part of the produce and labour services contributed by the members for the purposes of warfare or religious observances into his own private property and labour services.

Within the Asiatic community, particularly within the subjugating community, class differentiation, that is, expropriation, had begun in such forms as these. I would draw the reader's attention to the fact that this class differentiation is not the same as that which produced the slave system, nor does it presuppose the slave system.

Subjugating communities, having tasted such expropriation of the surplus labour of others within the community, direct their expropriation to objects external to the community, subjugate other communities, enlarge more and more their ideas of grandeur, and, making the unequal development among the communities all the greater, rapidly expand their sphere of rule and form small states, or local states. Further, as a result of differentiation among this group of small states the imposing despotic states of Asia, built on a national scale, are formed.

3. The Asiatic Mode of Production=The Despotic State of Ancient Asia

The Asiatic mode of production is an order of rule over a large number of Asiatic small communities by a despotic monarch or state. The basis of the rule over these small communities (and the individuals within them) by the state or monarch resides in the nature of the Asiatic form of the com-

munity itself. By this we refer to the fact that in the Asiatic community the individuals (and families) contained within the community cannot stand up independently of the community. For this reason, "he is at bottom himself the property, the slave of that which embodies the unity of the community."²⁴ Consequently, if one has control of the functions of the community one can exercise rule over the members of the community, for whom an independent stand in relation to the community is impossible. With this character of the Asiatic community as its basis, the state, by absorbing into itself the various communal functions possessed by the small communities, can exercise rule over a large number of isolated small communities, bind them to itself, and go on to exercise rule over the individuals within the small communities also. Now the following two are the principal ways in which the state absorbs the communal functions possessed by the small communities. The first is the performance on a large scale by the state itself of the communal functions, namely, river and irrigation works, etc., which mediate in the reproduction of the labour process in the small community, the elemental unit of production. The second is to deprive the small communities of their rights of ownership in respect to land (this was thought of as being owned by the head of the community) and have the land owned by the state (by the despotic monarch), thus degrading the small communities to the position of mere occupiers. Consequently, the collective landownership which forms the basis of the community places limitations on the establishment of private ownership by the members within the community, while the character of the Asiatic community itself, in which the members cannot take an independent stand in relation to the community, provides the basis for the exercise of rule by the state over the small communities and the individuals within them. In the Asiatic mode of production the state uses the collective ownership of land, the communal function which checks the independence of the members, as its instrument of rule.

Now in their essential nature the rights of landownership of which the despotic state (or monarch) deprives the small community, that is to say, the landownership enjoyed by the state (or by the despotic monarch), are not rights of private landownership but rights of collective landownership which have been accumulated on a national scale. Further, the content of the hereditary rights of occupancy left in the small communities is in no wise of the nature of private rights of ownership, but is still essentially of the nature of collective rights of ownership. By bringing the small communities into relations of dependence under the despotic state (or monarch) the collective rights of land ownership have been divided into those of a higher order and those of a lower order. We have already pointed out that in *Formen* the relation between the way of thinking represented in the words "the sole and supreme owner" and the notion that land appears only as collective ownership is by no means clear, but, as we have shown above, it is possible to understand these kinds of land ownership in a unified manner and without

²⁴ See Note 10 above.

any contradiction between them.

The form in which surplus labour was drawn off between such states and small communities was the special system of presentations of tribute, a form distinct from the slavery of antiquity and the serfdom of the feudal period. As we have already stated, we cannot agree to the characterization of this form as *allgemeine Sklaverei* on the basis of the text of *Formen*, nor to its being regarded as a type of, or stage in, the slave system of antiquity.

4. The Fall of The Asiatic Mode of Production

= The Establishment of a New Elemental Unit of Production

The Asiatic mode of production is a form of rule based on the Asiatic community. Consequently, as a result of these communities lapsing into atony the power of the state will be rendered insecure, and if the communities break up the power of the state will also break up. Engels speaks as follows: "Where the ancient communes have continued to exist, they have for thousands of years formed the basis of the cruelest form of state, Oriental despotism, from India to Russia. It was only where these communities dissolved that the peoples made progress of themselves, and their next economic advance consisted in the increase and development of production by means of slave labour."²⁵

This being the case, in what way does the community break up? As a result of advances in the productivity of labour the families in the community achieve independence as units of production and reproduction and also own cultivated land, so that in the place of Asiatic community itself a new elemental unit of production attains an independent existence. Hereupon the Asiatic community breaks up, and the form of class differentiation also changes. The new class differentiation develops among the families which are the new elemental unit of production, but since through the rights of membership of the community these families enjoy private ownership of cultivated land class differentiation among these families of necessity appears as a resolution into slaves and slave-owners, and thus slaves make their appearance within the community and the slavery mode of production of antiquity is formed.

By the above analysis we have been able to build up the total theoretical structure of the genesis, development and fall of the Asiatic mode of production, without presupposing the slave system and on principles entirely different from those of the slave system. Further, I think that we have been able to show the necessity of the slave system of production of antiquity coming into being out of the fall of the Asiatic mode of production. Thus I would make it my contention that the Asiatic mode of production was a specific mode of production which preceded the ancient mode of production and came into being as one of the succession of modes of production which includes the ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production.

²⁵ F. Engels, "Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring)." *Werke*, Bd. 20, 1962, S. 168. The English translation follows F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring, Herrn Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, 3rd edition, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962.