

Reviews

Du -Yul Song: Aufklärung und Emanzipation. Die Bedeutung der asiatischen Welt bei Hegel, Marx und Max Weber. (Horizonte Asiens). Berlin:EXpress Edition, 1988. 124 pages, DM 48,—

Juxtaposition of Western and Asiatic or oriental society viz. political systems can be considered almost a household topic ever since Greek criticism of oriental despotism in the Persian empire. In modern social theory, Hegel, Marx and Max Weber stand out for their particular efforts to integrate, in a more or less systematic fashion, perceived structures of oriental societies into their over-all patterns of thinking. Their concepts of the Asiatic world obviously vary according to their very different general approaches, be it an all-encompassing philosophy of history, a conception of the genesis of capitalism and its spread across the world or a quest to understand capitalism as a very specific product of Western society.

Song, a Korean at present based in West Berlin and reader in sociology at Münster University, here presents his doctoral thesis, submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy, Frankfurt am Main in 1972, but unpublished heretofore; he aims at a critical appraisal of the above-mentioned concepts. The author has added a "postscript 1985", to take account of debate and developments since the time of writing, also free from the trammels of academic exercise. It may be noted at the outset that the text has lost none of its relevance by the intervening years; the publication therefore forms a most welcome addition to the few available serious treatments of this complex matter which I consider vital to cross-cultural understanding.

The study proceeds at two interrelated levels: (1), by comparing "Asiatic", mainly Chinese, conceptions of society with the concepts of Asiatic society elaborated by the three authors, but above all, (2), by an immanent critique of their interpretations. While the main point of reference is China, India and Persia are given consideration as called for by the texts of reference.

The introductory chapter on the relationship between *ordo naturae* and *ordo humanitatis* in Chinese thought (pp. 9-16) serves a multiple purpose: above all, Song claims legitimacy here for logical and methodological propositions prominent in classical Chinese and also Daoist philosophy, but clearly at variance with the mainstream of Western philosophical tradition. This also opens out an important field for the ensuing argument. The central point here

is the differentiation of the concept of polarity into complementarity, antonymy and converseness; of these, the first is predominant in Chinese tradition, epitomized in the concept of *yin* and *yang*, whereas Western thought, steeped in the tradition of eschatology, and also Manichaeism conform rather to antonymy (cf. pp. 10/93). The concept of relationalism, based on a "holistic speculation about order" (p. 11), also serves as an important orientation for the three main parts devoted to the three authors analyzed. A theme running through these considerations is the Western dichotomy of substance and form, which will be seen to have grave political as well as epistemological implications.

While noting carefully the relevance of their respective writings on Asiatic reality and thinking, Song also points out the limitations inherent, less in the authors' lack of adequate information, but in their being firmly and unquestioningly rooted in the Western tradition of thought.

Hegel dealt with China and India chiefly in his *Philosophy of History* and in his *History of Philosophy*. His basic tenet here is that China represents the beginning of history, i.e. the very initial phase of the coming to itself of Reason (or the Spirit) which can, however, still not be conscious of itself. Song details Hegel's phenomenological evaluation of China as 'in itself and for us' (*an sich und für uns*), which is to say that only from the vantage point of more evolved stages of the Spirit's path through history can China be properly understood, and certainly not by the Chinese as they presented themselves to Hegel. Whereas China is seen by Hegel as the very image of substance and stability, India is, inversely, understood as the epitome of indiscriminate movement; rejecting both, Hegel, as is well known, claims that history, properly speaking, only begins in the Persian Empire as an actual process of development. Song not only places Hegel's tenets within the context of the history of Western thought, showing *inter alia* their close relationship with Montesquieu's views on China; moreover, he confronts them with a criticism based on the Chinese view of their own society. This leads to an indictment of the "eleatic tradition hidden in Occidental philosophy which reduces variegated phenomenality to linearity pure and simple (p. 33)". This criticism applies in particular to Hegel's notion of oriental despotism which in turn is linked intimately to his concept of freedom and thereby to his entire view of a world historical process. This led Hegel to legitimize the impending colonial conquest of Asiatic societies.

Marx, in his understanding of "Oriental Society", and of China in particular, was a faithful disciple of Hegel for a long time and in a number of respects. To be sure, he modified certain of Hegel's judgements, in particular the positive evaluation of colonialism. Far from rejecting the positive element in this

process, Marx still stressed the bourgeois hypocrisy involved and looked to the East for a revolutionizing impulse even with respect to Western European society. However, Song maybe overestimates Marx's positive evaluation of contemporary movements such as the *Taiping* (cf. pp. 43-44). Marx's broader attempts at theorizing about Asiatic societies are associated with the controversial notion of Asiatic Mode of Production which Song sees as a decisive step forward. In particular, the Asiatic Mode, according to Song, is conceived not as a regionally restricted category, but as a universal stage in the history of human society, marking the transition from pre-class to class societies. Thus, notions of a specific Asiatic stagnation or Hegelian statuariness are overcome. Song bases this view above all on a thorough interpretation of the celebrated passage in the *Grundrisse* on the forms preceding capitalist production and also on Marx's late writings on Russia. Song, as others, has to leave open, at least in terms of terminology, the question of the society that succeeded the one characterized by the Asiatic mode; he limits the characteristics of this later development to stating that here, rent and tax coincided (cf. p. 54). In Marx's late writings, particularly in his evaluation of the Russian *obshchina*, at least a tendency is discernible to overcome the hallowed view of the Orient 'as such and for us' in favour of a plea for its finding a path "of its own" (p. 56).

Max Weber's analyses of Asiatic societies are intimately bound up with his quest to understand both the genesis of capitalism in England and the elements impeding such development; these studies are contained above all in his sociology of religion. Obviously, Weber is explicitly far removed from any attempt at universal historical concepts so prominent in Hegel and certainly inherent in Marx. Still, the most striking result of Song's analysis of his writings may be Weber's actual proximity to Hegel in a number of central respects, all referring to the underlying tenets in these two so very different approaches. As Song points out, this applies, first, to the view of Asiatic history as being the history of religion, which is reciprocated by Weber in his stress on religious beliefs in his approach to over-all and recent social history; this outlook is of course also present in Weber's notion of traditional society which places him squarely in the trajectory of modernization theory and, in political terms, of colonialism and imperialism. And finally, while noting the interest common to all three authors in understanding "why *modern capitalism* did not emerge in Asiatic society" (p. 77), their differences lie in "their different vantage points": Here, Weber's concept of *Christian* 'rationality' appears "as only a version of Hegelian Christian freedom" (p. 78). This criticism may sound somewhat harsh in the light of the more recent debate on Weber and thus may miss

some potential insights to be gained from him, as also hinted in the postscript (cf. p. 89 f); it does however lead back to Song's fundamental criticism of Occidental thinking in a most illuminating way:

The three authors converge in their recourse to the Occidental dichotomy of *substance* and *form*. This recourse is explicit in Hegel's juxtaposition of Chinese substantiality with bourgeois formality, but it is present as well in Marx's holistic view of pre-capitalist society as confronted by the separations of bourgeois society, and of course in Weber's concept of formal vs. material rationality (p. 80). Of these, only Marx offers the further perspective of this contradiction being resolved by achieving a higher form (*Aufhebung*). While Hegel relegated China to the dawn of world history and Weber identified it as the ideal type of an irrational prebendal state, both of them sharing the view that China, and Asiatic societies in general, fell victim to the colonialism of rational, formal or progressive Europe, an alternative of 'interaction' may be culled at least from Marx's late considerations: This would point towards adapting Western science and industry while fighting for "independence for this part of the world ... (as) two conditions inseparable from each other of one historic necessity". In this mediating perspective "the expectations, hopes and dreams of a better future for this world" (p. 81) may justly be seen to reside, at least to a considerable degree.

Song's postscript goes some way to showing the wide-ranging potential implications of his study. He points to such diverse subjects as the dichotomy of mind and body only lately overcome by psychosomatic approaches; the notion of the primitive inherent in so much illustrious scientific writing where parallels are drawn between phylogenesis and ontogenesis, attributing, in quite Hegelian fashion, to primitive peoples the status of childhood in the development of mankind; or the concept of 'Oriental Despotism' resuscitated by Wittfogel and taken up in bizarre ways by prominent representatives of the New Left, particularly in West Germany. A closing discussion takes up once again the overriding problem of dichotomy, here addressed to that of the soul and the body as expressed in the recourse to holistic Asiatic concepts apparent in youth religions. This is then related to the myth of 'Asia' which Song claims has to be included in the critique of mythology along the lines of Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this process complementarity between Asia and the West may run the risk of remaining only a model of cognition, but it might also be able "to offer a practical principle for a new vision of unity between universality and identity, mediated by *emancipatory enlightenment*" (p. 92).

It is to be regretted that the publisher - despite the lapse of 3 years to publish a book since the preface dated autumn 1985 - has not succeeded in eliminating numerous errors in type-setting that at times seriously mar the reading of this important, though by no means easy, text. This slender volume deserves a wide readership not only among Far East specialists; it appeals to the general reader concerned with the vital problems involved in mediating between intellectual traditions and in overcoming the menace of annihilation hovering (not only) over what is deemed *substance* in *one* of these traditions, the virtual monopoly of which is here questioned with so much justification.

Reinhart Köbler

Ganga Ram Garg: An Encyclopedia of World Hindi Literature. Foreword by Dr. Prabhakar Machwe. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company 1986, XVIII, 780 pp., Rs. 650 (US \$ 130)

This highly ambitious volume promises to be a reference tool not only on Hindi literature from its beginnings until today but also on the scholars both from India and abroad who contributed to the study of the language and its literature. The main part of the book consists of the encyclopedia proper, comprising entries on both authors and important works. It is followed by a list of foreign authors and a general index (giving again almost all the names contained in the former list).

The articles on single authors depend heavily on previous research and reference works such as the *Hindī Sāhitya Koś* (ed. Dharendra Varma et al.) and Ram Darash Mishra's *Modern Hindi Fiction*, the latter often being quoted almost verbatim (including some of its mistakes) without any indication. Generally, the data given seem to be correct, but there are errors even with major writers like Nirala (poems like *Saroj smṛti* and *Rām kī śakti pūjā* were written in the late thirties and not, as suggested, in the early twenties. Besides, Saroj was not the wife, but the daughter of the poet, as anyone will remember who has read the moving elegy on her death - in fact one of the finest pieces of poetry in modern Hindi literature).

The articles on important works are rather sketchy and often superfluous. Most of what is said about a particular book could have been included in the article on the author. This would have saved a lot of space.