

## BEYOND THE MODERNISM OF KARL MARX (?)

---

Kenji SASANO

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kyushu Sangyo University gave me the opportunity to studying at Sydney University. During the term (1 Sep. 1995~31 Aug. 1996), I researched into two topics. One was “The Place of Veblen in the History of Economic Thought”. The other was “Beyond the Modernism of Karl Marx(?)” A discussion of the latter topic is summed up in the following paper. Further inquiring into it is my task in the future. Needless to say, I express thanks to many staff to Kyushu Sangyo University. In particular, my thanks are due to Professor Frank Stillwell. He provided excellent facilities and support for my study at Sydney University. I also appreciate the help of Gisela Hofs at Premier Language College with my writing English.

### I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM AND ITS LIMIT

“In the modern era, satisfying wants was approved in itself. In relation to it, getting wealth was approved in itself” [N. Takagi]. In

other wards, people believed in becoming happy by increasing wealth and consuming it. In this way, the so-called belief in the wealth (modern belief) took the place of the once influential belief in God.

A representative of these days is Smith. His task was to research how productivity was increased. Surely, we could find the following worry in him. "Increased wealth is not distributed fairly. A gap between luxury and poverty is occurred." But, he believes that this worry is solved by increasing wealth. In short, this problem depends on the amount of "pie".<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, Smith's concern was concentrated on increasing productivity.

But, in the days of Marx, the gap between luxury (capitalist) and poverty (labourer) developed. Unexpectedly, Marx says that Capitalist, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created much more productive forces than have all preceding generations together.<sup>(2)</sup> As far as I know, this is the greatest paean of capitalism. How can this Marx connect with the socialist Marx? He was a thoroughgoing capitalist. Therefore, he become a thoroughgoing critic of capitalism. This is a logic of dialectic.

Anyway, wealth is now increasing. While, the gap between luxury and poverty is also increasing. Marx clarified that capitalism itself inevitably brings about this difference. Thus, he entrusted its solution to socialism. But, hoping only for the fair distribution of wealth, we do not need socialism any longer. Japan is a fine socialistic country. Even student drievs a luxury car and puts up a very nice appearance. The productive forces of capitalism managed to raise the people's low standard of living. Thus, Smith's world has swallowed Marx's world. But, Smith was too optimistic, believing in an invisible hand.

Marx predicted that capitalism will collapse sooner or later.<sup>(3)</sup> It is because he believed that the development of capitalism brings about not

only an increase of conflict between capitalist and labourer, but also the falling rate of profit. After the death of Marx, Veblen also predicted the collapse of capitalism from his peculiar point of view. Were their predictions right? The answer is Yes and No.

In the 1930's, capitalism has fallen into a great crisis. For instance, a long lasting depression, mass unemployment, an increase of conflicts among people, etc. So, Keynes was summoned. He, having said good-bye to Smith's world ("an invisible hand"), advocated the necessity of incorporating the so-called visible hand. By incorporating this hand (as it were, by socialization), capitalism got over the great crisis and remarkable development followed. This stage of capitalism was analyzed by the Regulation School.

Now, new technology called Fordism was introduced. It made the productive forces of capitalism grow by leaps and bounds. But it also increased tension in labour and provided a profound sense of alienation from labour. Namely, the workers were enforced on labour in the so-called white prison. So, capitalist offered an increase of wage in compensation for that. Thus, a compromise was made between capitalist and labourer. Many things are now produced. People purchase it with their increased wage. In this way, the age of mass production•mass consumption has come.

It goes without saying that mass production reduces the price of goods. Thus, we are able to afford items which we had once only dreamed of. But, then large-sized and sophisticated products appeared. However much our wage may be increased, these items could not be afforded. To solve this, a system of loans (sales on an installment plan) was introduced. But, without stimulating desire, goods are not bought. We already have the fundamental things needed for our existence. Thus, advertisement is indispensable. Much funds are spent on it. The war now

is made “not in product, but in sales-propaganda” [Veblen]. Lots of flyers are distributed. TV shows advertise many kinds of products in 15 minutes intervals.

In this way, capitalists created not only goods but also our desire for it. In addition, they say “the customer is a king”. Thus, people are being brainwashed and are buying and consuming (wasting) many things. We lost ourselves in “an affluent society” (Galbraith). “Hurray for capitalism!”.

But, at the end of the call, we hear the words “poverty in abundance”. There appeared the people who could not find a life worth living. They began to feel their mind’s thirst.\* Namely, the modern belief in wealth began to be shaken. In this way, produced goods were not bought. Business slowed down. The so-called depression set in. And, here a very interesting phenomenon could be observed.

\* If so, it may be the age of religion in the 21th century, as Toynbee predicted. But, I believe that the age of religion ought to be the age of criticizing religion. Namely, we ask sincerely what religion ought to be. It is because we are apt to be caught in the following trap. We use the next world (religion) as a means for doing well in this world. Or, we use the next world as an excuse for not doing well in this world.

Needless to say, most of the things produced by mass production are homogeneous. Now, looking at the right or looking at the left, we can not see a big difference. People eat the same foods, put on the same clothes, and drive the same cars around. In this way, it seemed that equality, which was one of the modern slogans, has been realized. Were people pleased with it? No, they were not pleased it. People are now becoming rather impatient about the sameness among them. They say that there is no point in looking the same.\* Thus, the age of mass production•mass consumption is coming to an end. And we are going to the days of

producing things in small quantity but different in quality.

※ The equality has not the worth in itself. The equality seemed to have the worth, because we were in the inequality. But, it does not mean that we are allowed to approve of the inequality. Could not we do nothing but living this dilemma? If so, it is important for us to acquire "the sense of balance" [S. Nishibe]. But, how could we acquire the sense of balance? It seems to me that we have to make a further inquiry into the human being.

But, by changing the structure of industry in this way, could we tide over the depression of today? If it is done successfully, there remains one big problem.

As we have seen, the history of capitalism has forced us to get more and to get further. The method of such an economy is now going to expose us to the danger of existence. Because, it is bringing about the deterioration of the environment, and by and by will bring the exhaustion of resources. In this sense, capitalism is reaching the limit. For instance, cancer in Japanese (Gan) means "a sickness caused by many things as mountain". Thus, cancer is a sickness which was brought on by the very modern era. If so, is it very difficult to cure it by using modern medicine? We learn now that modern medicine is also reaching a turning point.

In short, the destruction of the outside (nature) is going to destruct the inside (human body). The spread of capitalism has taken us that far. Nevertheless, we have no fundamental solution to its problems. "We are only trying to smooth things over for the moment" [A. Asada]. We should not yet prepare Marx's tomb.

## II. AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIALISM AS THOUGHT

"In socialism the Subjectivity (self-direction) of a human being is respected. Socialism is superior to capitalism in this point" [T. Tsuru].

Although this may be true, we could conclude as follows. Ironically, the collapse of socialism, meaning the change of socialism into capitalism, was brought about by this respect for Subjectivity. Namely, socialism dug its own grave. The collapse of socialism was inevitable. Thus, the way from capitalism to socialism has been closed. Is this true?

The argument mentioned above is disregarding the following question. "Why should the Subjectivity of a human being be respected?" Or, "What is the meaning of a human being being the Subject (the master of the earth)?" To tell the truth, this question can not be found in Marx's writings. If failing to ask this question, we would no longer be able to advocate socialism positively. The way from socialism to capitalism, according to Veblen, means the "regression to barbarous civilisation". We can not be satisfied with the collapse of socialism without reserve, for the collapse of socialism does not necessarily mean the victory of capitalism.

Now, let me introduce the next arguments of Marx, its sentences being simple but its meaning profound. There is the condition only under which a human being can live and society can exist. This condition is the doing of certain labour and the distributing of it in proper ratio. Namely, only by fulfilling this condition, a human being can live and society can exist.\* This is a self-evident truth which even a child could understand. This condition could not be changed by a human being. It is the law of nature. A human being could change only the form by which this condition is fulfilled.<sup>(5)</sup>

\* Marx's definition is not sufficient now. Because, the viewpoint of the symbiosis (A human being can not exist without being in harmony with nature) could not be found there. Thus, it is necessary to include the viewpoint of the symbiosis in Marx's definition. His definition has a structure which allows the viewpoint of the symbiosis to be included. Because, his concept of labour contains the recognition of the interaction between a human being and nature. But, Marx's concept of a human being, as we shall see later, prevents him from taking a step toward the viewpoint

of the symbiosis.

Now, the law of value-price (“an invisible hand”, Smith) could not be controlled by a human being. Instead, he must obey it. He is at the mercy of it. Saying in this respect, therefore, capitalism (free economy) is not free economy, but controlled economy.\* The master in this system is not a human being, but the law of value-price. If so, we could also think of the law of value-price as the “craft of reason” (Hegel). Because, it makes a human being (selfish-existence) distribute labour and makes society exist. In this way, the “craft of reason” changes “private vices” (Mandeville) into “public vices”, though something has been found wrong with it in recent years.

\* Surely, we are free. But, the free in this context is blind free. Because we know nothing beforehand. While, it is said that “the free is the selection with self-responsibility”(Drakcar). Its words sound wonderful, but the meaning of its content is cruel.

Instead of the above-mentioned law of value-price, a human being (a visible hand) should make willfully the distribution of labour. A human being should be the master. This is the socialism which Marx advocates. If so, socialism means a challenge of a human being to the “craft of reason” or God. A considerable preparedness is necessary.\* Anyway, we could surely say that in socialism the Subjectivity of a human being is respected. In this way, it is not capitalism but socialism that is coincidental to the following modern thought: A human being is the Subject, or the Subjectivity of a human being should be respected.

\* There are many discussions about the causes of the failing of socialism. Its failure originates from a lack in this preparedness or overestimating of the Subjectivity of a human being. In short, this is what I want to emphasize in this paper.

But, why should the Subjectivity of a human being be respected? We

could not find this question in Marx's writings. This means that Marx approves of the above-mentioned thought without any conditions. He, too, does not doubt the modern thought. In this sense, he is a so-called modernist, following the restrictions of the days. He remains within modernism. But, I believe that Marx suggests a way which makes us go beyond modernism. So, let me return to Marx's arguments and to interpret it from my point of view.

Marx said that a human being can live only by making the distribution of labour in a proper ratio. What he says here can be summarized as follows. "A human being could not live without food, clothing, and shelter. In this point, there is no crucial difference between a human being and an animal or a plant". Thus, Marx admits the following. "There is a firm limit on this earth which a human being could not surpass. A human being could not possibly move beyond this limit, even if he strives to do so. He cannot but remain within this limit. In short, a human being is not the master of this earth without any conditions. Namely, he is not the Subject." Thus, Marx is not a mere modernist.

But, why can a human being not live without food, clothing, and shelter? It is regrettable that Marx does not ask this question.\* He said that it is a self-evident truth which even a child could understand. Needless to say, nothing would come from such an assertion. So, I think that this is the ultimate reason which makes Marx remain within the modernist.

\* It may be said that this question is not a matter for social sciences. It means to go beyond the limit of social science. But I believe that it is necessary now to go beyond the limit of it. The argument should be made about how to go beyond the limit of it.

To tell the truth, by asking the question mentioned above, a new



concept (“the copernican concept”, Frankl) of a human being could be gained. It is because we cannot help confessing the following. “A human being is not the Subject. He is not the existence who created himself by himself. He is the created existence. In this sense, a human being is the Object. Thus, he is not the asking existence, but the asked existence.” By admitting to this concept of a human being, could we not advocate socialism positively? Namely, a human being is being asked for “the proper distribution of labour” and “the appropriate controlling of society.\* To achieve this, Subjectivity is given to a human being. A human being, therefore, is the “Object-Subject” [K. Takizawa]. He is not the real Subject of being called the “Subject-Subject”.

\* As I have already mentioned, it is necessary to include “the viewpoint of the symbiosis” (A human being can not exist without being in harmony with nature) in here. To do it, we need a new concept of a human being. This is one more reason why I am adhering to Marx’s concept of a human being. By the way, Marx questions the exploitation of a human being. But, does he not question the exploitation of nature? This is the limit of Marx or modernists. The exploitation of nature will lead to the exploitation of a human being in the end. Therefore, including the viewpoint of the symbiosis in here is not incompatible with the thought of Marx. Rather, it means the acceptance of Marx’s thought and the development of it. The work, who is studying the history of thought, is to prepare the tomb for the past thinker. But, we face difficulty without having Marx still alive.

Lastly, the circumstances of today (See, I in this paper) seem to demand that we awaken to this concept of a human being as mentioned above. Namely, a human being is a human being not above, not under.

### III. APPENDIX: HUMAN WANTS AND MODERN ECONOMY

It is said that socialism has been collapsed. But what is the meaning of collapse? If the meaning is that socialism has began to incorporate market economy into planned economy, I think that capitalism had been

collapsed in the 1930's. The reason is as follows. After the 1930's, capitalism has been able to stay alive by incorporating planned economy into market economy.

So, I lump the two systems together and call it modern economic system.\* In addition, it seems to me that capitalism and socialism originates from the same basis, or the so-called humanism.

\* It does not mean that economic conflict is gone. As soon as socialism disappeared, many patterns of capitalism appeared. There is the economic conflict between these types of capitalisms now. We have to analyze this conflicts and cope with it. Institutional Economics will be useful for it.

Now, the modern economic system has been working on the bases of human wants. If this so-called "system of desire" (Hegel) is left to its own, it will bring us the deterioration of environment and the exhaustion of resources. And in the end, we will not be able to exist on this earth. In this sense, the modern economic system is reaching its limits. This is the situation today, which requires us to think seriously about.

Economics——most of it——is constructed on the following precondition. This precondition is the modern thought which approves of the human wants in itself. Simply speaking, this thought, which can not be found in the Middle ages, is as follows. "Satisfying our wants makes us happy. The more we satisfy our wants, the happier we become." Marx as well as Smith do not doubt this thought. Smith emphasizes increase in production. Marx emphasizes the fair distribution of products. But he also approves of the increasing of production. At least he does not question it.

Now, productivity, under the modern economic system, has been extraordinarily increased and many things has been produced. Using Galbraith's words, we are now living in the "affluent" society. The "affluent" society means also the "superabundant" society. Nevertheless,

we can not be satisfied and are not really happy. We are complaining about the shortage of possessions and craving more and more. While the modern economic system, as I mentioned above, is going to reach the limits, we have not yet found a fundamental solution to it. "We are only trying to smooth things over for the moment" [A. Asada].

So, I believe that we must reconsider the modern thought which approves of the human wants in itself. In relation to it, we must reconsider the modern thought which thinks of a human being as the master of this earth or the existence of self-direction. In other words, we need to go back to the precondition of economics and to examine it critically. Then, I give out the following questions. (1) "Why cannot a human being be satisfied with the present situation?" (2) "Is a human being the master or the subject on this earth?"

(1) Why cannot a human being be satisfied with the present situation?

According to Lewis, there are three ways along which a human being walks. The first is "The Fool's Way". We now feel the shortage, not getting enough. So, we try to get more. If we get more, our wants are satisfied. In this way, we try to get more and get further.\* If so, this way is the very one along which modern human being have walked until now and still walks now. Anyway this way is endless. As soon as we acquire what we want now, we surely want more later. But, a human being cannot be immortal. Thus, we have to pass away without attachment to this world.

\* This human wants is coincidental to the logic of capital (G-W-G'). Surely, capitalism produce this human wants and increases it. But, we can not deny that this human wants produces capitalism and sustains it.

The second is "The Way of the Disillusioned Sensible Man". He realize that our wants are endless. So, they want to live with abandoning

wants. It is difficult for an ordinary man to walk along this way. In addition, this way is somehow unnatural. In the end, we would be caught in nihilism.

Previous to showing the third way, "The Christian Way", Lewis made a precondition.<sup>(6)</sup> Namely, the existence of wants shows the existence of the thing wanted.\* We have walked along the way which forces us to get more and get further. Thus, we are now in the affluent (superabundant) society. Nevertheless, we are not satisfied and lament the shortage of possessions. It means that there is no thing on this world which could satisfy our wants. Namely, it shows the existence of the next world (paradise). Thus, Lewis concludes that human want is a desire for heaven. If so, our wants can not be satisfied on this earth, however far we may walk along.<sup>(7)</sup>

\* This precondition could not be verified. Is Lewis unscientific? Then, could we verify the following precondition of mathematics. "All parallel lines do not intersect." Nobody could verify it. In the end, what is right or what is wrong depends on the context of the days.

(2) Is a human being the master or the Subject on this earth?

A human being is not the living being who created himself by himself. He is the created living being. In this sense, A human being is not the Subject but the Object. He is the same living being as an animal and a plant. There is no difference between them. This is clear from the following fact. Where an animal and a plant can not live, a human being also can not live.

But a human being is not the mere Object. He is given the Subject. Thus human being is the "Object-Subject" [K. Takizawa]. This means that a human being has obligations to other living beings. In other words, he should be "the steward" on this earth. So, a human being must make

an effort to live in symbiosis not only with other human beings but also with animals and plants.

Now, what kind of economic system should be asked for today? At least we can say as follows. Taking the above-mentioned remark into our views, we have to think about it. In short, we have to reconstruct economics from the new point of view. It is because the crisis of economic systems means the crisis of economic theory. By the way, economy in Japanese (Keizai) means "to manage affairs and bring these affairs to a successful conclusion". What is the meaning of "successful conclusion"? Does this mean to make money? If so, we have already an old story about Tarou (Japanese name) sleeping for 3 years. Namely, we could not even wake Tarou up.

- (G) "Get up and work."
- (T) "Why must I work?"
- (G) "You are stupid not to be able to understand such a thing. Work, or you will not make money."
- (T) "Why do I need to make money?"
- (G) "Money makes us rich and our life comfortable."
- (T) "Nonsense! Then, it is better to sleep on as I am."

#### NOTES

- (1) "It may be true, perhaps, that the accommodation of an European prince does not always so much exceed that of an industrious and frugal peasant, as accommodation of the latter exceeds that of many an African King, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savage" (A. Smith, *An inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, The Modern Library, Random House, Inc., New York. 1937, p. 25).
- (2) "Die Bourgeoisie hat in ihrer kaum hundertjährigen Klassenherrschaft massenhaftere und kolossalere Produktionskräfte geschaffen als alle vergangenen Generationen zusammen. Unterjochung der Naturkräfte, Maschinerie, Anwendung der

Chemie auf Industrie und Ackerbau, Dampfschiffahrt, Eisenbahnen, elektrische Telegrafen, Urbarmachung ganzen Weltteile, Schiffbarmachung der Flüsse, ganze aus den Boden hervorgestampfte Bevölkerungen—welches frühere Jahrhundert ahnte, daß solche Produktionskräfte im Schoße der gesellschaftlichen Arbeit schlummerten” (Karl Marx: Friedrich Engles, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1965, S. 48).

- (3) “Mit der beständig abnehmenden Zahl der Kapitalmagnaten, welche alle Vorteile dieses Umwandlungsprozesses usurpieren und monopolisieren, wächst die Masse des Elends, des Drucks, der Knechtschaft, der Entartung, der Ausbeutung, aber auch die Empörung der stets anschwellenden und durch den Mechanismus des kapitalistischen Produktionsprozesses selbst geschulten, vereinten und organisierten Arbeiterklasse. Das Kapitalmonopol wird zur Fessel der Produktionsweise, die mit und unter ihm aufgeblüht ist. Die Zentralisation der Produktionsmittel und die Vergesellschaftung der Arbeit erreichen einen Punkt, wo sie unverträglich werden mit ihrer kapitalistischen Hülle. Sie wird gesprengt. Die Stunde des kapitalistischen Privateigentums schlägt. Die Expropriateurs werden expropriert” (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Erster Band, Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1968, ss. 790—791).
- (4) “.....the calculable future seems to belong to the one (Socialism) on the other (Militarism). It seems possible to say this much, that the full dominion of business enterprise is necessarily a transitory dominion. It stands to lose in the end whether the one or the other of the two divergent cultural tendencies win, because it is incompatible with the ascendancy of either” (*The Theory of Business Enterprise*, Clifton: Augustns M. Kelley Publishers, 1973, p. 400).
- (5) “Every child knows that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish. And every child knows, too, that the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society’s aggregate labour. It is SELF-EVIDENT that this necessity of the distribution of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the specific form of social production; it can only change its form of manifestation. Natural laws can not be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the form in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour express itself as the private exchange of the individual products of labour, is precisely the exchange value of these

products" (K. Marx, F. Engels, *Karl Marx-Frederich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 43, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1988, p. 68).

- (6) "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same" (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1961, p. 108).
- (7) "You have never had it. All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it—tantalising glimpses, promises never quite fulfilled, echoes that died away just as they caught your ear. But if it should really become manifest—if there ever came an echo that did not die away but swelled into the sound itself—you would know it. Beyond all possibility of doubt you would say. Here at last is the thing I was made for. We cannot tell each other about it. It is the secret signature of each soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or made our friends or chose our work, and which we shall still desire on our deathbeds, when the mind no longer knows wife or friend or work. While we are, this is. If we lose this, we lose all" (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Collins Fount Paperbacks, Glasgow, 1986, p. 117).