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**Teaching Classical Sociological Theory in Singapore:
The Context of Eurocentrism**

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Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha

Introduction

Why read or teach the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim or other European authors long since departed to a class of Singaporean or Southeast Asian students? What have the ideas of three European theorists born in the last century in a different cultural milieu have to do with the Southeast Asia of today?

The issue of the 'relevance or 'applicability' of the social sciences in a number of non-Western contexts has been raised by scholars across a wide variety of disciplines since the late nineteenth century. It had long been noted that the social sciences emerged amidst specific historical conditions and cultural practices, the recognition of which should lead to a critical appraisal of received theories and methods and the creation of original perspectives and approaches.

During the same time, the relationship between the conceptualisation and practice of the social sciences on the one hand, and colonialism on the other began to receive considerable scholarly attention. The call to decolonize the social sciences was of course not an isolated one, but accompanied by parallel discourses from Marxist, feminist and Third World "native" scholars. The multiplicity of colonial encounters, its intersections with various social science disciplines and the need for historical specificity have been noted (Chaudhuri & Strobel 1992, Dirks 1991, Mani 1989, Sangari & Vaid 1989). Collectively these critiques have underscored the politics of "othering", "representing" and "writing." Certainly, this recognition has generated substantial theoretical debates in anthropology, sociology and history, among other disciplines. Testimony to this, are the various pleas for indigenised, nationalised, delinked, sacralised, and post-colonialist social sciences.

In our view, while the various calls for alternative discourses, whether modernist, postmodernist or deconstructionist, have in theory questioned the existing perspectives in the social sciences, they have so far been unable to displace the fundamental assumptions of specific disciplines in *practice*. The pragmatic need to reproduce disciplines such as sociology and anthropology demands that certain continuities with the past be maintained. Hence, it is not without importance that the debates about critiquing the social sciences are more often than not staged in professional arenas (eg. journals, conferences and other academic forums) with the participants being established scholars. In the present academic environment many social scientists are engaged in at least the dual task of tertiary education as well as personal research.

Yet, there is sufficient evidence for the great gulf between undergraduate teaching and the realm of research. Indeed the divide between the theory and teaching, as a form of practice, of the social sciences appears to be growing.

The critique of the social sciences that emanated from academic institutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America tend to remain at an abstract and reflexive level. There have been several thoughtful pieces on the state of the various disciplines, raising the issue of the lack of connectedness between the social science and the societies in which they were taught (Alatas, 1972, 1974; Asante, 1990; Atal, 1981; Fu, 1993; Lie, 1996; Uberoi, 1968). But the calls to decolonise the social sciences were generally not followed by successful attempts to build 'indigenous' theories or autonomous social science traditions, delinked from the academic core of Western Europe and North America.

Neither have these calls manifested themselves at the level of teaching in the social sciences. No doubt all students of sociology have at some point encountered Marx, Weber and Durkheim as the "founding fathers" of their discipline. An essential component of sociological training in most universities is the teaching of sociological theory. The latter is seen as the basic grounding for the making of a sociologist. What constitutes sociological theory is generally defined as the particular writings of a set of European scholars, names with which most social scientists are familiar. Starting from a rather large pool, some central figures have emerged and are consistently viewed as forefathers of sociology. There is further a "universal" acceptance that anyone, anywhere who wants to study sociology must "know" the writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Courses in sociological theory and social thought throughout the world tend to restrict themselves to discussions and expositions of their works and of some other Western scholars.

Given this scenario, this paper is an effort to bridge the gap between our research interests and our teaching commitments. In mainstream discourse, the social sciences are defined and accepted as being of "Western" origin. This is institutionalised as common wisdom not just in Western academic circles but also in their non-Western counterparts. There are, however, some scholars (albeit a minority) who problematize the taken-for-granted definition of the social sciences as "Western" disciplines (Alatas, 1993, 1995; Sanda, 1998; Sinha, 1997). Conceptually and ideologically, we consider the latter to be a legitimate research agenda.

Nevertheless, the rationale for rethinking the teaching of sociological theory is not only grounded in our theoretical concerns but also in our encounters with sociology students. Generally speaking undergraduate students consider social theory to be "dry, dull and boring, intimidating and full of jargon". Frequently, the label "irrelevant" is also heard in this connection, even in the West itself (Parker, 1997). This question is then logically raised: how can social theory be made

interesting and relevant? Additionally, the issue of teaching "Western" sociological theory in a non-Western context to non-Westerners adds a further critical dimension. Of course, a more universalistic approach to the study of sociological theory would have to raise the question of whether it is possible to identify examples of sociological theorising outside Western/European responses to modernity. The example of Ibn Khaldun comes to mind. A recognition of theoretical insight in Ibn Khaldun's work would imply changes in sociology theory curricula. Nevertheless, it is not our contention that the recognition of contextuality requires that Western sociological theory be deleted from sociology curricula in non-Western universities. Rather, we argue from experience, for a fresh approach to teaching classical sociological theory that attunes students in more meaningful and critical ways to the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Ironically, such an approach constitutes a new form of legitimating the classics by revealing their timeless qualities, notwithstanding their various conceptual and methodological limitations.

This paper proceeds as follows. We start with a discussion of how a 'typical' course in classical sociological theory is outlined and taught in a number of universities in Asia. This is then followed by an exposition of a course in classical sociological theory that we co-taught, and which attempted to address our theoretical concerns regarding the contextual relevance of sociological theory at a more practical level. This was accomplished by acquainting the students with the significance and meaningfulness of the ideas of Marx, Weber and Durkheim and further by contextualising them in ways that made sense to the historical memory and contemporary life of our students in Singapore. Finally, we document and review the wide range of student responses to the newly-structured course, as evinced from classroom discussions and hence make some remarks on the teaching of classical sociological theory in this different mode.

Classical Sociological Theory Courses in Asia

It is rather surprising that classical sociological theory courses have been taught in a number of Asian countries without due recognition of the historical context and cultural practices of the students who enroll for these courses. What is often discussed is the context of the rise of sociological theories in Europe, dealing with issues that may bear little historical relevance or cultural meaning to the students. It is often noted that sociological theory arose as a result of communities of thinkers reflecting upon various social forces and problems, such as political revolutions, the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, urbanization, and the growth of science. These are all valid points to make, but an additional context for the rise of sociological theory, that is, the historical fact of European political and cultural domination from the 15th century onwards, is seldom given any space, let alone equal weight. As is well known, this

domination resulted, among other things, in the implantation of European social sciences in non-European societies, whether these societies were colonised by the Europeans or not. Furthermore and more importantly, it was in the period of European colonial domination that the European classical theorists wrote not only about their own societies but the 'Orient' as well. Often, their analysis and reflections on non-Western societies were as much statements on the 'Occident' as they were on the 'Orient'. For example, Marx's discourse on India served to confirm the uniqueness of Europe as far as its propensity for capitalist development was concerned. Bringing in colonialism is an example of how classical sociological theory can be further contextualised to accord with the historical background of students.

A glance at the course outlines of undergraduate sociological theory courses in a number of universities in Asia shows that theory is taught in much the same way as it is offered in a British or North American university. For example, the classical sociological theory (M1040) syllabus of the Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University is devoted to the study of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Friederich Engels, Herbert Spencer, Ferdinand Toennies, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber and Vilfredo Pareto.¹ At the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, a compulsory course for the Bachelors of Social Science in Sociology, History of Sociology (Soc 301) covers very much the same ground in addition to the inclusion of more contemporary theorists such as Karl Mannheim, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, George Herbert Mead, and others (University of Dhaka, 1988: 18-20). An elective course, History of Western Social Thought (Soc 311) does, ironically, include Ibn Khaldun, while there is a separate course on non-Western thinkers in India and Bangladesh (History of Social Thought in the Orient with particular reference to India and Bangladesh - Soc 312)(University of Dhaka, 1988: 43-50). Soc 311 and Soc 312 are both elective courses, however. At the University of Delhi, Sociological Theory (Paper V) covers only Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons and Merton (University of Delhi). The Department of Sociology at the University of Jordan offers a sociological theory course covering Ibn Khaldun, Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Toennies and Gabriel Tarde. By and large, non-Western social thinkers and theorists are not covered. Neither is sociological theory contextualised differently in comparison to how it is taught in North America and Europe.

The above is also true of SC3101 (Social Thought and Social Theory), offered as a compulsory module to third (final) year sociology majors at the National University of Singapore, as it was taught in previous years.

In general, we discern two problems with such syllabi. One is that non-Western founders or precursors of social thought and social theory are generally left out of the course outlines. The other is that classical sociological theory is not contextualised in a manner that establishes a

relevant reference point for the students. While it is true that European enlightenment, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and democratization in Europe etc., form the relevant context within which the emergence of sociological theory can be understood, the context of European colonial expansion and Eurocentrism is equally relevant to both Euroamerican and Southeast Asian students. Furthermore, such a context suggests topics and readings from the classics that are not normally assigned in a course on classical sociological theory. We provide examples of what such topics might be in the next session. In our reconstruction of the syllabus for SC3101ⁱⁱ, taught over two semesters in 1997-98 and 1998-99, we address the second problem. It is our intention, however, to include non-Western precursors and founders of classical social theory in future incarnations of the course.

Rethinking SC3101: The Context of Eurocentrism

Given our theoretical interests and teaching experiences, we wanted to formulate an alternative way of teaching sociological theory in a non-Western university setting. It is important to emphasize that this alternative conceptualization was not designed to replace Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Using these scholars as our starting point, we aimed to ask the question: how can we teach the sociological canon, but with a difference that would incorporate both our theoretical concerns and the needs of our students? An early lecture, therefore, was entitled "Why Marx, Weber and Durkheim?"ⁱⁱⁱ (see Appendix I).

Bearing in mind the "Western" origins of writings that are seen to constitute the corpus of sociological theory, we felt that the theme of Eurocentrism would provide a crucial additional point of orientation and could also provide for a meaningful and empowering discourse. A cautionary word on our usage of the term 'Eurocentrism' is necessary. As we understand the term, it signifies far more than its literal and common-place meaning 'Europe-centredness'. We hold that Eurocentrism connotes a particular position, a perspective, a way of seeing *and* not-seeing that is rooted in a number of problematic claims and assumptions. We also did not want to ourselves essentialize by assigning to the three theorists the same, generalised usage of the label 'Eurocentrism'. In fact we quite consciously strived to establish the specific and different ways in which aspects of the theories under consideration might be Eurocentric or not. We are further aware that the recognition of Eurocentrism in the writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim is neither a surprise nor a recent discovery. Yet despite the datedness of this theme in the social sciences, the critique of Eurocentrism has not meaningfully reshaped or restructured the ways in which we theorise the emergence of the classical sociological canon. So despite 'knowing' that some aspects of Marx's, Weber's and Durkheim's writings are 'Eurocentric' and expectedly so,

the issue of how this impacts our contemporary reading of their works remains largely unaddressed and untheorized. In an effort to deal with these issues, we assigned an essay by Wallerstein on Eurocentrism (1996). We contextually located the issue of European political, economic and cultural domination of the non-West in the very emergence of sociological theory itself. We then raised a series of related questions: how have colonial and imperial encounters shaped conceptualization in the social sciences by Western scholars? how have these writers imagined both the "non-West" and the "West"? how are we to assess and gauge classical sociological theories given the possibility of different kinds of biases, including a Eurocentric bias?

In posing these questions we operated on the premise that a creative approach to sociological theory that imparted a level of meaning to the students hitherto unexperienced, should incorporate these three inter-related objectives:

- (a) to generate consciousness of "Eurocentrism" as a theme and context that informs classical sociological theory,
- (b) to demonstrate the utility of theory for the recovery of our past (Singapore or Southeast Asia) from Eurocentric accounts of it and,
- (c) to demonstrate the utility of theory for the understanding of contemporary realities in areas and regions closer to home.

Our teaching tools and strategies were above all influenced by the first of these objectives. As mentioned previously, our aim in this project was not to look for 'other' founding fathers of sociology but to ask how we should read Marx, Weber or Durkheim given the Eurocentrism of the "Western" social sciences.^{iv} Thus, the rethinking entailed emphasizing those aspects of say, Marx's works, that either demonstrate his Eurocentrism, or selecting Weber's writings that either prove or invalidate similar charges levelled at him. For example, in addition to reading Marx's *Contribution* (1970) and the *Grundrisse* (1973), we also chose to focus on Marx's discussion of the Asiatic mode of production and his discussions on colonialism in India, themes that are routinely excluded in sociological theory courses. More importantly, through our treatment of these substantive issues we further hoped to generate discussions about the effects of identifying Eurocentric biases in these works.

The need to reorient the course in this way is held to be all the more important because we note that Eurocentrism is not only found in European scholarship, but has affected the development of the social sciences in non-Western societies in a number of ways:

- (i) the lack of knowledge of our own histories as evidenced in textbooks. In textbooks used in Asia and Africa, there tends to be less information on these parts of the world because the textbooks are invariably written in the United States or the United Kingdom. For example, we

know more about the daily life of the European premodern family than that of our own. This is because sociology arose in the context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and, therefore, the European historical context is the defining one. Normal development is defined as a move from feudalism to capitalism, therefore, that is the normal thing to study. The object of study is defined by this bias of normal development. In our own societies, while the priority is to study modern capitalist societies as well, the problem is that we begin with European precapitalist societies and draw attention to our own precapitalist societies in order to show that they constituted obstacles to modernization.

(ii) Through Eurocentrism, images of our society are constructed which we come to regard as real until Eurocentric scholarship yields alternative images which may be equally Eurocentric. An example is the role of Confucianism and development. In the 1950s it was thought that Confucianism acted as a brake on development. After the experience of high growth in East Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s, Confucianism is offered as a factor explaining growth. With the onset of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, however, once again Confucianism and Asian values become suspect for having a hand in the economic decline.

(iii) The lack of original theorising. Because of the deluge of works on theory, methodology and empirical research arising mainly from North America and Europe, there has been much consumption of imported theories, techniques and research agendas.

Bearing in mind the above three problems, it was stressed to our students that they should (i) bear in mind the context in which sociological theory developed; (ii) gauge its usefulness for the study of our own context (non-Western); and (iii) be aware of the Eurocentric aspects of sociological theory, which detracts from its scientific value.

In dealing with the theme of Eurocentrism in the course we presented to our students the following assessment with regard to specific aspects of the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

Marx: While the section on Marx did deal with traditional topics such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, circulation and production, alienation, class consciousness, the state, and ideology, there was an attempt to work into the materials the three inter-related objectives referred to above (page 11). For example, we put it to the class that the relevance of Marx's discussion on the transition from feudalism to capitalism is that it suggests that the presence of an emerging bourgeoisie in feudal society and a weak decentralised state in feudal societies were preconditions for the rise of capitalism. This in turn implies that these preconditions were non-existent in non-European societies. We pushed our students further with these queries: To what extent is this true and to what extent is this a Eurocentric view?

In line with Eurocentric assumptions that Europe was unique, it was assumed that such prerequisites were not to be found outside of Europe and that precapitalist modes of production

outside of Europe were obstacles to capitalist development. An example was the Asiatic mode of production on which students were assigned readings (see Appendix I).

Highlighted in the lectures were the features of the Asiatic mode of production, that Marx was often factually wrong about his characterisation of 'Asiatic' economies and societies, and that undergirding his political economy were Orientalist assumptions which viewed non-European societies as being the polar opposite of Europe. To put things in perspective, bearing in mind the problematic nature of Marx's characterisation of Indian society and his discussion of the Asiatic mode of production, we also pointed out that despite this limitation Marx's concept of the 'mode of production' is extremely central to sociological analysis. Yet, we emphasized that it is important to recognise the limitations in Marx's discussion of the Asiatic mode of production because it continues to inform contemporary interpretations of his works and perpetuates certain images of Asiatic and/or Indian society.

The discussions on the Eurocentric elements in Marx then made it possible to provide a more critical reading of Singapore's or Southeast Asia's past while retaining the universalistic aspects of Marxist theory. For example, an article on colonial ideology in British Malaya was assigned (see Appendix I). Here it was possible to demonstrate the utility of the Marxist concept of ideology for the critique of the Eurocentric aspects of colonial capitalism, of which Marx himself partook.

In addressing such topics as class consciousness, the state, and ideology, we made it a point to include readings on contemporary Third World societies and on the region of Southeast Asia in order that students might see the relevance of the ideas of Marx to regions and areas other than his own. There was a concerted attempt, therefore, to expose the Eurocentrism in Marx while preserving the universal elements of his work as well as his theoretical contributions.

Weber: In our discussions on Weber, we explored two related themes: one, how Weber and his writings have been 'orientalized' and two, the nature of Weberian orientalism or Eurocentrism, if indeed 'Weber is orientalist'. In these conversations, we impressed upon the students that in evaluating Weber's work, we were not concerned with Weber's intentions or his personal position, and so less interested in questions of 'whether Weber was himself Eurocentric or orientalist, etc.' Our real goal was to ask if Weber's sociological writings revealed, or were embedded in Eurocentric and orientalist assumptions and how our answers would shape our subsequent interpretation of Weber's theoretical contributions.

According to Weber, the form that capitalism took in the West or what Marx would call the capitalist mode of production, could only originate in the West because it required an attitude of commercial gain and profit that Weber called the spirit of capitalism, which generally emerged in Protestant-dominated areas of Europe. Weber acknowledged that although Islam and

Confucianism world views do stress frugality and hard work, the spirit of capitalism did not emerge in the Arab world or in China because of these missing elements: an ascetic compulsion to work, this worldly asceticism, rationalization of life.

Third World consumption of Weber has been such that the discourse assumes that for Weber capitalism was an advanced, progressive economic system, and thus something 'good and desirable' and following from this that, Western society was superior in this respect.

As a result, some non-Western students and scholars took a defensive position and attempted to show that their own religions (Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism) were conducive to the development of capitalism or they were not against wealth acquisition. We saw this as the 'Orientalisation' of Weber's Protestant ethic theory in which Orientalist tendencies were attributed to the works of Weber.

This then led into a lecture on the relevance of Weber's Protestant ethic theory to the context of Southeast Asia where we attempted to rescue Weber from his interpreters and speculate on the implications of his sociology of religion for the understanding of the relationship between culture and development. For example, some class time was spent on discussing the possibility that current interpretations of Confucianism and development tend to implicitly valorise a disenchanted world. Weber's views on objectivity and the social sciences were discussed as well (Weber 1969). We found them useful in clarifying the distinction between value-laden and Eurocentric social science. Weber did believe that fact and value should be separated. He made a distinction between existential knowledge of what is and normative knowledge of what should be. Values should be restricted to the times before research begins and after the analysis is done. They should influence what we choose to study and how we choose to use the results of our study for social policy. But science cannot tell anyone what he should do, it cannot derive ideals or ethical goals. Therefore, social science should be value-relevant. We choose to study certain things because they are of relevance to us. But this is not the same as saying that social scientists should be Eurocentric or ethnocentric, ie., their values intrude to the extent that facts distort reality or legitimise a political mission.

Turning to the second theme, Weber's arguments about the origin of modern, rational capitalism in the West as carried in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by contextualizing this text in the larger corpus of his comparative sociology of religion. So we assigned selections from Weber's *The Religion of India* and *Religion of China*. Through an attention to Weber's sociology of religion we were able to abstract Weber's discourse on the specific socio-economic and cultural descriptions of 'Western' and 'non-Western' societies. For example in looking at *The Religion of India*, we noted Weber's attention to 'caste' and 'Hinduism' as defining and distinct features of Indian society. We further pointed out that

Weber's understanding of caste and Hinduism is informed by a textual reading, which is problematic and provides some evidence for his essentializing and orientalizing of Indian society, in addition to a weak substantive account of the same. Similarly Weber's account of Confucianism and Taoism in his *Religion of China* raise broader conceptual questions about the limitations treating the Judeo-Christian notion of 'religion' as a universal category of investigation. Thus can Confucianism and Taoism be treated as 'religions' in the former sense? Furthermore Weber's characterization of Confucianism as 'world affirming' and of 'Confucian rationalism' as a 'rational adjustment to the world' contribute to the image of Chinese society as static, unchanging, or at least not inclined towards change. This again feeds into orientalist constructions of the non-West as 'passive', lacking a history and ultimately 'different' from the West.

So we argued that taken as a whole, Weber's writing on the comparative sociology of religion do reveal specific Eurocentric biases. Parts of his writings were clearly ethnocentric (for eg, interpreting other societies in terms of measures and criteria given by the model of the West) and also orientalist to the extent that he essentializes the West/non-West by emphasizing the differences between them and through asserting the uniqueness of the European experience.

But we also impressed upon our students that we do not find in Weber a simplistic notion of progress and that Weber does not link the uniqueness, distinction and singularity of Europe with a parallel notion of progressive, civilizational superiority of Europe. Neither do we see an attempt to impose a universalist history in Weber. We made the point that far from suggesting that capitalism should be adopted by other, including non-European societies, Weber was extremely explicit about the negative aspects of modern rational capitalism. We emphasized that Weber's attitude towards capitalism and bureaucratic structures were ambivalent. Thus despite the various substantive and methodological weaknesses in Weber, we nonetheless noted the value of his theoretical contributions. So Weber may have been mistaken about the nature of caste in India and about Confucianism in China, but the larger point he made about the relations and connectedness of religious, political and economic structures is worth pursuing.

Durkheim: In attempting to make a case for the continued relevance of Durkheim to the study of contemporary society, the lectures focused on his three main texts: *Division of Labour in Society*, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* and *The Rules of Sociological Method*. It was argued that Durkheim's methodological contributions to sociology are indeed immense; in addition to pioneering the use of statistics in sociological explanations, Durkheim's most lasting contribution is carried in his question "What is the social?" The latter continues to engage contemporary sociologists who creatively debate about how to place boundaries around an entity labelled "social."

In addition to methodology, the impact of Durkheim's conceptual categories were also highlighted. Evidence was garnered to support the continuing relevance of such concepts as anomie, moral individualism, collective conscience and mechanical and organic solidarity in theorising contemporary societies. In a particular tutorial question, students were asked to think about how Durkheim's ideas of mechanical and organic solidarity could be used to make sense of the "Shared Values" debate in Singapore. They were asked to apply Durkheim's concepts to an analysis of the state's efforts to forge a sense of common, national identity in the face of socio-cultural, religious and economic differences within the citizenry. The question of searching for the "social glue" to bond people also has shades of Durkheim's "collective conscience." It was suggested that "mechanical" solidarity, premised on the perception of similarities between individuals might continue to be relevant in societies that Durkheim might otherwise label as "modern." In the provocative piece "The Return of Mechanical Solidarity," which we assigned as a tutorial reading, some students took issue with Edward Tiryakian's argument that in the postmodern world, we may be witnessing the "return" of mechanical solidarity in the form of increased gender, religious, ethnic and national solidarity. Some students disagreed with Tiryakian (and Durkheim) in his usage of the word "return" adding that in their view, mechanical solidarity had never disappeared, for it to now make a comeback. Students suggested instead that we should alternatively speak of a "resurgence" or "reassertion" of mechanical solidarity, in the contemporary world.

We also discussed Durkheim's insightful comment that suicides amongst children and teenagers may be intensified in modern societies, for which there is overwhelming empirical support in countries like Japan, India, Hong Kong and Taiwan. We noted that contrary to stereotypical accounts of Durkheim, his treatment of the relationship between the "social" and the "individual" is complex and nuanced. It was argued that even the most liberal amongst us would agree with Durkheim that to some extent the "social" was necessary for society to be possible.

Continuing the theme of Eurocentrism, we asked if Durkheim's writings show any signs of orientalism. Comparing Marx and Durkheim on the issue of colonialism, we made these following observations. While Marx explicitly addresses the issue of colonialism and talks about its effects on a colony (India), Durkheim, in his sociological writings, remains silent on the subject of European imperial and colonial activities. What we find problematic in Marx is his treatment of British colonialism and its justification for the "progress" of Indian society. What is troubling in Durkheim is precisely his neglect of colonialism and conflict. Now it could be argued that not all sociologists address the issue of colonialism and imperialism in their writings and is this ground for dismissing their work as "Eurocentric" or "Orientalist"? We are not suggesting that Durkheim's mere neglect of colonialism and silence on this issue furnish evidence for his

Eurocentrism. We were more interested in exploring the impact that this silence has on his theorising of social change, both in the West and the non-West.

The two lectures on Durkheim's writings on social change critically assessed his theory. Durkheim conceptualizes social change as the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity, i.e., from traditional to modern society. His proposal that this change is normal, natural, inevitable, spontaneous, desirable and "progressive" is further problematic. This theory is not only conceptually flawed but also ahistorical. Durkheim does not theorise colonialism and ask how this might affect his proposed theory of change. Neither does he seem to acknowledge that "real" historical societies did not change spontaneously and naturally, but that very often change was imposed through external domination, conquest and threat of violence. In fact Durkheim's silence on colonialism, leads one to speculate if he might actually view the devastating changes brought about through European colonial encounters with the non-West (which were viewed as traditional societies) as desirable and good, because it led to differentiation, organic solidarity, and moral individualism - in a word modernity.

Student Responses

The previous section outlined how we tried to put into practice an alternate way of teaching the classical sociological canon through our lectures, tutorials, assigned readings, etc. We now move to a discussion on student responses to the course. The following discussion comes from two sources: tutorial discussions and student term papers. This is a crucial element of our project as it highlights both what we accomplished with our students and, more importantly, what we need to take into account the next time we teach this course. We selectively present the various student responses, some of which we anticipated and others which surfaced unexpectedly, in terms of the three interrelated objectives referred to above.

Eurocentrism

During the first tutorial, students were introduced to the theme of freedom as one that underlies the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. They were also asked to address the implications of Eurocentrism as a context for the rise of sociological theory (Appendix II).

As expected, questions were immediately raised about what is meant by "Eurocentrism" and what many students labelled as its "opposite" - an "Asian perspective." Some students were quick to point out that Eurocentrism had negative connotations and that the corrective to Eurocentric approaches did not lie in taking an equally ethnocentric perspective from an Asian

point of view. Admittedly, there was a degree of confusion about what these various terms meant. For instance, some students wondered if everything "European" was Eurocentric. Many argued that these terms could be interpreted variously. Given that these categories were "created" and in the absence of a consensus about what they meant, questions were raised about their validity. Similar queries were posed about such categories as "West," "non-West," "Europe," and "Orient."

We assigned Wallerstein's "Eurocentrism and Its Avatars" (1996) to continue the discussion in the second tutorial (Appendix II). Although the students had not arrived at a consensus with regard to how Eurocentrism and related terms should be defined, most accepted Wallerstein's formulation of Eurocentrism. Using his framework, some students asked if some central questions raised by Western social scientists were not Eurocentric. For example, referring to the discussion the previous week, one student said:

Is the 'problem of freedom' a true problematic for us? What is meant by freedom anyway? Isn't freedom an enlightenment ideal and so Western, thus European and Eurocentric? Is this a 'problem' for everybody? The same can be said for democracy.

Continuing in this vein, other students wondered why we should be concerned with C.W. Mills and the problem of reason and freedom (the topics of the 2nd lecture) and whether these ideals are not imposed on "us" by Europeans.

Many students interpreted "Eurocentrism" to mean a dominance of "European things and ideas." Class discussions led to students asking these of each other:

Student 1: Are you Eurocentric?

Student 2: Yes, to a large extent. But we don't have a choice. We didn't choose this... it was thrust upon us. So just bear with it. It's not voluntary. I have no choice.

Student 1: Are you sure? Maybe *you like it*.

Picking up on this theme, one student added that she thought herself to be Eurocentric with regard to clothes she wore, food she ate, movies she watched and the fact that she spoke English as a first language. She added that she was not ashamed of it. Wasn't it "better" and "good" that she was "Eurocentric"? She argued thus:

But my Eurocentrism can be explained. There is a reason for it. Like clothes. I like jeans and t-shirts because they are so comfortable.

To which another student replied quite sarcastically:

You mean tight jeans are more comfortable than *sarong*, *samfoo* and *sari*?

So there were those who self-defined themselves as "Eurocentric" and saw nothing "wrong" with it. One student said of his Eurocentric (read 'Western') preferences:

Quite good, what. Anyway the whole world likes jeans so not really Eurocentric but something like globalcentric.

With regard to Marx's writings, all of the students saw evidence of Eurocentrism in his discussions of India and colonialism (Marx & Engels, 1968). A further question then surfaced: If Marx's theories are Eurocentric, does it mean his works are irrelevant? They agreed with Wallerstein about the various biases in the social sciences but wondered what difference this made to reading sociological theory.

Only a small minority saw the unequal relationship between the "West" and the "non-West" carried in the term "Eurocentrism" and critiqued it on these grounds. Of the three theorists we read, Marx was most obviously seen as Eurocentric. Marx's portrayal of Indian society generated lively discussion:

How can Marx make fun of people praying to *Hanuman* and considering the cow a sacred animal?

What makes Marx think Europe is all good?

What is so great about capitalism anyway? Didn't Marx think Capitalism should be destroyed? Does he have double standards or what?

Anyway, Marx was wrong about India. He was mistaken.

These students with their somewhat emotional responses to Marx's letters to Engels (Marx & Engels, 1968) concluded that it was essential to identify Eurocentric biases in social science theorising and that this affected how we looked at Western societies as well as the non-West. They emphasized that Marx had stereotyped both these societies. They also noted that Marx had not visited India and was writing on second hand reports, so how could his account be trusted? Other students argued that at least Marx was not "hypocritical" and that with different information about Indian society, he admitted his earlier mistaken views, as discussed in an assigned reading (Ghosh, 1984). But these students also saw that Marx's retraction only shows that he was wrong about the progressive role of colonialism, not that he thought Indian society could successfully adopt a different historical route from that of Europe. In this they saw absolute evidence of Marx's Eurocentrism.

In Tutorial 3, students were asked to distinguish between the factual and ideological statements contained in the concept of the Asiatic mode of production (Appendix II). Along the lines of argument made in Tutorial 2, some suggested that Marx's change in views did not necessarily signal a non-Eurocentric stance adopted by him as we are still unclear as to whether

he accepted the progressive role of colonialism in principle. At this point, students began to realise the complexity of the problem of Eurocentrism when they asked if the view that social change in Europe from feudalism to capitalism represented progress was itself Eurocentric. In other words, if Europeans believed themselves to be progressive for having made this transition, does this belief in itself constitute Eurocentrism? One possible answer to this that the class considered was that what defines a belief or theory as Eurocentric is not the view that capitalism could have only originated in Europe or that capitalism was a progressive system, but rather the conviction in European superiority and the 'white man's burden'.

Having become familiarised with a Eurocentric account on the rise of capitalism, students were asked in Tutorial 2 to assess the claims made with regard to the relationship between Confucianism and development in East Asia, in terms of their being Eurocentric or counter-Eurocentric. As expected, both arguments were made. Some felt that the argument that Confucianism was conducive to economic development and that it was a factor in the rise of East Asia was counter-Eurocentric, whereas others came to a consensus that such an argument bought into Eurocentric notions of the superiority of capitalism and, therefore, reinterpreted the role of Confucianism in development. It was even suggested in a discussion over Tutorial 7 that such a view was the reverse of Orientalism (what some call Orientalism in reverse or Occidentalism).

By Tutorial 6, students were quick to pick up on what they saw as Eurocentric elements in the works of the classical theorists. Referring to the Protestant Ethic thesis, most students concluded that Weber was Eurocentric because he regarded capitalism as a superior economic system which could only originate in Europe, owing to the presence of Protestantism. Some even suggested that Weber used Protestantism to engage in propaganda for capitalism. Nevertheless, we were impressed that at least some students were perceptive enough to point out that such a view [even if falsely attributed to Weber] was reductionist because it did not consider the role of structural factors in the rise of capitalism in Europe. This does not preclude the possibility of the presence of the spirit of capitalism outside of Europe or the possibility of capitalism with a different spirit from that found in Europe elsewhere. Later, the students were to learn that this view came close to Weber's own and that Weber was not quite as Eurocentric as many thought he was. In response to the question of whether it was justifiable to speak of a Weberian Orientalism (Tutorial 7 - Appendix II), most students understood that the fact that Weber saw modern capitalism as a uniquely European creation itself did not justify his being labelled an Orientalist, unless it was demonstrated that he held Eurocentric views such as the 'double mission of British colonialism' (Marx & Engels, 1968), and so on.

Our goal in highlighting the theme of Eurocentrism was to get students to think seriously about the problem without reacting emotionally and ethnocentrically to Western knowledge. By

the end of the semester, Eurocentrism was understood in terms of the various dimensions pointed in Wallerstein's essay (1996) on Eurocentrism in the social sciences.

Wallerstein discusses a number of ways in which social science is Eurocentric. Eurocentric historiography yielded accounts according to which whatever Europe was dominant in (bureaucratization, capitalism, democracy, etc.) was good and superior and that such dominance was explained in terms of characteristics peculiar to Europeans. Thus, Europe considered itself to be a unique civilization in the sense that it was the site of the origin of modernity, the autonomy of the individual (vis-a-vis family, community, state, religion, etc.), and non-brutal behaviour in everyday life. The idea that European society was progressive (industrialization, democracy, literacy, education) and that this progress would spread elsewhere, became entrenched in the social sciences. Furthermore, social science theories assumed that the development of modern capitalist society in Europe was not only good, but would be replicated elsewhere and that, therefore, scientific theories are valid across time and space.

A very important dimension of Eurocentrism listed in the Wallerstein essay and discussed at length in tutorials was the theme of 'Orientalism'. Another way in which the social sciences are Eurocentric is that they are informed by Orientalism, referring to the discursively constructed images of non-Western societies to be found in the minds of Western scholars, travellers, diplomats, colonialists, etc.

After having read some analyses, views and comments of Marx and Weber on India and China, students were able to appreciate the different ways in which sociological theory could be Orientalist. For example, Marx was Orientalist in that he held to negative definitions of non-Western societies, a case in point being that India was defined in terms of the absence of features present in Europe such as private property. Weber, on the other hand, was Orientalist in his tendency to look at non-Europeans in homogeneous and undifferentiated terms. For example, this was how he saw Hinduism. Weber also tended to be textualist in his reading of Indian society in that he assumed Indian reality conformed to versions presented in the text, an assumption that he explicitly avoided in his analysis of Europe. There is also the question of the imposition of terms and concepts originating in a European setting and their application in non-European contexts. For example, Weber used terms such as church and sect when discussing Hinduism and Islam. Weber was also guilty of essentializing as when, for example, he regarded Confucianism as the main value system in China. Thus, through the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, Eurocentrism was seen to be complex and multidimensional.

Theory for the Recovery of Our Past from Eurocentric Accounts

It was interesting that the subject of colonialism and particularly the colonial past of Malaya and Singapore did not inspire a discussion of any significance with a majority of the

students. Most of them seemed to view Singapore's colonial experience in rather benign terms. They also appeared to accept the past of Malaya and Singapore as articulated in mainstream and "official" discourse. This could possibly be due to the way in which colonial history has been so far presented and preserved in Singapore, where the British came not as conquerors but as harbingers of "progress." Even in our discussions of colonial and state ideology, most students did not appear to be able to theorise the power of these dominant ideologies in the past and indeed in the present. Most argued that if not for the British and the colonial episode, Singapore would not have become a modern and developed society.

Both in tutorial discussions and in essays, we repeatedly encountered the familiar discourse about Singapore being a small island, a fishing village with little or no natural resources until the British came and modernised it through science and technology. Very few students attempted to construct Singapore through ancient or colonial history. Most contemporary narratives of "modern" Singapore begin with its "founding" by Sir Stamford Raffles as a British trading post in 1819. The year and the name are synonymous with the very existence of Singapore, particularly in historical reconstructions of the island's past by local political elites. Our students recounted the official history. They did not find it odd that a European man, a colonizer should be crowned the "founder" of Singapore. Also no one mentioned the *Sejarah Melayu* or the comprehensive account of Temasek's history carried therein. Few students seemed familiar with the notion of an alternative history of Southeast Asia, the rest of Asia or of Europe, for that matter. Most, on the other hand, carried rather fixed, stereotypical notions about what constitutes Europe, India or Singapore, both today and in the past. This was evident in our discussions about "modernity" and its relationship to the non-West. Most saw Europe or the West as the locus of modernity and its transportation to the rest of the world.

It was in this context of the understanding of the past that the notion of ideology and its relationship to the ruling class was introduced in class. There were some students, however, who did problematize the official history of Singapore. They questioned if the British had been "good" for Singapore and if "progress" and "modernity" can only be achieved with capitalism and industrialisation. While some suggested that the proclamation of Raffles as a hero was due to gratitude on the part of Singaporeans, others understood it as a product of the ideas of the ruling class. Nevertheless, how the image of Raffles fits into the ideology of postcolonial capitalism in Singapore remained vague for the class.

On the utility of Weber for the study of the historical role of religion in Southeast Asian development, students generally failed to note that it was less Weber's views on the Protestant ethic and capitalism than the relationship between religion and economy that was important. In discussing the applicability of Weber to Southeast Asia, some had thought that Weber was

irrelevant as he wrote on Protestantism while Protestantism was not a major religion in the region. It was then necessary to make a distinction between Weber's specific statements on the Protestant ethic and the theoretical implications for the study of religion and capitalism.

*Theory for the Understanding of Contemporary Realities
in Areas and Regions Closer to Home*

The question of "relevance" necessarily surfaced in view of our discussion that Marx, Weber and Durkheim were European scholars, concerned most explicitly to theorise the profound changes occurring in Western society.

Many thought that Marx was "wrong" about his account of capitalism, its impending destruction the anticipated polarisation of society into two classes. Indeed, most saw capitalism as a universal mode of production as well as a "good thing" and wondered what Marx meant by the "evils of capitalism." They observed that capitalism had not disappeared, that the middle classes had burgeoned in contemporary society and that most of the world is now capitalist. Many had difficulty agreeing with Marx about the issue of "pauperisation." Questions like this were typical:

Are workers in Singapore really that bad off?

Is capitalism that evil?

What is wrong with capitalism anyway?

How can the capitalist be exploiting the workers? He also has to take some risks by investing through capital etc?

If not capitalism, then what else? The whole world is capitalist now. Don't tell me you can escape it?

With specific reference to Singapore, most students seemed to think that Marx's description of capitalism as "exploitative" and "alienating" did not quite "fit" their experience of Singaporean society. Many thought this was due to the "moderating" effect of the Singapore government, which in their assessment did not represent the interests of the ruling class but served all its citizens equally. One very perceptive student noted that Singaporeans could not identify with Marx's thesis about the emiserating effects of capitalism because Singapore was not a "real" developing country. As such living here, one did not see the "bad side" of capitalistic development, as one would in most Asian and African countries. She also said that Singapore was an advanced capitalist society, which Marx was not theorising. Insights like this were, however quite rare. With regard to the use of Weberian theory, after having considered the possibility that it was Weber's interpreters who Orientalised his works on the Protestant Ethic, students were ready to explore the use of Weber's ideas for the study of development in East Asia. They came to understand that the importance of Weber's work lay in the understanding of the nature of the

relationship between religion and development (Tutorial 7 - Appendix II). In other words, quite apart from the validity of his theory of the Protestant ethic, the question of how religious doctrines and practices relate to economic conduct was one that could be addressed for any religion and that it is this kind of issue that needs to be raised in the context of East Asia. Students often suggested that official interpretations of Islam and Confucianism were meant to align them with corporate values and that this was a result of formal rationalization processes in modern East Asian and Southeast Asian societies.

On a different theme, most students agreed that Marx, Durkheim and Weber rightly noted the presence of alienation, anomie and disenchantment in capitalist society. But they felt that all three theorists were too pessimistic about the effects of these on individuals. According to some, these phenomena may be present in modern society, but were confined to the workplace. Others suggested that people in capitalist societies had developed "coping mechanisms" so that they would not feel anomic and alienated. Others asked if alienation could only be "economic" in nature, suggesting that in non-Western societies there could be other sources of alienation such as political and religious.

A vast number of students also noted the "datedness" of the theories we were reading. The question of their applicability to contemporary societies (Western and non-Western) was thus raised.

Conclusions

We want to emphasize that the ideas carried in this paper reflect a project that is in progress and far from complete. This reflects our initial and experimental effort to conceptualise an alternative way of teaching sociological theory and more importantly, to put it into practice. Given our own theoretical and political locations, we tried to restructure the syllabus and the course content of "Social Thought and Social Theory" accordingly. We used the theme of "Eurocentrism" as a major organising principle as this allowed us to raise a number of related issues about the state of the social sciences and its teaching. It should be noted, however, that this was not the only organising principle around which the course was developed. We maintained the perspective that guided previous instructors of the course when we stressed to the class that a common thread connecting the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim was the problem of freedom in modernity (see Tutorial 1 - Appendix II). When we embarked on this rethinking exercise, we assumed that the course needed to be made relevant and meaningful to the students in order for it to be of some interest and use to them. We conceived of this relevance in terms of the dual stress on the Eurocentric context of the rise of sociological theory as well as the concern with the moral condition of humanity.

How then did the students respond? Did they find the course meaningful? In our assessment the student reactions were mixed and probably for a number of different reasons. Most students respond to theory in a dull fashion anyway, so the lukewarm response to any course in theory is the norm rather than atypical. It was the same for us. Did our students appreciate discussions of "Eurocentrism." Those who saw the problematic of Eurocentrism through the lectures and their own readings and reflections were probably in a minority and debated the issue. Most "got it" when it was pointed out to them via examples and illustrations. Some, however, did not "get it" and remained untouched by its theoretical or political value.

Nevertheless, even for those who were less than enthusiastic about the course, they could relate to the problematic of Eurocentrism as it is this theme that brings the ideas of Marx, Weber and Durkheim within the orbit of relevance in the Southeast Asian context. Our aim was less to make the course more interesting to students than to infuse it with a set of meanings that were hitherto unavailable to them and which resonated with ideas that were in circulation in critical academic discussions on the state of global social science.

Those who saw Eurocentrism as an important issue collectively raised a number of interesting questions:

If one identifies Eurocentric bias in the writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, are all their writings meaningless and therefore to be rejected?

We can talk about "anti-Eurocentrism." What about a "non-Eurocentric" position? Is it possible and necessarily better?

What is the value and purpose of locating Eurocentric biases in sociological theory?

Does identifying any kind of bias, including Eurocentrism make the bias "go away"?

These questions show that at least some of our students are thinking about issues that we raised in the course. We view these queries positively in that they suggest possibilities for rethinking the course. Writing in the late 1990s, one is no longer required to justify the need to identify and critique the biases in which the various social science disciplines are often strongly embedded. Yet, criticism alone is insufficient to unseat these biases, as the last question by a student so well articulates. But we contend that such critique is empowering and must be the first step in any re-thinking process. The fact remains that Eurocentric biases do exist and that these biases have been exposed in the literature. Our aim in this project has not been merely to conduct an expose of Eurocentrism in a sociological theory course but to indicate to students how one set of biases needs to be made explicit and this should not be replaced by another. It was repeatedly stressed that the critique of Eurocentrism need not be substituted by other ethnocentric perspectives.

Many students suggested that Eurocentrism was unavoidable as Marx, Weber and Durkheim were simply products of their respective times. We did point out, however, that it is possible for individuals to transcend the dominant consciousness of their time. Furthermore, it is always the case that the future generation of thinkers are able to see through the ideological preconceptions and biases of the earlier scholars and present a different reading of the same facts. To some extent this involves the correction of erroneous conceptions and distortions. More than this, the future generations bring theoretical perspectives informed by alternative ideological positions. So, while Eurocentrism may have been unavoidable by Marx, Weber and Durkheim, it is also unavoidable that we engage in its critique, bearing in mind our own context of postcoloniality.

Highlighting Eurocentrism in classical Sociological theory is essential to the achievement of our other two objectives, that is, to generate consciousness of Eurocentrism and to demonstrate the utility of theory for the recovery of our past. This being a course on theory, we were only able to briefly explore how the critique of Eurocentrism shapes how we interpret the past and present.

Even if we showed Marx, Durkheim and Weber to be Eurocentric in specific ways, we are not suggesting that their writings, ideas or theories should be dismissed, rejected or deemed irrelevant for theorising contemporary society--Western or non-Western. Through our critique of Eurocentrism we are searching for ways of reading and re-reading the classical sociological theorists that allows us to see continued meaning in their ideas, but with a critical yet constructive eye. But we do insist that it is imperative that we be sensitized to the Eurocentric biases not just in these classical texts, but also in the current readings these texts are subjected to. Most importantly, we wanted to translate this critique into practice i.e., through teaching classical sociological theories with a difference.

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Endnotes

i. Communication with the course instructor, Dr Sun Chung-Hsing, Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University.

ii. The course consisted of 23 lectures taught over 13 weeks. The class size per semester averaged about 160 students. The students broke into groups of about ten and would meet with us for tutorial sessions, of which ten were held. See Appendix II for the list of tutorial assignments.

iii. When we taught the same course in the second semester, we included Harriet Martineau as one of the four classical theorists. Martineau's inclusion was an attempt to address the bias of androcentrism in classical sociological theory.

4. We plan to include Ibn Khaldun and other non-Western sociologists and social thinkers in future incarnations of this course, but these are not meant to replace Martineau, Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

APPENDIX I**SC3101: SOCIAL THOUGHT AND SOCIAL THEORY****Semester I 1998-1999****Lecturers: Dr. Syed Farid Alatas****Dr. Vineeta Sinha****Times and Venue: Tues 1-2, LT 9, Fri 9-10, LT 8****Course Description**

This course aims to develop a critical appreciation of classical social theory. We will concentrate on the contributions of four major theorists: Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1857-1917). These theorists, among others, offered profound analyses of the rise of modernity and the nature of modern society. What are the large-scale sociological processes in the making of modern society? What are its antecedents? What are its characteristic tendencies? And what are its human consequences? What is the relevance of these theories to our own condition today? In attempting to address these basic questions, this course will take us back to the classics that have shaped the development of sociology. How did each theorist grapple with the problem of modernity? What are the affinities and contrasts in their analyses? What is living or dead in their works in the light of the contemporary world as we experience it? In what ways can their ideas and arguments, their concepts and methods, still inform our analyses of the world we live it? What is the practical value of social theory? And what does the discipline of sociology mean for us? These are questions that students are encouraged to pursue without settling for quick and easy answers.

Text

Irving M. Zeitlin, *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory*, 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997 (Available at NUS Coop).

Course Requirements

In addition to lecture and tutorial attendance, students are required to write an essay of 4-6 typed pages. Suggestions for topics will be made but students are free to select their own essay topics in consultation with the lecturers/tutors. Tutorial attendance and the essay assignment comprise 30% of the final assessment. The essays are due on October 5 1998.

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SC3101: SOCIAL THOUGHT AND SOCIAL THEORY
SESSION 1998-99 (SEMESTER I)

Lecturers: Dr Syed Farid Alatas
Dr. Vineeta Sinha

Key to readings

* required readings to be completed prior to attending the lecture
no asterisk suggested readings

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

What is Sociological Theory?

Housekeeping matters
Types of theory

Why, Martineau, Marx, Weber and Durkheim?

Modern capitalist society and its traits
Social forces behind the rise of sociological theory
European domination, Eurocentrism and Androcentrism

*Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science". Paper presented to the KSA-ISA Joint East Asian Colloquium on "The Future of Sociology in East Asia", Seoul, November 22-23 1996.

*Mary Jo Deegan, 'Transcending a Patriarchal Past: Teaching the History of Women in Sociology', *Teaching Sociology* 16, 1988, 141-150.

HARRIET MARTINEAU (1802 - 1876)

Introduction

Androcentrism & Female invisibility
Harriet Martineau: The First Woman Sociologist?
Martineau's methodology: Science of morals and manners

*Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1838/1988, pp 13-22, 71-77, 223-231.

*Artemis March, 'Female Invisibility in Androcentric Sociological Theory' *Insurgent Sociologist* Vol XI, 2, 1982, pp 99-107.

Lynn McDonald, *The Women Founders of the Social Sciences*, Carleton University Press, 1996, pp 164-175.

Martineau's Sociological Insights

Sociology of slavery
Ethnic relations/racism
Women's studies

*Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, edited by S.M. Lipset, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 1836/1962, pp 47-56, 291-314, 355-357.

*Paul L. Riedesel, 'Who was Harriet Martineau?' *Journal of the History of Sociology*, 3, 2, 1981, pp 63-80.

KARL MARX (1818 - 1883)**Introduction**

The life of Marx
An outline of Marx's sociological theory

*Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, preface.

Rius, *Marx for Beginners*, Cambridge: Icon Books, 1976.

Werner Blumenberg, *Potrait of Marx: An Illustrated Biography*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1972.

Feudalism, Capitalism and the Asiatic Mode of Production

The feudal system
The rise of the capitalist mode of production and its relevance
Oriental Despotism

*Karl Marx, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," in R. C. Edwards, M. Reich & T. E. Weisskopf, ed., *The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp. 61-66.

*Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *On Colonialism*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968, pp. 35-41; 81-87.

*Suniti Kumar Ghosh, "Marx on India", *Monthly Review* 35, 1984, pp. 39-53.

Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 35-40.

The Capitalist Economy

Circulation and Production
The theory of surplus value
Capital and capitalist production

*Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, New York: Vintage, 1973, pp. 250-256.

*Ernest Mandel, *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 7-37.

Giddens, *Capitalism*, pp. 46-55.

Alienation in Capitalist Society

The pauperization thesis
Alienation

*Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, New York: International Publishers, 1982, pp. 106-119.

*Herbert Gintis, "Alienation in Capitalist Society," in Edwards et al., *The Capitalist System*, pp. 274-285.

Zeitlin, ch 11.

Class and Class Consciousness

Bourgeois, proletarians, and communists

Class consciousness

Classes in the Iranian revolution

*Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, T B Bottomore, trans., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956, pp. 178-191 [stop at line 2]; pp. 200-201 [start at "The history..."].

*Ahmad Ashraf & Ali Banuazizi, "The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution," *State, Culture and Society* 1, 3, 1985, 3-40.

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Capitalism and the State

The capitalist state

The post-colonial state

*William Domhoff, "State and Ruling Class in Corporate America," *Insurgent Sociologist* 4, 3, 1974, 3-16.

*Arief Budiman, "The Emergence of the Bureaucratic-Capitalist State in Indonesia," in Lim Teck Ghee, ed., *Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988, pp. 110-128.

V I Lenin, *The State*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1973.

Ideology

Idealism and materialism

Ideology and the sociology of knowledge

Colonial ideology

*Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, New York: International Publishers, pp. 42-48.

*Charles Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology," *Sociological Forum* 1, 2, 1986, 330-361.

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N. Abercrombie, S. Hill, & B. S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980.

MAX WEBER (1864 - 1920)

Introduction

The life of Weber

Objectivity and the social sciences

An outline of Weber's sociological theory

*Stanislav Andreski, *Max Weber's Insights and Errors*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 1-8.

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The Origins of Modern Capitalism

The prerequisites of modern capitalism

An idealist theory of the development of capitalism

*Weber, *General Economic History*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981, ch 22.

*Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, ch 2.

The Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism

Protestantism and capitalism

Calvinism

The metaphor of the iron cage

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Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, ch 9.

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The Protestant Ethic and Southeast Asia

Weberian Orientalism?

Southeast Asian interpretations of Weber

The relevance of Max Weber to Southeast Asian development

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APPENDIX II

SC3101 - Social Thought and Social Theory

Tutorial Assignments

TUTORIAL 1

Guiding questions

1. The main purpose of this first and introductory tutorial is to discuss the common theme that unites Martineau, Marx, Weber and Durkheim. This has to do with the problem of freedom in modern society. Try to guess what this problem of freedom entails in daily life. What does freedom mean to you?

2. An important aspect of the context in which sociological theory developed was Eurocentrism and androcentrism. Why is this important for us?

NOTE: These and subsequent tutorial questions are meant to be guides to discussion. We are not bound to answering all these questions as other issues may arise during your readings and classroom discussions.

TUTORIAL 2

Readings: 1. Marx, 'The transition from feudalism to capitalism'.
2. Wallerstein, 'Eurocentrism and its Avatars'.

Guiding questions

1. Why is the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism an issue in sociological theory? How would you answer this question from a European point of view, as opposed to an Asian (say, Indian or Chinese) point of view?

2. What would be a Eurocentric Marxist approach to interpreting the transition from feudalism to capitalism?

3. From what you know of claims that are being made with regard to the relationship between Confucianism and development in East Asia, do these involve Eurocentric or counter-Eurocentric arguments?

TUTORIAL 3

Readings: 1. Marx and Engels, *On Colonialism*.
2. Ghosh, "Marx on India".

Guiding questions

1. What are the ways in which the concept of the Asiatic mode of production is orientalist in approach? Distinguish between ideological and factual statements contained in the concept.

2. After having read Ghosh, may we conclude that after all, Marx was not Eurocentric in his views about India?

TUTORIAL 4

Readings: Ashraf & Banuazizi, 'The State'.

Guiding questions

1. Write down on a piece of paper, anonymously, the class category that you feel you belong to and, if possible, the annual income of your household.
2. Was the Iranian revolution a class revolution in the Marxist sense of the term?

TUTORIAL 5

Readings: 1. Domhoff, "State and Ruling Class".
2. Budiman, "The Emergence of the Bureaucratic-Capitalist State".
3. Marx, *The German Ideology*, pp. 39-48.

Guiding questions

1. Discuss the concept of the ruling class.
2. Does the Marxist theory of the state apply to Indonesia?
3. "It has not occurred to anyone of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings". Discuss the meaning of this statement.

TUTORIAL 6

Reading: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch 2.

Guiding Questions:

1. With recourse to the views of Benjamin Franklin, describe the spirit of capitalism. What has it to do with systematic and rational conduct? What is rationality?
2. What is economic traditionalism?
3. What does Weber mean when he says that the spirit of capitalism and capitalist enterprise may exist separately and apart from each other?
4. What does Weber mean when he says that the "development of the spirit of capitalism is best understood as part of the development of rationalism as a whole, and could be deduced from the fundamental position of rationalism on the basic problems of life"?

TUTORIAL 7

Readings: 1. Munshi, 'Max Weber on India: An Introductory Critique'.
2. Molloy, 'Max Weber and the Religions of China: Any way out of the maze?'.

Guiding Questions

1. In what ways can Weber's essays on India and China be interpreted as control tests for the 'Weber-thesis' carried in *The Protestant Ethic*? Are his writings on the 'orient' really about the 'Occident'? Are we justified in speaking of a Weberian orientalism?

2. According to Weber, how did 'caste traditionalism' and 'Chinese traditionalism' prevent the endogenous development of capitalism in India and China respectively?

3. How can we still usefully read Weber's works on the comparative sociology of religion despite some of the substantive limitations and methodological problematics of his essays on China and India?

TUTORIAL 8

Readings: 1. Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, pp. 22-26, 85-86; Vol. II, pp. 956-958.

2. Weber, "Social Psychology", p. 293.
3. Caiden, 'Excessive Bureaucratization'.
4. Fulbrook, "Max Weber's Interpretive Sociology".

Guiding questions

1. What is the relationship between the types of rationality and the types of social action? What is meant by meaningful social action?
2. To what extent would you regard the *Protestant Ethic* as a critique of historical materialism?
3. Discuss Weber's conception and practice of sociology. How does this distinction relate to the idealism/materialism debate. How does Weber differ from Marx in terms of his views on the place of ideal factors in sociological analysis?
4. "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order" (*The Protestant Ethic*, p. 181). If this is the case, what has replaced religion today? What type of rationality dominates and how is this manifested in daily life? Reflect on the movie 'Brazil'.

TUTORIAL 9

Readings: 1. Barnes, J. 'Durkheim's Division of Labour'.

2. Tiryakian, 'Revisiting Sociology's First Classic: *The Division of Labour in Society* and its Actuality'.

Guiding Questions

1. How does Durkheim conceptualize 'mechanical solidarity' and 'organic solidarity'? Can we make sense of the need to devise 'shared values' for Singaporeans using these concepts?
2. Do you agree with Tiryakian's assertion that in the 'post-modern' world we may be witnessing 'the return of mechanical solidarity' (p.12)? Support your responses with relevant examples.
3. How do we assess Durkheim's theory of social change which assumes the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity to be natural, spontaneous, desirable and inevitable given the historical experience of colonialism and its role in transforming pre-colonial societies?

TUTORIAL 10

Readings: 1. Mestrovic, 'Anomie, the Unleashing of the Will', chap 4, pp 54-75.

2. Anthony Giddens, 'The 'individual' in the writings of Emile Durkheim'.

Guiding Questions

1. Mestrovic suggests that it is inaccurate to translate Durkheim's anomie as normlessness (p 61). What alternative conceptualization of anomie does Mestrovic offer?
2. Why is the distinction between egoism and individualism crucial in Durkheim's theorising? How does Durkheim conceptualize moral individualism?
3. Durkheim is typically seen as privileging society over the individual. How accurate is this perception in view of Durkheim's specific understanding of the relationship between the 'social' and the 'individual'?

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