

## EGALITARIAN AND UTOPIAN

### TRADITIONS IN THE EAST

Socialism was born in the West in the 19th century, be it the Utopian visions of Saint-Simon, Owen or Fourier, or the system, at once theoretical and militant, founded by Marx and Engels. It was the heir not only of the philosophers and economists of the modern age, Diderot, Hegel and Ricardo, but also of a more ancient egalitarian and Utopian tradition, which constitutes its “prehistory” and its “proto-history”: social movements such as the Bohemian Taborites, the Münster anabaptists<sup>1</sup> or the English diggers; and similarly the Utopian outlooks like those of Thomas Moore or Campanella or, still more ancient, Plato himself.

During the 19th century socialism spread from the West into the East; timidly at first, as an echo of the activity of the second

Translated by Simon Pleasance.

<sup>1</sup> The best general study of these Western egalitarian movements in the Middle Ages is that of N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

International;<sup>2</sup> and far more vigorously in the frame of the Komintern from 1918-1920 onwards. By “into the East” one means, for example, the “major East-west project” of UNESCO. That is to say that it spread into a series of societies which includes the Far East with its Confucian tradition, the Buddhist countries of South-East Asia, India, the Islam countries. These societies differ widely from one another in their history, religion, political system, but they have in common the fact that they had not evolved in the modern age towards an industrial society, that they had not followed the same route of historical development as the Christian West in the Middle Ages (which until the 16th century was just one among many of the great pre-industrial civilizations of the Old World). Distinguished from the West in this way, this “East” does not become confused with the “Third World”; it is hallmarked by written cultures, by complex politico-religious systems which are deep-rooted in an explicit history, by a higher technological and economical level, and by vast state constructions.

Judging from the manner in which socialism implants itself in this “East” in the 20th century, is it no more than a graft, a purely exogenous development? This characteristic of exteriority and novation is certainly fundamental. But one cannot shrug off the fact that socialism has also had an effect on a whole series of egalitarian and Utopian traditions that belong to the East, particularly to China and the Islam countries.

Contrary to what took place in the West, these muddled traditions of justice and equality are certainly not connected with modern socialism by a continuous series of historical intermediaries. But for the first socialists of these countries they made precedents and “national legitimizations” which they felt to be all the more vital because they were living in an East dominated by the West, an East impatient to free itself. And so in Tokyo in about 1905 the first groups of Chinese students favorably inclined to socialism discussed its possible Confucian “ancestors”: Mencius, the minister of the Sung Wang An-shin, the collective granaries of the Tai-ping. The first Arab socialists devotedly compiled the *hadith* (words attributed to Mahomet) which could

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the collective work directed by Georges Haupt and Madeleine Rebérioux, *La Seconde Internationale et l'Orient* (Paris, 1967).

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be interpreted in the sense of social justice. The socialising reform plan of the Siamese minister Pridi in 1932 was put under the patronage of the Messiah *Maitreya*, whose coming, in Buddhistic tradition, should promote a just and happy society.

Even if implanted in the East by an external process, socialism has shown itself capable of carrying out and realising the confused dreams that had been entertained by men for generations. In this sense it is not as “foreign” to the East as one might sometimes think. Sun Yat-sen, for example, has several times spoken of the continuity that links modern socialism to Taoism and Confucianism: “When the people has communalized everything that concerns the State, we shall have really realised the objective of the ‘well-being of the people’ (which is the third principle of Sun Yat-sen); we shall have realised this *ta-t’ung* world of great harmony wished for by Confucius,” he says in the conclusion of the second lesson on the well-being of the people.

Mao Tse-tung has likewise insisted on several occasions on the idea that the historical mission of Chinese communism was to achieve the old Confucian Utopia: “The power of the State and political parties will disappear quite naturally, he says of the future communist age, and thus allow mankind to enter the era of *ta-t’ung*.”<sup>3</sup>

In return, particularly as the 20th century advances, these “pre-socialist” Eastern traditions have been used by the political *milieux* in Asia which are hostile to communism; today one talks of “Islamic socialism” in certain traditionalist *milieux* in Algeria, Syria and Egypt; it is upon “Buddhistic socialism” that certain leading *milieux* in Cambodia, Burma or Ceylon want to found an ideology that would be capable of rivalling Marxism. A similar preoccupation was also doubtless present in the mind of Sun Yat-sen when he insisted on the specifically Chinese sources of socialism which he proposed in his *Three Principles of the People*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Oeuvres*, vol. IV, Peking edition in French, p. 1474 (“on the dictatorship of popular democracy”).

<sup>4</sup> “The new European culture,” Sun Yat-sen says again in his fourth lesson on nationalism, “anarchy and communism, which are talked of so much today, are old theories in our China which date back several thousand years; thus the theories of Huang-ti and Lao-tzu are anarchic, and the kingdom of Hua-hsü-shih, the inhabitants of which, according to Lieh-tzu, have no chief and no law, and which is the State of pure nature, is not that anarchy... abroad it is only com-

These egalitarian and Utopian traditions hold an important place above all in China, in the Buddhist countries of South-East Asia, and in the Moslem countries; they count far less in India and Japan.

In China, the *locus classicus* of social Utopianism is represented by a very ancient text in the Book of Rites (*Li Chi*), chapter VI, article I, the terms of which were familiar to any literate Chinese in those days as they are to any cultured Chinese today:

“When men walked in the path of virtue, the world was a community. Those who were talented were chosen (as leaders). Their voice was sincere and they exercised harmony. Men treated others’ parents as their own, and cherished others’ children as their own. Old people were given shelter until they died, men in their prime had work, and the young education. Widows, orphans, the childless and the sick were shown tenderness and compassion in the way they were cared for. Every man had his work, every woman her hearth. People hated to see goods wasted, but did not want to procure them for themselves. They liked to work to their full capacity, but without seeking private gain. That is why individual ambitions had no chance to develop. There were no thieves or brigands, and the rontdoors of the houses were always open. It was the period of so-called Great Unity (*ta-t’ung*).”<sup>5</sup>

The same ideal of a fraternal society where mutual interest takes the place of private interest can be found in Mencius (6th century before our era), with the idea of the priority of the people over the sovereign, a phrase which is likewise often quoted. Mencius also describes (Book III, chapter 1) a state of primitive agrarian communism, where the fields are divided into nine parts, the eight lots on the outside going to families, the ninth, in the center, cultivated commonly for the prince.<sup>6</sup> It is the system of the “field in the shape of a well” (the Chinese ideogram that means “well” is drawn with two horizontal and two vertical lines which make nine divisions), that is *ching-t’ien*, “those who culti-

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munism that is discussed, but the economic system of the Tai-ping and of Hung-hsü-ch’uan was real communism without the theory.”

<sup>5</sup> A term which Needham happily translates by *Great Togetherness*.

<sup>6</sup> The ambiguity of this myth comes from what the same Chinese ideogram (*kung*) calls the common interest and the prince. The prince, originally, is not the master but the representative of the community.

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vathe the same *ching*, says Mencius, will always be together wherever they go; they will share among themselves the job of defence and keeping watch. In case of illness they will help each other. In this way all the inhabitants will love one another and live intelligently together." This Utopian myth of agrarian communism, the *ching-t'ien*, is extremely vital in China until the 20th century.

Mo Ti, another master of classical Chinese philosophy, based his philosophy on mutual aid and universal love. The ideal Mohist society is based on the principle of similarity; people love what is profitable to all; everyone works and the gain is divided.

But it is the Taoist school (5th-6th centuries before our era) which puts forward the richest traditions of social Utopia and egalitarianism. The Taoists are filled with nostalgia for a Golden Age "based on cooperation, not on acquisition" (Needham). They condemn class distinction and urge mutual aid. They are opposed to State power and private interest).<sup>7</sup>

"In ancient times, says Chuang-tzu, one of the fathers of the Taoist system, the human condition was identical. Men wove their own clothes and every one cultivated the land to subsist. There was the Virtue of all men living in the same manner (*t'ung-te*). They were united in a single social group, which is what we call freedom given naturally from heaven. In that age of perfect virtue, men lived with the birds and the wild animals and all creation was one family. How could they know the distinction between prince and subject?" (Chuang-tzu, chapter 9).

The Taoist philosopher Yang Chou glorified the physical strength of the labourer and the love he had for his work; for him the principal factor is "everything that renders calm the man of the fields, everything that gives him joy." He is the author of the famous paradox of the benefit which becomes its own opposite, by the intermediary of glory and profit: benefits and above all "distributions" bring "glory." This latter leads to "gain" because of the respect that is earned. Aspiration to gain is accompanied by the violation of the rights of other men, "strife"; "benefit" becomes an evil...

<sup>7</sup> When he visited China in 1920, Bertrand Russell's sensibility was quite naturally attracted to Taoism, in which he saw a Chinese archetype of anarchic socialism. He defined it as follows: "Production without possession, action without any attempt to impose, development without domination" (*Problem of China*, p. 194).

Another classical Taoist, Lieh-tzu, describes, as if in a dream (Book II, chapter I) a mythical kingdom where "there are no leaders, and everything happens by itself; the people have no desires, everything comes about naturally," a text which Sun Yat-sen considered to be a precursor of modern anarchy. This whole Taoist tradition is impregnated with an Utopian egalitarianism, which J. Needham and E. Balazs have been particularly insistent about.<sup>8</sup> Such ideas as *tai-ping* (great harmony), *p'ing-chün* (equalization), *chün-t'ien* (equal fields) belong to this Taoist fund, from which, as we shall see, peasant revolts and Utopian reformers borrow heavily throughout the history of China. In the words of L.D. Pozdnieieva, in ancient China "the religion born from the doctrine of certain ancient Taoists was nothing more than a heresy capable of advancing for the first time the demand for the equality of all men, in the face of god, and consequently the equality of goods, contrary to Confucianism, that religion for the privileged."

Egalitarian movements similarly make the best of the Buddhistic tradition of charity and the condemnation of riches, and most particularly of the myth of the Buddhist Messiah, the *Maitreya* (in Chinese *Mi-lo-fu*) whose coming is supposed to be the beginning of an age of justice, plenty and well-being.

In fact, this brief sketch of the "pre-socialist" elements of the traditional Chinese heritage must make way for another philosophical school of ancient China, that of the agrarians (*Nung-Chia*), which J. Needham connects with the English diggers of the 17th century. The agrarians, who are close to the Taoists, desire a society where everyone works the fields, leader and subject alike. They attacked the views of Confucius on the necessity of having wise men, exempt from manual labour, to direct the State. In

<sup>8</sup> J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. II: *History of Scientific Thought*, Cambridge, 1956, in particular paragraph 10 on Taoism. Cf. by the same author. "The Past in China's Present, a Cultural, Social and Philosophical Background for Modern China" (*The Centennial Review*, Chicago, Spring and Summer 1960).

E. Balazs, *Chinese Civilisation and Bureaucracy*, Yale, 1964, p. 309; and *Political Theory and Administrative Reality in Traditional China*, London, 1965, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> L.D. Pozdnieieva, *Ateisty, Materialisty, Dialektiki Drevnevo Kitaia* (The Atheists, the Materialists and the Dialecticians of Ancient China). Moscow, 1967, p. 403. (Passages chosen from Yang-Chou, Lieh-tzu and Chuang-tzu, translated and commented on.)

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the ideal country they describe, the leaders cultivate the land with the simple folk, and prepare their morning and evening meals themselves, and at the same time carry out their official duties. But the classics of the agrarian school are lost, and are only known about through the allusions of other authors, notably Mencius.

This rich egalitarian and Utopian tradition is perpetuated throughout classical Chinese history and right into the 19th century by two quite distinct tendencies, two currents of social protest against the established order: the protest of the literate Utopian reformers and the protest of the egalitarian peasant movements.

In fact, repeatedly throughout Chinese history there have been literate men with Confucian backgrounds and members of the ruling class who have been in conflict with the established order. Some were content to express in words their criticisms and their dreams of a more just society. Others, taking advantage of favorable circumstances, tried to put their social reform projects into practice, to translate Utopia into facts. But both categories borrowed constantly from the traditional heritage, the content of which has just been briefly outlined; they referred to the Golden Age of *Ta-t'ung*; they called for an equal distribution of wealth and land especially; they attacked private interests and profiteers.

In this way a real school of social Taoist-inclined criticism, full of energy, was formed under the dynasty of the later Han (during the first two centuries of our era). Wang Fu (90-165) expresses a nostalgia for a *t'ai-p'ing* era of great harmony, and condemns the concentration of wealth; he prefers the secluded life of the hermit to glory. T'ung Chung-ch'ang (born in 180) sanctions a return to the state of *t'ai-p'ing* by reintroducing the ancient system of a communal cultivation of fields "in the form of the well" (*ching-t'ien*); the evils of society, in his eyes, stem from the fact that "the fields are distributed without restriction among private people." Pao Ching-yen (3rd century), a disciple of Chuang-tzu, is the "first political anarchist in China, and a bold thinker who goes far beyond the muddled Utopianism of popular Taoism" (Balazs). He levels the Golden Age when "there was neither master nor vassal" against the regime of oppression that reigned in China in his lifetime.

The same dream of the Golden Age is expressed in the famous Utopia of T'ao Yüan-ming (365-427) entitled *The Source of the*

*Peach-Garden*. In this imaginary journey, the author describes a land beyond the world and beyond time, the people of which preserve the primitive customs of ancient China, day-to-day life, work and leisure take place in a communal atmosphere; government, officials, taxation, public forced labour and war do not exist.

But it was not simply a matter of intellectual constructions. From the end of the first Han dynasty, in the first years of our era, the usurper Wang Mang (who reigned from 9 to 23) had attempted a general redistribution of the land, in line with the *ching-t'ien* system. He added a whole series of antiquating reforms, made legitimate by the ancient Utopian canonical books, particularly the Book of Rites: thus the system of the "six monopolies" (salt, metals, mines etc.) and the "five zones of equalization" (in which State offices fixed the prices, purchased the surplus and resold when prices were rising). His reforms died with him.

Another great reformer, Wang An-shih (1021-1086), appeared under the *Sung* dynasty. He likewise appealed for the communal traditions of very ancient China, in order to impose agrarian measures which would equalise the land-tax in terms of the productivity of the land. Together with Wang Mang he was considered as the father of Chinese socialism by the first socialist intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century. But Wang An-shih is not an isolated figure. Another thinker of the *Sung* dynasty, Li K'ou, came before him in the path of antiquating Utopianism (1009-1059); he had written a book in which he proposed to set up a regime of social harmony (*t'ai-p'ing*) by reintroducing the mythical system of the Chou dynasty and by putting into practice a radical agrarian reform.

The 17th century is similarly a period of profound political crisis in China, both intellectual and social, with the fall of the Ming dynasty and the rise of the Manchus. A thinker such as Huang Tsung-hsi (1601-1695), who took an active part in the resistance against the northern invaders, is the author of a famous work "Plan for the Prince" (*Ming-I T'ai fang lü*), proposals for a more propitious age, written in 1662. In it he systematically criticises the function of princes, "the greatest enemy of humanity". He is nostalgic for antiquity when there was less disorder because the laws were less severe. "If there were no governments,



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every man would live for himself..." He too favors a return to the agrarian system of *ching-t'ien*.

In the 18th century this Utopian tradition is represented by Li Ju-chen (c. 1763-1830), author of a famous novel of a hundred chapters on which he worked for ten years, the *Ching-hua-yüan* (The Mirror of the Flowers); the novel is set in the 7th century under the T'ang dynasty, and describes the adventures of a hundred talented women in imaginary kingdoms; the description gives rise to an acid criticism of China under the Manchu dynasty. In these kingdoms women have the right to sit for public examinations, they study, they marry freely, they do not have to bind their feet or serve as concubines. This feminist Utopia is still very famous in China.

Hou Wai-lu, the great specialist in ancient Chinese philosophies, has proposed a classification of these intellectual Utopia into two main categories.<sup>10</sup> Those which, in the tradition of the Taoist fathers, describe an ideal imaginary world, the evocation of which presents an opportunity to level accusations at the injustices of real society, but which cannot be put into practice; this is the case of Lieh-tzu, Pao Ching-yen, T'ao Yüan-ming and Li Ju-chen. And those which, by departing from certain archaic texts such as the page by Mencius on *Ching-t'ien*, envisage a restoration of social order by a return to antiquity: this is the case of Wang Mang, Wang An-shih and all their rivals.

Parallel with this long series of intellectual Utopia, Chinese peasant revolts had for centuries also borrowed from the old traditional Utopian and millenary heritage. They referred themselves to Taoist egalitarianism and to Buddhistic Messianism. Their leaders readily proclaimed themselves to be the *Maitreya* incarnate and the old themes of *t'ai-p'ing* (great harmony) and *p'ing-chün* (equalisation) often recur in their vocabulary and slogans.

Thus in the 3rd century of our era the revolt of the Yellow Turbans and that of the sect of the Five Bushels of Rice, which provoked the fall of the later Han dynasty, referred themselves to a Golden Age in which there would not be two different prices in the markets, and there would be no thieves on the highways. They

<sup>10</sup> Hou Wai-lu, *Zhong-guo Da-tong si-xiang zi-liao* (Materials on the Idea of Utopian Community in China), Peking, 1959, p. 98.

attempted to create "a double communal organisation with a hierarchy based on merit and a will to realise a perfect state."<sup>11</sup> The rebels had to set up in the province of Ssuchuan, which they had held for several years, the system of "equity inns" (*I-she*), where meat and wine was hung at the disposition of the traveller on the condition that he ate only what was strictly necessary. If the traveller contravened this, he was considered a sinner, and had to expiate his sin by working on the roads. In these phalansteries, then, the economic community went cheek by jowl with a severe moral law. The Yellow Turbans referred themselves to an age of prosperity and equality (*t'ai-p'ing*) and proclaimed its imminent advent.

These same themes were taken up by other peasant risings. At the end of the T'ang dynasty, for example, in the 9th century, the chief peasant, Wang Hsien-chih, proclaimed himself as the "great general delivered from Heaven to re-establish equity." Under the Sung, (11th-13th centuries), another peasant, Wang Hsiao-p'o, chief of a jacquerie in Ssuchuan, announced that "he is weary of the inequality that exists between rich and poor; and that he wants to level it out to the benefit of the people." From the outset of the movement, he confiscates all the surplus from the rich and distributes it among the poor; "with us, declares another rebel peasant of the Sung dynasty, Yang K'o-shih, everything we possess in the way of clothes, food, livestock, cloth, grain is not the object of private accumulation, we hand it out fairly to everyone, which is why we represent a true community" (*t'ung-ch'u*).<sup>12</sup>

These egalitarian and millenary aspirations also characterise the "secret societies," groups of religious dissent, social agitation and political opposition, which have been so active throughout Imperial Chinese history (in particular under the Mongol and Manchu dynasties). The society of the White Lotus (*Pai-lien-chiao*), for example, was profoundly marked by the millenary expectation of the Buddhistic Messiah, *Mi-lo-fu*. Groups such as the society of Heaven and Earth (Triad) or the Elders and the Ancients (*Ko-lao-hui*) had an egalitarian organisation (including benefits for women)

<sup>11</sup> R. Stein, *Remarques sur les mouvements du taoïsme politico-religieux au II<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.C.* (*T'oung Pao*, vol. 1, 1963, pp. 1-81.)

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Hou Wai-lu, *op. cit.* Cf. also Y. Kuramatsu, "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies," in *Confucian Persuasion*, edited by A. Wright, Stanford, 1960, pp. 241-268.

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and their fictitious hierarchy (Great Dragon etc.) was such that it compensated for the inequalities of actual society. The secret societies were furthermore closely connected with peasant egalitarian agitation.<sup>13</sup>

This latter continues with the peasant revolts that provoked the fall of the Mongol dynasty in the 14th century, and the Ming dynasty in the 17th century. This leads directly to the primitive egalitarian communism of the T'ai p'ing in the 19th century, the great peasant revolt, the very name of which evoked those Taoist traditions that have already been cited. The T'ai-p'ing, who established a dissenting state in central China from 1851 to 1864, the "Celestial Kingdom of Great Harmony" (*T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo*), had promulgated an extremely radical agrarian law:

"All the land beneath Heaven will be cultivated in common by the people beneath Heaven... the land will be cultivated by one and all, rice eaten, clothes worn and money spent. There will no longer be inequalities and no one will go without food or fuel."<sup>14</sup>

In the system of the T'ai-p'ing the harvest had to be stored in communal granaries (celestial granaries) and artisan production was assured by "celestial" battalions of State craftsmen.

This egalitarian character of Chinese peasant movements, an Asiatic version of "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?", that the English Lollards chanted in the 14th and the peasants of Rhineland in the 15th centuries, has strongly marked the whole of Chinese social history. It is this that explains why every new dynasty, brought into power by the wave of elementary peasant agitation that had overthrown the preceding one, considers itself obliged to realise at least a semblance of agrarian reform. Chinese communism, above all in the thirties, and again round 1955-1960 with the popular communes, develops against this backcloth of peasant egalitarianism.

To what extent have these two currents of egalitarian and Utopian protest, the literate and the peasant, mutually supported and influenced each other? Naturally enough our sources indicate only very exceptional participation by literate men in peasant

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Chesneaux, *Les sociétés secrètes en Chine*, 19th-20th centuries, Paris, 1965.

<sup>14</sup> This document is quoted *in extenso* in the work by J.C. Cheng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, Hong Kong, 1963, p. 181.

movements, for example the figure of a certain Li Yen, an educated man who draughted the egalitarian proclamations of the peasants in revolt against the Ming in the middle of the 17th century. But one must bear in mind that Chinese historical documents are all of mandarin origin, and that they were thus quite naturally inclined to hush up any literate opposition to the established order and support of the rebel movements.

These two tendencies, however, represent but a series of isolated episodes and solitary figures. All things considered, the old Chinese regime did not really have to put up with all these protests. But one also wonders to what extent traditional Chinese society, as a whole this time and not as seen through marginal and exceptional cases, is not marked by certain community tendencies which similarly provided favorable ground for the development of modern socialism. This view of an East less marked by individualism than the West has been developed by many sinologists, J. Gernet, L. Vandermeersch, P. Fitzgerald, and especially by J. Needham in a resounding article which tries to show that communist China is nothing more than "the realization of a whole series of community traditions which go back as far as Classical China."<sup>15</sup>

In fact the general climate of classical Chinese society tends far more to integrate the individual in the collective than to oppose him to it, as is the case in the West. The individual is part of his family, his guild, his clan and his village. The word *kung* (collective) opposes what is "private" (*ssu*) in the economic sense of the term. But the word *ssu*—which is a significant fact—has at the same time a pejorative moral connotation: it indicates a "private," that is furtive, appropriation with a view to profit, and more generally all that is secret, dishonest, clandestine, contrary to what is done in a collective and public manner, that is in broad daylight and in the general interest (*kung*).

Classical Chinese society did not offer a favorable ground for private enrichment and lucrative activities. This fact is also clear from hierarchy of social values, in the order of precedence of the "states," such as the political moral of Confucianism defined it: first the literate (*shih*), in possession of knowledge and power, then the peasants (*nung*), their work being the basis of any so-

<sup>15</sup> The article was published in the *Centennial Review*, as quoted earlier.

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ciety, then the craftsmen (*kung*), and right at the bottom of the social scale the “treacherous merchants” (*shang*).

The importance of the traditions of public management of the economy is another aspect of this collective climate of ancient China. This management deals not only with dams and canals, but also with iron and salt, State monopolies since the Han dynasty; in Needham’s words it is a “tradition of nationalised production,” which one could doubtless link with the “manner of Asiatic production.” All the same a strong state hold over the land still exists, and private ownership of land, even if it exists, never has the absolute and unlimited character that Roman law recognizes, the *Freies Eigentum* of the West; F. Schurman has shown how it is tempered by such customs as the joint rights of the other members of the family, rights of preemption and rights of tenure.<sup>16</sup>

“Marxism,—a Vietnamese intellectual<sup>17</sup> has remarked—in no way led Confucian intellectuals astray by focussing man’s thoughts on political and social problems... the Confucian school thought of nothing else. By defining man by the totality of his social relationships, Marxism hardly shocked the literates who considered the supreme aim of man to assume his social obligations correctly... When he moves from traditional to socialist society, the Confucian adopts a new social discipline, but at heart he had never been hostile, like the western bourgeois intellectual, to the principle itself of collective discipline, considering it indispensable to the development of his own personality.”

But the objection one can level against all these “transcontinental” analyses of the historical relation between imperial China and Chinese socialism is that they rest on facts which in reality contribute to a defense of the Chinese *Ancien Régime* and its social inequalities. Such is the sense of the hierarchy that gives political and moral supremacy to the literate over the merchants; the social cohesion implied by the contrast between *kung* and *ssu* helps the established power, and the “natural” authority of the emperor and the body of mandarins who govern in his

<sup>16</sup> H.F. Schurman, “Traditional Property Concepts in China,” *Far Eastern Quarterly*, August 1956.

<sup>17</sup> Nguyen Khac Vien, “Confucianisme et marxisme au Vietnam,” *La Pensée*, No. 105, October 1962, pp. 3-26.

name (we have already pointed out the basic ambiguity between *kung*, common, and *kung*, prince). It is the same with the tradition of public management of the economy, a tradition which consolidates imperial and mandarin power as well. Classical Confucian society is founded on the opposition of power and the people, on the submission of the one to the other, on the inequalities of fortune and condition that this submission engenders. In this sense it is absolutely opposed to the egalitarian and Utopian traditions that have been analysed above, and it is against this society that the latter have developed.

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Buddhistic Messianism did not only influence Chinese peasant movements. More generally, Buddhism, in its southern form of *Theravada* Buddhism or “Little Vehicle” (*Hinayana*) is at the origin of a rich egalitarian and Utopian tradition, implanted in the countries of South-East Asia: Burma in particular,<sup>18</sup> Ceylon, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. Again in 1957 a party with socialist tendencies founded at Bangkok bore the name *Sri Ariya Mettaya*, which evoked the Golden Age which is supposed to follow the reincarnation of the Buddha *Maitreya*; in 1932, the great plan of political and economic modernisation in Siam, proposed by Pridi, was also put under the sign of this Utopia.

The moral and social law of Buddhism, the *Dhamma*, insists a lot on the fraternity of human beings. In this ideal of a harmonious society, private interest and the search for gain have no place, unless it is a question of financing some pious foundation. English colonialists complain bitterly about this Buddhist contempt the Burmese show for business and profit, and in general about their *unbusiness-like* attitude (the term used in the *Census Report* of 1901).

Royal function, in the classical Buddhistic conception, is founded on this tradition of common good, of Welfare State, say English specialists of Buddhism. Chronicles tell us of Dhammaraja, for example, a Siamese king of the 14th century, that “his piety and charity were as limitless as the waters of the ocean; he loved

<sup>18</sup> For which we recommend the excellent study by E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Background of the Burmese Revolution*. The Hague, 1965, p. 248.

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his people as his children. It was his custom to pardon criminals; he offered them the possibility of making up for their crimes and sent them home. At this time there were no slaves in the country. Everyone was free and happy. His reputation spread to other nations, and people came from all directions to live at peace under his gracious power.”<sup>19</sup>

In one of his discourses the Buddha is said to have explained that it is not by taxation or recourse to force that one can remedy brigandage and social troubles, “it is poverty and lack of work that are at the root of social unhappiness.” The peasant must have grain, the merchant capital and officials a correct salary; “in this atmosphere of creative activity and satisfaction, citizens will be able to bring up their children in a state of well-being and happiness, and make of them people who are free from need and fear...”<sup>20</sup>

The originality of this Buddhistic vision of a just and prosperous society lies in the fact that it is a pre-condition for moral and spiritual progress, the entry into the state of *Nirvana*; it is necessary as a guarantee of the leisure necessary for meditation. This, moreover, is why, at a first stage, the King and the people must at least contribute towards the material subsistence of monks. This idea of social justice as a condition of spiritual progress recurs, in our time, in the hymn of the revolutionary party, of the *Thakin*, the first core of Burmese intellectuals to rally to socialism in 1935. Again in 1948, in the preface to his law on the nationalisation of land, U Nu explains that property has only a relative value, and that it is an obstacle to the pursuit of moral perfection. The first Burmese marxists call a just, classless society *Lokka-Nibba* (*Nirvana* realised in this world).<sup>21</sup>

This Buddhistic ideal of social justice is likewise nourished by the mythical traditions of the past, and by the idea of a primitive golden age where everything would be at the disposition of a people prepared to work and living in a state of equality. In this state of natural abundance rice grew by itself...

“Formerly we excelled in everything, thanks to our state of

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by E. Sarkisyanz, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> D.D. Kosambi, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> In a Burmese text of 1930, Stalin is hailed as the builder of *Lokka-Nibba*.

mind. We were overflowing with joy before those things disappeared. Human bodies sparkled like the firmament... The thin tasty soil offered itself as food. Climbing plants were consumed to exhaustion. These foods disappeared when man no longer deserved them."<sup>21</sup>

This state of primitive democracy, of communal life, absence of need, survived in Buddhist society in the form of monastic communities; they perpetuate the past and announce the future. This fact is important, because it explains that the leftist movements in Buddhist countries have never known the anti-clerical phase. On the contrary, indeed, they have drunk from the monastic tradition. Consequently the modern Burmese term for a strike is none other than the old expression which meant the gesture of the monks handing back their bowls of rice (*thabeit bmauk*) and refusing alms as a sign of protest against some immoral deed of the donor (who was thus deprived of the chance to buy back his error).

The aspirations towards a society of plenty, from which Buddhism is nourished, are in the future as well as the past. One awaits the advent of the Buddhist Messiah, the *Maitreya* or *Met-taya*, the reincarnation of the Buddha, who will come to promote a universal order of justice and love, a state of absolute plenty:

"Jewels strew the ground and are as plentiful as stones. People say that in the old days men harmed one another, threw each other into prison, lied to each other and stole from each other... Now nobody keeps watch over the jewels; people do not covet them, they despise them."<sup>23</sup> This Utopian prosperity, this plenty, is thus an antidote for man's material appetites. With the advent of the *Maitreya* man will go beyond his attachment to wealth, by a process of satiety.

But the *Maitreya* himself will be preceded by a sovereign of justice, the *Cakkavatti* (in Burmese, *Setkya Min*), a universal emperor who will conquer the world without violence. He will renounce his privileged status and his wealth, he will feed the poor and disinherited, and he himself will wander homeless. The state and political society will then be diluted into a monastic-type super-state unit, all goods being common. In this ideal world

<sup>22</sup> E. Sarkisyanz, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.



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community there will be only one language. The world will be identified with the Utopian island *Uttarakuru*, where the inhabitants are "equal in all things." The divisions that have separated mankind, because of the aspiration to private ownership, will be surpassed because rice will grow for everyone without work, for the benefit of a mankind that is unified under the ideal authority of the *Cakkavatti*. All the material needs of men will be covered by "wishing trees" (*Padeytha Pin*), from the branches of which hang clothes and jewels for all the inhabitants of the island. The tree stretches forth its branches when the people wishes something, and nobody need work.

These Utopian and egalitarian dreams were very strongly anchored in the minds of Burmese peasants. It is in the name of the advent of the *Setkya Min* (the Burmese form of *Cakkavatti*) that they revolted on many occasions against English domination, in 1839, 1855, 1860, 1886-87, 1922 and 1930 particularly. On that date the diviner of the village Saya San directed a very important rising in Lower Burma, where the rice crops were seriously affected by the world economic crisis; he passed himself off as the *Setkya Min* in person.

For their part, the first Burmese intellectuals with socialist leanings took a great interest in the problem of the "transcontinuity" between socialism and Buddhism; like the Chinese intellectuals thirty years earlier, they tried to legitimize socialism by the egalitarian and Utopian traditions of the East. Towards 1935 the nationalist group of *Thakin*<sup>24</sup> and in particular the poet Thakin Kudaw Hmain (born c. 1875) tried to incorporate these Buddhist traditions into a socialist vision of history; with the progress of cupidity and hatred, mankind has strayed further and further away from the primitive state of nature and prosperity; the most extreme form of this avidity and this state of hatred is capitalism, the abolition of which corresponds to the religious aspirations of Buddhism. Thakin Nu and Thakin Ba Swe have both written in these terms. When Nu and Ba Swe were in power in Burma in the fifties their moderate socialism was not placed under the sign of the socialist Welfare State, which they were never-

<sup>24</sup> This word is the Burmese equivalent of *sahib*, and affirms a will to overthrow the colonial relation of subordination to the English in favor of the Burmese.

theless very close to, but under that of the Buddhist *Piyidawtha*, the state of plenty.

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Primitive Islam, perhaps even more so than primitive Christianity, is impregnated with a certain egalitarian and community climate, an expression of the ideological fraternity that united the first disciples of the Prophet (certainly more than the communal traditions of the desert Bedouins, as was for a long time thought, for the movement implanted itself very quickly in the small people of the towns). Mahomet poured invective on the rich and on the accumulation of wealth. Certain authors have insisted on this aspect, to the extent of making primitive Islam an essentially social movement, the religious apparatus of which aims only at strengthening moral constraint against the rich, by the dogma of the Last Judgement.<sup>25</sup> H. Grimme, for example, whose life of Mahomet appeared in 1892, at the time of the great progress of social democracy in Germany, proposed that one consider Islam as "a socialist-type attempt to oppose excessive terrestrial imperfections; the rich are the class of sinners." The same ideas have been taken up by Bendeli Djawzi, an Arab marxist from Baku, in the early years of the Soviet regime. He, too, sees in the Prophet essentially a social reformer.

These ideas, in this oversimplified form, have been criticised by the specialists. Primitive Islam is a far more complex phenomenon; but one which in effect has an egalitarian aspect, symbolised for example by the figure of Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari, one of Mahomet's companions. He has been called "a socialist to the letter."<sup>26</sup> He adopts an ascetic attitude with regard to wealth and attacks the profiteers of the calif Mu'awiya's entourage. He is recorded as saying, for example, that everyone should spend that part of their fortune which is over and above their strict needs in the service of God or in charity. Among the "three men loved by God" he quotes the man who secretly gives alms to a beggar whom he has first

<sup>25</sup> Cf. M. Rodinson, "The Life of Muhammad and the Sociological Problem of the beginning of Islam," *Diogenes*, No. 20, Fall 1957.

<sup>26</sup> L. Gardet, *La Cité musulmane*, Paris, 1953.

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refused, and among the “three men hated by God,” the iniquitous rich man. After Mahomet’s death he was exiled.<sup>27</sup>

Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari, who died in 652, is reckoned as the father of Sufism, that Moslem mystical theology that so appealed to Louis Massignon. Scorn for wealth is one element of Sufism, one of the eminent representatives of which was the great juriscounsel, the Ottoman Badr-ed-Dîn (1358-1416). Badr-ed-Dîn renounced a brilliant career to preach the community of property and rally the vast numbers of poor people. He even went so far as to cooperate with the leaders of a peasant rising, Mustafa and Torlak, of which he became the “ideological leader” (*Encyclopédie de l’Islam*). He was haaged when the rising was put down and is still extremely popular in Turkey. Nazim Hikmet, one of the founders of communism in Turkey, saw in him the father of Turkish communism, and dedicated an epeope to him:

Men had opened this land  
without wall or limit as a table of brothers ...  
the ten thousand had given their eight thousand  
to sing all together in chorus  
to pull in the nets from the water all together  
to work the iron like lace  
working the land in chorus  
to eat all together the figs filled with honey  
to be together in everything and everywhere  
except on the cheek  
of the beloved.<sup>28</sup>

The whole Moslem Middle Ages are punctuated by peasant risings, the Jacquerie of Burklüdje Mustafa and Torlak Hu Kemal being just one among many examples. All these movements have a very marked egalitarian character. Their adversaries accused them

<sup>27</sup> Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari has been claimed by a large number of Marxist and communist intellectuals in the Arab world as a precursor and “guarantor.” In 1948, the Al-Azhar University of Cairo, a world centre of Moslem theology, gave a conference on the “communist” character of primitive Islam; young intellectuals in favor of the comparison between Islam and Marxism supported this thesis, and dwelt in particular on Abu Dharr’s case. But the reply was entirely negative.

<sup>28</sup> Nazim Hikmet, *Anthologie poétique*, Paris, 1959, p. 54. The last remark is a reply to the accusation which is often brought against the egalitarian peasant movements in the Middle Ages by Moslem historians, namely the practice of the community of women. On this point cf. later.

of sanctioning not only the community of land but also that of women. In fact they were above all opposed to polygamy, and the monopoly of women by the rich and powerful. These egalitarian movements were particularly numerous in Iran, for example with the Jacquerie of Harith Ibn Soraïdj at Khorassan in the 8th century. It was in the same region that the rising of Abu Muslim broke out; he raised the black flag of the Abassids against the Ommiads and introduced this new dynasty in 750; the Abassid movement, which the aristocracy also took part in, was largely backed by peasants. Iran was again shaken in the 9th century by the agrarian rising of Babak (a *khurrammi* sect) and Mazyar, which split up the land owned by the rich and dispersed their harems. From the Mazdakist revolt of the 5th century<sup>29</sup> up to Abu Muslim, Babak or Mazyar, the connection is clear and expresses the aspirations of the peasants of Iran towards a just society.

Even more famous is the great collectivist movement of the Qarmats, which Massignon calls "initiatory communism."<sup>30</sup> Their leader, Hamdam Qarmat, began to preach in Arabia towards the end of the 9th century; he preached an egalitarian insurrection which lasted until the beginning of the 10th century in the Yemen and the Khorassan, in Syria and Bahrein. In this latter they succeeded for some time in maintaining a small community state, in a marginal Bedouin zone. Property was made common by an extension of the Moslem principle of the Zakat, the tithe due to the collectivity. "Everyone, says a chronicler, worked assiduously, competitively, in order to deserve a distinguished rank by the services rendered to the community."

In other peasant movements in the Moslem world, the millenary

<sup>29</sup> In the reign of the Sassanid King Kawadh I (488-531), Iran had been shaken by the egalitarian preaching of Mazda, who called for the division of land, property and women, and who at one time even converted the king to his ideas. Cf. A. Christensen, *Le règne du roi Kawadh I<sup>er</sup> et le communisme mazdakiste* (Historisk-Filologiske Meddelelser, vol. 9, Copenhagen, 1924-1925).

<sup>30</sup> The *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, under *Qarmat*. The movement closely followed another social egalitarian movement, namely the rising of the *zendj* slaves of the great latifundia of the Lower Euphrates in 869-883. It appears that they formed an ephemeral egalitarian state in the region of Bassorah, about which there is only vague documentation. Arab Marxists have hailed them as precursors and "Spartakists of Islam." In fact it was a very localised and singular movement, because the cultivation of large estates by slave-labour was not current in medieval Islam, and was not carried on in this region after the *zendj* revolt (the *zendj* were negroes brought over from Africa).

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aspect is the most clearly defined. These movements refer themselves to the *Mahdi*, the Liberator or rather the Restorer, who will come to re-establish the spirit of primitive Islam, put to flight the corrupt complacent leaders. The *Mahdi*, in this way marked by a fundamental ambivalence between past and future, will set up a world of justice and equity and assure all Moslems unequalled prosperity. "The land will yield all its fruits and the heavens will shed their rains; on that day silver will be strewn on the ground and will not be counted."<sup>31</sup> This tradition of Mahdist millenarism continues throughout the history of Islam, from the Ismailians of Syria ("the order of assassins") to the modern movements in the Sudan and Cyrenaica. It has also marked dervish orders such as the *Bektashiyya*, in the form of an elogy of poverty ("silver will be strewn on the ground and will not be counted...").

The Qarmat movement had philosophico-religious as well as social aspects; Massignon links it with the neo-Platonic gnosis. But the political elements of the Platonic tradition seem to have occupied only a very reduced position in medieval Moslem thought. The only notable representative is Al-Farabi ("Avennason"), who originated from Turkestan and died at Damascus in c. 950. One of his principal writings is titled *On the Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Perfect State*; in the pure Platonic tradition he criticises a whole series of political systems: oligarchies, pleasure-domes, democracies etc... He contrasts cities that are degenerate, because they are ignorant, with the "perfect city." His originality resides in the fact that he extends Plato's vision of a localised city to a limitless human community, an *umma* ruled by a prince-philosopher.<sup>32</sup>

In the classical Moslem world egalitarian and community tendencies are manifested likewise in the form of groups and private or semi-private associations, some of which have survived up to the threshold of the modern world; village communities (*djemaa*), corporations (*sinf*), with their chivalrous oath of solidarity (*futuwwa*), and fraternal societies of mutual aid (*akhi*).

The *djemaa*, such as Jacques Berque has studied it in Morocco in the 20th century, is at once a rural collectivity and the "collec-

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, under *Mahdi*.

<sup>32</sup> On Al-Farabi, cf. the work by E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought of Medieval Islam*, Cambridge, 1962.

tive" that assures the direction (a sort of council of elders). Its origins are very old, and down the centuries it has preserved a very strong customary solidarity, even when cultivated land is the object of individual appropriation; which once more underlines the relative and not unlimited character of private property in Moslem society.

These community traditions are equally important in the towns, in the form of trade or *sinf* corporations. Some commentators, such as L. Massignon, have suggested that they could have developed in the wake of the Qarmat insurrection, particularly in Fatimid Egypt. Craftsmen lived a common life and divided the commissions they received etc. They were bound by an initiatory oath, the *futuwwa*, a sign of solidarity of the poor people, rejected by honorable society, who abide by their own code of honor.<sup>33</sup>

The *akhi* societies, witnessed in Asia Minor in the 13th-14th centuries, which attracted the attention of, for example, the great Arab traveller Ibn Battuta, also grouped the small urban tradespeople. The members of these associations met with their president every evening; they brought their daily earnings to provide for the expenses of the association and communal meals. But they also played a political role and took part in movements against unpopular dynasties.

Hitherto it has been a question of marginal tendencies and episodic outlines: the Qarmats and Badr-en-Dîn, Al-Ghiffari, Al-Farabi and Mahdism. But some authors have held that Utopian egalitarian and community traditions impregnated the whole of classical Moslem society more deeply. This is in particular the feeling of L. Massignon, H. Laoust and L. Gardet.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The idea of *futuwwa*, as Claude Cahen has shown in his suggestive article in the new edition of the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, has, furthermore, far more complex extensions. It is also a sermon of fraternity among young people "who come together to lead the most comfortable common life possible, in an atmosphere of solidarity, mutual devotion and comradeship (property being made common)." But the *futuwwa* may also consolidate the unity of "barefoot" (*ayyarun*) movements, which foment urban insurrections in times of relaxed authority. These people blame the rich, "an elementary form of class recuperation which goes unreproached"; this was the case in Baghdad, for example, in the 11th and 12th centuries. The idea of solidarity at the heart of a trade association came later.

<sup>34</sup> The path of Roger Garaudy, in his lectures delivered at Algiers at the beginning of 1965 (the text of which has been published in a series of numbers of *Révolution Africaine*, in July 1965) is visibly the same. He insists in the intrinsically progressive character of classical Moslem society, as a whole. He likens

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These authors insist on the egalitarian and community character of the idea of *umma*, that is the collectivity of Moslems. The Moslem "city," in the ideal meaning of the term, is a society founded on the consensus (*ijma*) of all the believers; the idea of *umma* appears as a unifying factor of terrestrial cities. This community character is also expressed in the Moslem conception of ownership—theoretically speaking of course. The *Sunna*, the official commentary of the Koran, says that, according to God, "only the man who works the land can own it, and only the man who cultivates it personally." Which is to say that ownership is not an unlimited right but that it is conditioned by improvement. In principle "the Moslem does not have free use of his property; he has to bear the community in mind" (L. Gardet); it is a question of an economic ethic which is "communal and egalitarian" (H. Laoust). This community character is expressed in the institution of the *zakat*; of legal alms, given by everyone with the aim of solidarity, the function of which, theoretically at least, is to eradicate the inequality of wealth; the egalitarian preaching of Hamdan Qarmat dwelt on the principle of the *zakat*, to push it to the point where property is totally common.

This limited and social character of ownership is also expressed in the institution of the *waqf*, property in mortmain destined to foundations with a collective interest: hospitals, water adductions, drains, cemeterial spas, schools and various other charitable works. The institution of the *waqf* is the expression of a "spirit of mutual aid and personal disappropriation, under the auspices of God." (L. Gardet).

Another Islamic idea, *riba*, has also been called upon to support this thesis of the communal character of Moslem morals, if not of present Moslem society. According to Mahomet, the *riba*, that is the increase of wealth, is a grave sin. But is one to understand by this any mercantile or financial activity, as has been thought by some? In reality the meaning of this idea is far more restricted; it is a question of (the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*) "any illegitimate pecuniary advantage, without services rendered in exchange," and of any excessive gain, especially by usury.

In the same way the *hadith* (words attributed to Mahomet, but

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it to the Utopian socialism in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century, adding the merit of anteriority.

draughted a long time after his death) have often been quoted, such as “the air, water and the fields belong to everyone;” “the man who gives life to the soil owns it;” “men are as equal as the teeth of the weaver’s comb...”

What is it in reality? Certainly classical Moslem society is indeed egalitarian by law. But is it a “just” society? Its prescriptions are in fact very limited: the limitation of the interest loan, the equality of all men before the law, mutual aid from the wealthy for the benefit of the poor. Inequality of wealth and lucrative activities are considered normal. As for the “economic practice of the medieval Moslem world,” as Maxime Rodinson has illustrated,<sup>35</sup> this is itself very much this side of the vague ideal of social justice. Usury flourishes. The prosperity of the Moslem world is based on maritime trading and caravans, on the quest for gain.

Perhaps one should discuss further the existence of egalitarian, Utopian and community tendencies *within* Islamic society, rather than dwell on the characteristic tendencies of this society as a whole.

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Are egalitarian and Utopian traditions in the East then founded on the combined characters of oriental societies, as some Sino-logues and Islamists have thought? Or are they founded on egalitarian protest movements *against* the established order, and on confused aspirations towards more just societies? The discussion has been hardest in the cases of Islam and China, doubtless because the problem in both these cases is the more clearly defined. As far as we can see, with things in their present state, one should rather stop at the second conclusion; the eventual and distant antecedents of modern socialism in the East must be looked for on “the other side” of oriental history: those intellectual dreams and peasant revolts developed against the established order, and not in its shadow. But one should perhaps emphasize the common traits of all these movements, all these currents of ideas, all these unruly profiles, and all these myths, a summary inventory of which we have given here. Firstly their episodic and sporadic character. As we have said they are not an inherent part of the Islamic or Con-

<sup>35</sup> Cf. M. Rodinson, *Islam et capitalisme*, Paris, 1966.



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fucian world-vision and social structure. Quite on the contrary, in certain regions, on certain occasions, they happened as if the deep protesting aspirations of the popular masses and the intellectuals were expressed in broad daylight through the pores of the social order and official ideology.

These protesting aspirations were certainly expressed in religious, thus specific, terms, bound up with the particular religious heritage of each society under consideration; in China they rested on archaic canonical ideas such as *ta-t'ung* or *t'ai-p'ing*, in Iran on the memories of Manichean preaching, in Islam on the principles of the fraternal community as founded by Mahomet. Sometimes it is the return of the *Mahdi* that is awaited, sometimes that of the *Mi-lo-fu* and the *Maitreya*. But this religious differentiation appears secondary when compared with the common characteristics of all these movements of Utopian dreams and egalitarian protest; essentially, that is, their peasant character. It is in the village above all that egalitarian dreams and community customs have been preserved; they have nourished peasant revolts in medieval Iran and in imperial China, and right up to the Burmese peasants of today. The Utopia of prosperity, equality and plenty in the East are closely associated with rural images, with a way of life that has remained very close to a natural economy of subsistence thanks to the fields. This rural character is also expressed in the nostalgia for a state of harmony between man and nature ("even wild animals," says the Taoist Chuang-tzu). "The thin and tasty soil offered itself up as food," runs a Burmese text. That is, that nature is not an opposed and hostile entity but a cosmic frame within which this is achieved and expands harmoniously.

In fact, by a paradox which is not apparent, these muddled Utopian dreams, this nostalgia for a state of primitive happiness for mankind and for a Golden Age are very often conjugated with social movements against the established order, with Jacqueries and egalitarian revolts. The ideological motor of revolt lies here, not in the vision of a new society, more "advanced" historically than the old, as in the case in our modern world, but in the memory of very bygone times. This, moreover, is not peculiar to the egalitarian and Utopian traditions of the East. Think of the social roots of legitimist movements in modern Europe; the Carlists of Navarre, the Scottish Jacobites, the "false Demetrius" partisans in 17th

century Russia, all stress the peasantry of the poorest and least evolved regions.

And these oriental Utopia, and the popular movements they have nourished, are not strictly speaking of the past. They are hallmarked rather by the ambiguity which exists between past and future. This is the case of Moslem Mahdism, of the Buddhistic Golden Age, of the *ta-t'ung* of China.<sup>36</sup> These Utopia are beyond time, they express a conception of the world which is not in the dimension of time, and to which the idea of progress is almost always foreign. One can also certainly link this character to the old peasant heritage, to the immutable cycle of the seasons and the calendar of agricultural work, the immutable cycle which imposes the identity of past and future.

This peasant character seems fundamental, but does not exclude a certain diffusion of these egalitarian and Utopian traditions among the small folk in the towns and particularly among craftsmen. This fact has been pointed out by Islam specialists (*sinf*, *akhi* societies) and there are also numerous examples in China; the bonds between artisan guilds and Taoist currents are well-known; the inventors of artisan techniques have an important place in the Taoist pantheon.

These egalitarian and Utopian traditions in the East could not allow a real establishment of modern socialism in all these countries. For modern socialism is profoundly innovating; it implies a fundamental technico-sociological change, even more than an upheaval of values and political and ideological systems; those archaic protest movements and those Utopian dreams were not capable of preparing for such a change. But even if in the 20th century they have been exploited in utterly opposed political directions, they played an appreciable rôle, when socialist ideas were implanted, as "guarantors" of national caution in countries which are extremely sensitive to the effects of western domination and the

<sup>36</sup> As L.G. Lawrence has noted in his edition of the Utopia of K'ang Yu-wei, a Chinese reformer of the end of the 19th century who proposed a return to the political principles of primitive Confucianism (*The One-world Philosophy of Kan Yu-wei*, London, 1958), there are many translations of the passage in the Book of Rites on the *Ta-t'ung*; they differ particularly in that, because Chinese grammar does not always indicate the tense, the verbs of the text are sometimes made past, and sometimes future ...

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perils of Westernization. On this ground they are bound to the modern socialism of Eastern countries by a real historical bond. They have contributed to the personal profile and dynamism of modern Eastern socialism, at the same time as shading the overschematic vision of “oriental despotism” which many people continue to entertain.