

Elements of China in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*¹

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Over 30 items in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* were about China, through which we could roughly know Benjamin's understandings and interpretations towards China. In his explanation of the illustration *Le triomphe du kaleidoscope, ou Le Tombeau du Jeu chinois, (the triumph of Kaleidoscope or the Demise of Chinese Games)*, Walter Benjamin captures characteristics of Cubist art in European Modernism rather than the conflict between Chinese and Western culture. These items about China have mentioned numerous Chinese utensils and presented a sense of curiosity and glory of things "from China". Moreover, Walter Benjamin paid special attention to traditional Chinese shadow play and urban garbage disposition in China and quotations of Karl Marx's works as well.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, elements of China

Walter Benjamin's extracted notes constitute the main body of *The Arcades Project* as preparation for his study on arcades. Thanks to its "incompletion", in the absence of a complete and logical system, *The Arcades Project* has been renowned as a surrealist collage of dialectical images. Such a literary montage of more than 800 pages includes over 30 items concerning China, most of which are extracted from various books and only a few reflected by Walter Benjamin himself. These items unroll before us a marvelous panorama that could be named "China among galaxy of arcades".

One: Kaleidoscope versus Tangram

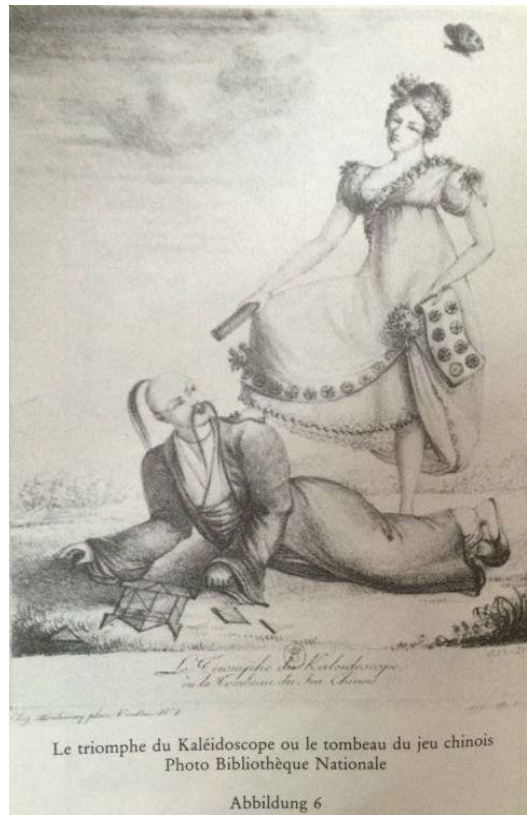
Let us start from an illustration, *Le triomphe du kaleidoscope, ou Le Tombeau du Jeu chinois (the Triumph of the Kaleidoscope, or the Demise of the Chinese Game)*. A reclining Chinese man in ancient costume scatters tangrams on the ground before him. On his shoulder, an arrogant well-dressed European woman plants her foot. In her right hand she carries a kaleidoscope; left hand, a paper printed fascinating kaleidoscope patterns. Her head leans, exuding scorn and disdain.

This anonymous lithograph, collected by Robert Delaunay and Aaron, is one of the treasures in National Library of France. Walter Benjamin specially noted that it came out in 1918. And it was in 1916 when Sir David Brewster, a Scottish physicist invented kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope is an optical instrument with three reflecting surfaces enclosed in a tube, tilted to each other in a certain angle so that the colored scrapes on one end are seen as a regular symmetrical pattern when viewed from the other end due to repeated reflection. Rotation of the cell causes motion of the materials, presenting an ever-changing viewed pattern. Such an

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invention amazed Europe and soon later the whole world with its gorgeous views based on optical principles. The kaleidoscope gained not only popularity as an intellectual toy among the young and the old, but its significant contribution to scientific development.



But here emerges the question, what for depicting such a dramatic scenario of “kaleidoscope versus tangram”? Why Walter Benjamin compiled it into *The Arcades Project*?

Tangram is a traditional Chinese puzzle consisting of seven flat shapes, which are put together to form over 1,600 shapes. The objective of the puzzle is using all seven pieces to form a specific shape, maybe a figure, an animal, an object or a letter. It is reputed to have been dated from 1st century BC and come into the shape today since Ming Dynasty. It has been carried over to other countries since the 18th century. The lithograph in 1918 expressed the popularity of tangram in Europe but also suggested Europeans’ admired hatred towards Chinese “puzzle techniques”. In this way, once kaleidoscope the counterpart was invented, the Europeans became so excited that they wished to kick away tangrams and then stamp on them. Apparently, “kaleidoscope versus tangram” is a distinct incident which marked cultural exchange between China and the Western world.

Why Walter Benjamin was so interested in such a lithograph? Did he intend to illustrate the conflict between Western technology and Chinese traditional culture like our general understanding? The illustration is in [F7a, 5] (i.e. “Volume F, 7a, the 5th item”).^[1] The caption of this illustration only introduces the title, content and collection, with no other details. But we could find the following explanation in [F6, 2]: “The ‘Chinese puzzle’, which comes to fashion during the Empire, reveals the century’s awakening sense for construction. The problems that appear, in the puzzles of the period, as hatched portions of a landscape, a building, or a

^[1] Find more explanations of these signs in *the Arcade Project* on Douban: <http://book.douban.com/annotation/14553853/>

figure are a first presentiment of the cubist principle in the plastic arts. (To verify: whether, in an allegorical representation in the *Cabinet des Estampes*, the brainteaser undoes the kaleidoscope or vice versa.)”^[2]

These notes convey the following meanings:

(1) Chinese traditional intellectual toys like tangram were quite popular among Europe. The “Empire” included three periods in French history: First Empire (1804-1814), Second Empire (1852-1870) and Third Republic (1870-1940), among which First and Second Empire are the most important period, that is, the upheaval era of bourgeois revolution, industrial revolution and socialist movement in Europe.

(2) Walter Benjamin paid more attention to seize some certain subtle tidings of 19-century Modernist art's transformation through tangram's popularity rather than simply illustrate the theme of “cultural exchange and conflict between China and the Western world”. In the article “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Expose of 1935>”^[3] Walter Benjamin wrote that “Just as architecture, with the first appearance of iron construction, begins to outgrow art, so does painting, in its turn, with the first appearance of the panoramas. The high point in the diffusion of panoramas coincides with the introduction of arcades.”^[3] As the first artificial material for construction (wood and stones before), iron's application on construction is regarded as one of the prerequisites for the emergence of arcades. However, architects kept using traditional concepts and designs on construction before they realized iron's revolutionary significance when it first came out as a constructional material. Such a mottled period weaved by new and old methods presents us unique “dialectical images” (or “wish images”): “Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are the images in the collective consciousness in which the new is permeated with the old. The images are wish images; in them the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the social organization of production. At the same time, what emerges in these wish images is the resolute effort to distance oneself from all that is antiquated --- which includes, however, the recent past. These tendencies deflected the imagination (which is given impetus by the new) back upon the primal past. In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history “Urgeschichte”—that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective—engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions.”

^[4] Iron provided imagination for shaping architectural spatial concepts, which gradually came into shapes thanks to geometry, a tool for scientific research; inspired by primitive art, modern art could develop its cubic principles of plastic arts. Therefore, the emergence of cubism followed the similar dialectical logic with iron construction. Inspired by primitive art, Cubism simplifies the details of Modernism and reduces into mastery of art tinged with somehow primitive art—to sketch the figure with geometric patterns. Meanwhile, it breaks away traditional techniques of observing and presenting from a single viewpoint but strives to apply multiple viewpoints to express three-dimensional space or the fourth dimension (the continuity of time) in a piece of two-dimensional work. All these factors constitute a grotesque picture of Cubist painting. In this way, we could find clues to such simultaneity leading to both past and future, nostalgic but utopian in a trivial incident that

^[2] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 164.

^[3] Benjamin, Walter, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Expose of 1935>” translated by Liu Beicheng, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2006. p. 8.

^[4] Benjamin, Walter, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Expose of 1935>” translated by Liu Beicheng, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2006. p. 6.

Chinese puzzle's popularity in Europe.

(3) It has still kept unknown whether “*Cabinet des Estampes*” in the brackets of [F6, 2] is the original place of “Kaleidoscope versus Tangram” in [F7a, 5]. Nevertheless, Walter Benjamin's expression seems to show his dialectical hesitation of deciding the relation between “kaleidoscope” and “tangram”. In fact, the sentence in bracket conveys a vague meaning. There is no predicate verb in German version (the original sentence is “Zu verifizieren: ob auf einer allegorischen Darstellung im *Cabinet des Estampes* der Kopfzerbrecher das Kaleidoskop oder dieses jenen ablöst.”^[5]) The verb “undo” in English version is added by the translator, which distorts the sentence into the confrontation between Chinese and Western culture: kaleidoscope “undoes” tangram (Chinese puzzle) or vice versa. But as we see in German version, there is no direct confrontation. Therefore, a better interpretation of this sentence could be “brainteasers exemplify kaleidoscope, or vice versa.”

Two: The Greatest Surprise...Came from China

The “Chinese puzzle” tangram epitomizes Walter Benjamin's discussions concerning “China” among galaxy of arcades. Over 30 items related to China have recorded daily utensils made of china, silk and fabric, highlighted Chinese traditional customs and techniques such as architecture, lantern, shadow play, legends and art, and discussed Chinese lifestyle and traditional philosophy of Confucius, Laozi and Zhuangzi. As for the resource, they may stem from European's description of Chinese utensils and culture out of curiosity, from their imagination of China in literature, from their observation of Chinese philosophy in academic studies, or from exhibition of Chinese utensils, art and techniques in world's fair or museum. From the “starry” scattered information, we could roughly describe how Walter Benjamin got to know about China and what impressions and questions he fostered, among which the most critical issue is the purpose of Walter Benjamin's focus on China.

Obviously, unlike Karl August Wittfogel, another important figure in Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin never devoted himself to Sinology. Instead, he showed more interest to France, to Paris, to Charles Pierre Baudelaire, to the arcades, to the monument or ruins of capitalism in developed countries. Therefore, the relation between Walter Benjamin and China lies more in Benjamin's introduction of the issue of China into that of Europe he pondered upon. That is exactly the purpose of Francois Jullien to “think of an outside world (China)” and develop “extreme-west talks”.

In the beginning of the section “Grandville, or the World Exhibitions” in his article “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Expose of 1935>“, Walter Benjamin quoted a poem written by Langle and Vanderburch: “Yes, when all the world from Paris to China / Pays heed to your doctrine, O divine Saint-Simon / The glorious Golden Age will be born...”^[6] And in [a10, 4], Benjamin quoted another poem by Alfred de Mussel: “With two arms of iron a magnificent track / Will begird my republic: Peking to Paris / A hundred different peoples, mixing their tongues, / Will make one colossal car a Babel.”^[7] Here the words “China” and “Peking” constitute vague designations of “the Eastern world” or “the Non-Western world” rather than a

^[5] Walter Benjamin *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, Suhrkamp, p. 227.

^[6] Benjamin, Walter, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Expose of 1935>“ translated by Liu Beicheng, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2006. p. 12.

^[7] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. pp. 715-716.

certain place. Anyway, here we could clearly see a view of modernity with its direction: from China, or to China?

In [G8, 1], Walter Benjamin extracted Julius Lessing's *Das halbe Jahrhundert der Weltausstellungen (Half a Century of World Exhibitions)* depicting the feast of 1862 International Exhibition in London: "Nevertheless, this exhibition had some noteworthy results ... The greatest surprise ... came from China. Up to this time, Europe had seen nothing of Chinese art except ... the ordinary porcelains sold on the market. But now the Anglo-Chinese war had taken place..., and the Summer Palace had been burned to the ground, supposedly as punishment."^[8] The era of growing bourgeois and industrial revolution has seen rapid changes in social life. In such a background, the world's fair served as not only a showcase for high technology and new production but a center for multi-cultural integration. Though Chinese culture was brought to Europe in early days by Marco Polo and European noblemen long adored luxuries like china, silk and tea, it is the world's fair that exhibited China's exquisite techniques and amazed the world. The first time China participated world's fair was 1851, when Guangdong merchant Xu Rongcun brought 12 bundles of "Rong's lake silk" and won both gold and silver awards in London. In 1876, China as a nation participated Philadelphia Expo for the first time. Compared with these two experiences, China contributes no special exhibition in 1862 world's fair but mainly vases, ivory carving, silkworm cocoon, raw silk and sesame seeds, for which China won the medal awarded by the jury and turned out as "the greatest surprise in this exhibition" according to Julius Lessing.

Therefore, those "from China" include exquisiteness, luxury and honor provided by "Chinese utensils". In [A7a, 2], Walter Benjamin extracted two stanzas from "Jehuda ben Halevy" by famous German poet and essayist Heinrich Heine: "And Jehuda ben Halevy, / In her view, would have been honored / Quite enough by being kept in / Any pretty box of cardboard // With some very swanky Chinese / Arabesques to decorate it, / Like a bonbon box from Marquis / In the Passage Panorama."^[9] There are two core images lying in the stanzas above: one is a pretty box of cardboard with swanky Chinese arabesques, the other is a bonbon box from the Passage Panorama. The simile of the latter to describe the former emphasizes the nobility and grace of the box and its decoration. Moreover, there are Jules Lecomte's minute descriptions about the apartment of Alphonse Karr in *Les Lettres de Van Engelmom*: "His walls are decorated with various old things ...; Chinese vases, death-heads, fencer's foils, and tobacco pipes ornament every corner."^[10] In other residences, there are countless crafts and utensils from China, such as "Chinese tower" in [Q3, 4], "Chinese lantern" in [T1a, 9], "Chinese porcelain" in [W13, 8], "Chinese legend" in [F⁰, 1], "Chinese Bagazinkoff" (a kind of fabric) in [B6a, 5] and so forth.

Three: Chinese Shadow in France

In [Z1, 4], Walter Benjamin extracted from *Letters Written on One Journey to Paris* by J. F. Benzenberg, in which the author minutely described about Chinese shadow play in royal palace. The author could understand nothing about the "plot" but recognize the gender and figure of characters in the play, nothing about the meaning of their motion but imagine a dance of one or four, in which the author could feel joy and agony.

^[8] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 187.

^[9] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 51.

^[10] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 223.

The letter was written in 1805, before photography was invented (on August 19th, 1839 when Louis Daguerre's photography was officially announced by François Arago the director of the Observatory of Paris at a joint conference organized by the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Fine Arts), before film emerged (on December 28th, 1895 when *The Arrival of the Mail Train* was first projected by Lumière brothers on public debut at the Grand Café in Paris), not to mention the emergence of “moving panorama” (invented by John Banvard) after 1848. Chinese shadow play had been brought to Persia, Arab and Turkey in the 13th century by Mongolia battalion since Song and Yuan Dynasty. The mid-eighteen century witnessed the beginning of Chinese shadow play's journey to Europe. According to research, it was first brought to France by French missionaries in 1767 and played in Paris, Marseille and other cities, causing quite a stir. The *Ombres chinoises* (French for “Chinese Shadows”) was modified with local characteristics into the *Ombres françaises*. Under such a circumstance, the author's description is filled with defamiliarization “for the first time” proposed by Viktor Shklovsky.

Based on the principle of light and shade, Chinese shadow integrated with skills of Chinese opera constitutes the preliminary phase of “film” in a manual technique. Therefore, the emergence of Chinese shadow in some way promoted and predicted that of photography, moving panorama and film, as a significant complement to these art forms created by mechanical reproduction. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin proposed an important idea: “An arbitrary outcome of traditional art forms' striving at their particular stage for a new art form in a later stage.” Not only did he exemplify how Dadaists presented behaviors in a two-dimensional space before the invention of film, but combined the mechanism of “mass audience” formed by Kaiser Panorama with the watching methods of a film. Furthermore, Walter Benjamin argued: “One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later. The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form.”^[11] No doubt far-sighted is Walter Benjamin's view throughout art history, with which we could explain why he excerpted minutely about Chinese shadow in *The Arcades Project*.

Such a cultural shock triggered by Chinese fine art also caused an impact on European aesthetic concepts. The following sentences in [G15a, 2] were extracted from “Exposition Universelle, 1855” by Charles Baudelaire: “What would a modern Winckelmann say...were he confronted by a product from China-something strange, bizarre, contorted in form, intense in color, and sometimes so delicate as to be almost evanescent? It is, nevertheless, an example of universal beauty. But in order to understand it, the critic, the spectator, must effect within himself a mysterious transformation; and by means of a phenomenon of the will acting on the imagination, he must learn by himself to participate in the milieu which has given birth to this strange flowering.”^[12]

Here Charles Baudelaire posed a sharp issue: we could not explain Chinese fine art with Western aesthetic principles but admit its aesthetic value. Based on this issue, Baudelaire pointed out that we should establish an aesthetic standard between the universality and diversity of beauty instead of generalizing our own aesthetic concepts. We could never confine ourselves within our own system because “It is a cruel punishment and

^[11] Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, translated by Wang Caiyong, China City Press, 2002. pp. 57-58.

^[12] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 200.

fatigue for us to vow to eradicate a fixed system as somehow a sin which may lead to the hell, but uninterruptedly create another system.”^[13]

Four: Fertilizer-collecting Peasants in China and City Governance

Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* is regarded as one of the classical works on urban culture. Benjamin focused not only on arcades, world's fair, panoramas, living rooms, streets and barricades, but on urban groups like Bohemian or those people who stroll or pick up trashes around the city.

The following sentences in [G15, 6] were excerpted from “Salon de 1846” by Charles Baudelaire: “Every day I see passing beneath my window a certain number of Kalmucks, Osages, Indians, Chinamen, and ancient Greeks, all more or less Parisianized.”^[14] Here Charles Baudelaire aimed to discuss the dialectical relation between specialization and generalization of models. Walter Benjamin's quotation may not aim for aesthetic research, but for urban research. He pondered upon individual's universality and personality in a “city of stranger”. First of all, as for a city especially a metropolitan like Paris, one salient characteristic is the convergence of strangers from different countries, ethnic or racial groups. Such convergence is the prerequisite of urban multi-culture. But meanwhile, they gradually get involved into the unique lifestyle and customs of the city after some residence. Those “Parisianized” people have shown the personality of the city (universality of these individuals). They have exemplified Charles Baudelaire's idea “Duality is both contradiction and outcome of unity”.^[15] Such comprehensive reflections on the variety of urban culture were also presented in cityscape. In [G16a, 1] Walter Benjamin extracted from *Paris et Londres compar'es (The Comparison between Paris and London)* by Amedee de Tissot: “It would be advisable to vary the forms of the houses and, as for the districts, to employ different architectural orders, even those in no way classical—such as the Gothic, Turkish, Chinese, Egyptian, Burmese, and so forth.”^[16] However, these exemplary reflections have shown that Walter Benjamin never meant to regard “China” as a reference location of otherness, but treated China as any position in the world beyond Europe or France. Hence “one of the Non-European places” could be the best designation for China according to Walter Benjamin.

However, exception does exist. In [C4a, 1], Walter Benjamin excerpted from *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, Book Second: The Intestine of Leviathan, Chapter I: The land impoverished by the sea. Here Hugo discussed about sewer in Paris (the intestine of Paris according to Hugo)^[17]. As far as Victor Hugo concerned, in Paris every year 25 million francs would be thrown into the oceans: on the one hand, urban manure was drained to the sea through sewers; on the other hand, excrement of swallows and penguins was collected in Antarctica at any price. On the contrary, Chinese people had collected fertilizer economically and ecologically: “In China, not a single peasant returns home, after selling his vegetables in the city, without bearing the heavy

^[13] Baudelaire, Charles, “Exposition Universelle, 1855”, *Aesthetic Essays of Baudelaire*, translated by Guo Hong'an, People's Literature Publishing House, 1987. p. 361.

^[14] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 199.

^[15] Baudelaire, Charles, “Exposition Universelle, 1855”, *Aesthetic Essays of Baudelaire*, translated by Guo Hong'an, People's Literature Publishing House, 1987. p. 256.

^[16] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. p. 201.

^[17] “The sewer” is a classical image in the 19th century European literature. Here it refers to a place dark and wet, dirty and vice, as well as a hidden place for tramps and criminals. Meanwhile, it constitutes the critic and the opponent of the hypocritical human world, and thus Hugo titled the sewer the “urban conscience”. (According to another essay of the author, “Metro Space: a Reshaping of Aesthetic Depth”, *City and China*, No.44)

load of an enormous bucket filled with precious fertilizer”^[18] This item is creative for its discussion on the issue of city governance rather than of urban humanitarian criticism from the perspective of emotion and value like before; besides, both Victor Hugo and Walter Benjamin hold quite positive attitudes towards Chinese peasants' fertilizer-collecting behavior for its various advantages like cleaning and money-saving. The depiction of “Chinese fertilizer-collecting peasants in cities” has provided significant meaning of adapting Chinese traditional wisdom to Western modernist dilemma.

Five: the China and the Tables Began to Dance

China means much more than an enormous nation of otherness to Europe, in a complicated and multifarious way. In [d17a, 5], Walter Benjamin quoted one sentence from *Das Kapital Vol. 1* by Karl Marx: “One remembers that the china and the tables began to dance, while the rest of the world seemed to be standing still—in order to encourage the others.”^[19] The sentence came from the notes of section 4 “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof” in chapter 1. According to Karl Marx, as soon as things were attached with the quality of commodity, it “abounds in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties”. For example, “as soon as the table steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent”. Such a change, which could be compared with “tamer” magic by dancing around table in Europe or Taiping Rebellion in China, seems wonderful but turns out grotesque.

We could never grasp Walter Benjamin's exact purpose from this quotation without any further explanation. According to Karl Marx's works, we could take a glimpse at the complication of Taiping Rebellion which is renowned as “Chinese revolution”: on the one hand, it was triggered by European interference, British artillery and opium; on the other hand, it exerted considerable impact on Europe: “The next European revolution for a clean republic government may to a great extent stem from what is happening in Celestial Empire (the direct opposite of Europe).”^[20] Taiping Rebellion launched a fatal strike on Late Qing Dynasty but “brought more terror to the mass than to the old governor”.^[21] In this essay, Karl Marx referred mostly to correspondence of Xia Fuli, the British consul in Ningbo, in which he described various vices of Taiping Army like plundering and looting to emphasize the negative meaning of Taiping Rebellion as a “Chinese revolution”. Hence, Karl Marx believes that “Taiping Army is in persona of the devil out of Chinese's illusion which would only exist in China as a product of stagnant society.”^[22]

There is insufficient evidence to prove that Walter Benjamin endorses Karl Marx's opinion towards “Asiatic mode of production” and “Chinese revolution” (especially Taiping Rebellion) in China, but herein we could draw the following conclusions:

First, through analyzing works on Chinese issues by Karl Marx, Charles Pierre Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, Heinrich Heine, Andre Gide, Alfred de Mussel and besides, Franz Kafka, Eugen Brecht, Franz Rosenzweig, J.P.Dubosc and Ilya Mechnikov and other scholars, Walter Benjamin has already constructed his own system of understandings and imagination towards China and its culture.

^[18] Hugo, Victor, *Les Misérables (2)*, translated by Li Dan and Fang Yu, People's Literature Publishing House, 1993. P. 190.

^[19] Benjamin, Walter, *The arcades project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 2000. P. 776.

^[20] Karl Marx, “Chinese and European Revolutions”, *a Complete Collection of Marx and Engels Vol. 2*, People's Publishing House, 1963. P. 607.

^[21] Karl Marx, “On China”, *a Complete Collection of Marx and Engels Vol. 15*, People's Publishing House, 1963. P. 545.

^[22] Karl Marx, “On China”, *a Complete Collection of Marx and Engels Vol. 15*, People's Publishing House, 1963. P. 548.

Second, the reason for Walter Benjamin to study about China is not out of his interest but the purpose to “think about Europe via China”. In this way, we do not need to criticize Walter Benjamin’s superficial overview or misunderstandings towards China (for example, his judgements of the art history and calligraphy in China are somehow incorrect in “Chinese Painting Exhibition at French National Library”). What deserves focus is Walter Benjamin’s recognition of China’s value while pondering on those issues. Only in this way we could make positive comments on Walter Benjamin’s selective discovery and creative misunderstandings.

Third, Chinese culture has been spreading in Europe for centuries. From ideology to customs and utensils, Chinese culture has been an indispensable element permeating in European culture, like Chinese brush painting which is strongly or slightly freehanded. “China” is also indispensable to Walter Benjamin: his close friend Bertolt Brecht once discovered the practice of “the fourth wall” in Chinese opera; moreover, his admired writer Franz Kafka preferred Chinese culture and even claimed himself “a Chinese at the depth of heart”.

Though Walter Benjamin never came to China, he wrote quite a lot about China. Besides these elements of China in *The Arcades Project*, there are some short essays (like “Chinese Painting Exhibition at French National Library” and “Chinese Antique” in *One Way Street*) on Chinese fine art. As for his study on Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin attaches special importance to his article “When the Great Wall was built”, discusses about the protagonist “K” with the theory of Chinese character and his “gestus” aesthetics with an inspiration of Chinese opera. The author will introduce more about Walter Benjamin’s study on Kafka and dialectic theories concerning Chinese and Western literature and aesthetics in his further theses.

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