

# Hiromatsu on Marx's Theory of the Commodity

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Hiromatsu Wataru (廣松 渉, 1933–1994) is well-known for his novel interpretation of Karl Marx's thought as well as his own philosophical project closely linked to his reading of Marx. Characterizing the “modern world-view” as ontologically “substantialist” and epistemologically bound by the “subject/object schema,” Hiromatsu strives to replace it with a new philosophical orientation that is marked by “the primacy of relation” and what he calls the intersubjective “fourfold structure” (四肢構造) (HWC 15: xii–xiii, xvii). In so doing, he attaches particular importance to Marx's thought, which, in his view, already exceeds the confines of modern philosophy. Specifically, in works such as *The Philosophy of Capital*, he explored Marx's ideas in a manner systematically connected with his own theory of the fourfold structure. In the present

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paper, I focus on this part of Hiromatsu's engagement with Marx's thought, particularly with his theory of the commodity as presented in *Capital*. In the first section, I outline Hiromatsu's interpretation of Marx's analysis of the commodity. In the second, with reference to other authors' alternative readings of Marx, I critically examine Hiromatsu's interpretive approach.

### HIROMATSU'S ANALYSIS OF MARX'S THEORY OF THE COMMODITY

From the early years of his academic career, Marxist philosopher Hiromatsu Wataru developed a new interpretive approach to Marx's work. In his reading, the young Marx went over from the theory of alienation, still confined within the modern subject/object schema, to the theory of reification, which surpasses the modern philosophical framework (see HWC 10: 213ff.). That is to say, while his early critique of alienation revolves around the notion of human subjectivity's turning into an external and alien object, his mature critique of reification focuses on the circumstance that "the social relation between people... appears as a 'relation between things,' a 'property of a thing,' or a 'self-contained thing'" (13: 101–2).<sup>1</sup> This latter philosophical orientation already took shape in his joint work with Engels, *The German Ideology* (*Die deutsche Ideologie*), among other writings from the mid-1840s, but was fully developed in his later works, especially in his masterpiece *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (*Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*). In what follows, drawing mainly on Hiromatsu's 1974 book *The Philosophy of Capital* (『資本論の哲学』)<sup>2</sup> and with occasional reference to other related texts,<sup>3</sup> I will outline the

1. Hiromatsu's interpretation of the development of Marx's thought is sustained not least by his detailed textual criticism of *The German Ideology*, which helped him bring out a new edition of the book, with a new Japanese translation, published by Kawade Shobō Shinsha in 1974.

2. HWC 12: 3–357.

3. Of particular relevance are Hiromatsu's texts that form part of the 1986 book *Read-*

way he interprets Marx's *Capital*, particularly the theory of the commodity<sup>4</sup> as presented in the early part of its first volume.<sup>5</sup>

As is well known, in the opening two sections of Chapter 1 of *Capital*, Volume 1, Marx argues that the commodity has the two factors of “use-value” and “value,” and, correspondingly, that commodity-producing labor also takes on a “dual character,” comprising “concrete useful labor” and “abstract human labor” (MEGA, II-6: 69ff./125ff.).<sup>6</sup> Specifically, it is abstract human labor that constitutes the “substance” of commodity values, and thus values—as “congelations” or objectifications of abstract human labor (II-6: 72/128)—are quantitatively measured by socially necessary labor-time. This account of the substance of value has indeed been taken by many, especially by orthodox Marxists, as a definitive formulation of Marx's position. In Hiromatsu's view, however, the above apparently substantialist account of value does *not* represent Marx's final position, but rather is a “provisional” formulation—made from a point of view internal to individual commodities—which is to be reconceived dialectically in his subsequent arguments (HWC 12: 383).<sup>7</sup> Marx develops a first such argument of pivotal importance in the third section of Chapter 1, entitled “The Value-Form, or Exchange Value,” which thematizes the social relationship

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ing *Capital from the Viewpoint of the Theory of Reification* (『資本論を物象化論を視軸にして読む』), a volume edited by Hiromatsu himself and co-authored with five other scholars. Those parts written by Hiromatsu are included in HWC 12: 361–512.

4. In this paper, I follow Hiromatsu's terminology in using the phrase “(Marx's) theory of the commodity”: It refers to the arguments presented in Chapters 1 and 2 of Part 1, “Commodities and Money,” of the revised editions of *Capital*, Volume 1 (see HWC 12: 247; cf. 215ff.).

5. There are considerable differences between the first and the revised editions of *Capital*, Volume 1, in the presentation of the theory of the commodity, above all in the discussion of the value-form (see HWC 12: 114ff.). In this paper, I basically draw on the revised editions, and, only where necessary, refer to the first edition. Throughout this essay, references to the pages in the English translation are preceded by a slash.

6. Here and throughout this paper, for the sake of consistency, I have adopted American spelling when quoting from the existing translation of *Capital*.

7. See also HWC 12: 73, 153, 189, 251. Hiromatsu already made this point in his 1969 book *The Horizon of Marxism* (『マルクス主義の地平』) (see 10: 206–7).

of commodities and thereby accounts for “the origin of the money form.”

Marx begins this section by stating that commodities’ “objective character as values” (*Werthgegenständlichkeit*) is “purely social” and “can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity” (MEGA II-6: 80/138-9; see HWC 12: 170). He then sets out to explore this social relation of commodities in terms of a series of different forms of value. The first form of value, which he calls “the simple or isolated form of value,” is constituted by the value relation between two different commodities. As Marx argues, in the relation “20 yards of linen = 1 coat” (20 yards of linen are worth 1 coat), for example, the two commodities play “two different parts”: “The linen expresses its value in the coat; the coat serves as the material in which that value is expressed.” That is to say, the linen on the left side of the equation is in the “relative form of value” (*relativer Wertform*), while the coat on the right side “fulfills the function of equivalent (*Äquivalent*),” or, in other words, is in the “equivalent form” (*Äquivalentform*). In Marx’s account, the relative form of value and the equivalent form are “two inseparable moments,” yet at the same time “mutually exclusive or opposed extremes” (II-6: 81/139f.; see HWC 12: 120).

At the beginning of his discussion of the value-form, Hiromatsu notes that although Marx’s account here may seem to abstract from “the standpoints of the subjects involved,” specifically, the producers and/or owners of commodities, his arguments implicitly involve those standpoints as “logically constitutive moments.” In fact, Marx’s above characterization of the linen as relative value and of the coat as equivalent holds only “insofar as he takes the standpoint of the owner of the linen,” which is the commodity on the left side of the equation (12: 136-7).<sup>8</sup>

8. As Hiromatsu notes, one of the points at issue in the debate between Kuruma Samezō 久留間鮫造 and Uno Kōzō 宇野弘藏—a major debate in Marxist economics in postwar Japan—was the question of whether the commodity-owner may be abstracted from in the theory of the value-form (HWC 12: 135; see KURUMA 1957). As opposed to both

Hiromatsu then goes on to analyze Marx's argument on the first form of value as follows. In terms of the above example, for the producer-owner A of the linen (commodity a), the producer-owner B of the coat (commodity b) is indeed "a concrete person before the eyes," but at the same time appears "simply as the producer-owner of the coat," thus as a kind of "depersonalized" subject (12: 143).<sup>9</sup> To be sure, this depersonalized producer-owner cannot immediately be called an "abstract human being," nor may her/his product immediately be regarded as "an embodiment of 'abstract human labor.'" In Hiromatsu's view, however, as will be seen below, the first form of value turns out to be "a constitutive moment" of the second form, and, to this extent, we are allowed to say the following: While being a concrete person, B also appears as an "abstract subject," and, correlatively, B's product, the coat, is also of "twofold" character, being "a product of concrete useful labor" (tailoring) and at the same time "a product of abstract human labor" (12: 143–4). Hiromatsu designates this double duality of the producer and the product symbolically as "B as [B]" and "b as [b]," respectively (12: 148).

In the above relation of the two commodities in which the coat is equated with the linen, the tailoring labor producing the coat appears as abstract human labor, and the coat as the product of such labor. As Marx then stresses, by this "detour (*Umweg*)" the fact is expressed that weaving also is abstract human labor (MEGA II–6: 80, translation modified; see HWC 12: 145). Hiromatsu interprets this "detour" as follows: The above circumstance in which the product and producer (or

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Kuruma and Uno, Hiromatsu himself maintains that the "desire" of the commodity-owner can be abstracted from, but her/his "standpoint" is a logically "indispensable moment" (12: 137). This interpretive issue cannot, however, be discussed in detail here.

9. To be sure, in his analysis of the value-form in the revised editions of *Capital*, Marx does not explicitly refer to the producers or owners of commodities. In the first edition, however, he does use such expressions as the "producer (*producent*) of the linen" in the "Appendix" to Chapter I (II–5: 628; see HWC 12: 135). Hiromatsu's expression "producer-owner" here seems to draw on these expressions as well as the term "commodity owner" as it appears in the subsequent chapter on the process of exchange.

her/his labor) each assumes a duality arises not only on the side of the coat, the commodity on the right side of the equation. Rather, insofar as A “can understand B,” that is, can imaginatively take B’s standpoint, A will be aware of the fact that, to B, A her/himself appears as an abstract human being, and A’s product *a* (the linen), “as an embodiment of abstract human labor,” and that, in this sense, the state of affairs is “conjugate between A and B.” The logic of the “detour” is precisely this “reflexive determination,” through which “A and B mutually recognize each other’s product as a value-thing, and, mediated by the relation to the other, also each recognize their own product as a value-thing” (12: 147). This state of affairs, in Hiromatsu’s view, is in accord with what he calls the fourfold structure in more general philosophical contexts.

As I here cannot enter fully into Hiromatsu’s general philosophical framework, let us only take a glance at the gist of his theory of the fourfold structure developed elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> According to Hiromatsu, any phenomenon in the world “appears in itself always already *as something* more than the mere ‘sensuous’ given.” For instance, “the sound that is now heard appears intuitively *as* a car horn; what is seen outside the window appears *as* a pine tree” (1: 33). In parallel with this duality of the object-side of the phenomenon, its “subjective” side is also twofold: A phenomenon appears to someone as Someone, or to a specific individual as a general knower or actor. These two sides of the phenomenon, each having a twofold character, are combined to form a fourfold structure: “A ‘given’ presents itself as ‘something’ to ‘someone’ as ‘Someone’” (15: 199). As Hiromatsu stresses, these four moments of the phenomenon are not self-contained elements, but “can subsist only as terms of the [fourfold] functional relationship” (1: 45). As he further claims, any phenomenon, thus fourfold-structured, is “not closed

10. Hiromatsu’s theory of the fourfold structure is presented in his 1972 book *The Intersubjective Being-Structure of the World* (『世界の共同主観的存在構造』)(HWC 1: 3–282) and several subsequent works, most systematically in *Being and Meaning* (『存在と意味』), vol. 1 (1982) and vol. 2 (1993) (HWC 15, 16).

in on itself as a four-term relation" (13: 260), but exists only in relation to other phenomena, that is, to other fourfold formations. From this point of view, Hiromatsu, in his analysis of the value-form in *The Philosophy of Capital*, states the following:

The basic structure of the theory of the value-form amounts to a fourfold structural state of affairs: For A (for-the-self), the commodity "b as [b]" (produced by "B as [B]") is equated with the commodity "a as [a]" (produced by A her/himself, who is "A as [A]" for-the-other). (HWC 12: 152)

We can see how, in this formulation, a phenomenon comprising commodity a and its owner A is fourfold-structured in its reflexive relation to another phenomenon (commodity b and its owner B), which is also structured in a fourfold manner.

The first form of value as seen above is, in Marx's subsequent discussions, followed by the second to the fourth form of value. The second form, referred to as "the total or expanded form of value," is the relation in which the value of one commodity—linen, for example—"is expressed in terms of innumerable other members of the world of commodities." This may be represented by a series of equations such as: "20 yards of linen = 1 coat or 10 lb. tea or = 40 lb. coffee or = 1 quarter of corn or = 2 ounces of gold or = 1/2 ton of iron or = etc." As Marx notes, it is in this expanded form that every other commodity becomes a "mirror" of the linen's value, so that "this value shows itself as being ... a congealed quantity of undifferentiated human labor" (MEGA II-6: 94/155; see HWC 12: 150). As touched on earlier, in Hiromatsu's view, this second form of value contains the first form as its component part, or, in other words, the first form is just "a constitutive moment of the second form as taken out and considered separately" (12: 399; see MEGA II-6: 102).

Next, Marx goes on to the third form, the general form of value, as the "converse relation" of the equations constituting the second form.

This is the relation in which the values of all commodities are expressed in terms of a single commodity:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 1 \text{ coat} \\
 10 \text{ lb. of tea} \\
 40 \text{ lb. coffee} \\
 1 \text{ quarter of corn} \\
 2 \text{ ounces of gold} \\
 1/2 \text{ ton of iron} \\
 x \text{ commodity A etc.}
 \end{array}
 \left. \vphantom{\begin{array}{l} 1 \text{ coat} \\ 10 \text{ lb. of tea} \\ 40 \text{ lb. coffee} \\ 1 \text{ quarter of corn} \\ 2 \text{ ounces of gold} \\ 1/2 \text{ ton of iron} \\ x \text{ commodity A etc.} \end{array}} \right\} = 20 \text{ yards of linen}$$

(MEGA II-6: 96/157)

In Marx's account, the series of commodities on the left side are in the "general relative form of value," while the commodity on the right side, the linen, is in the "general equivalent form" (II-6: 99-100/159-60, translation modified).

Hiromatsu characterizes this third form of value in its relation to the second form as follows: The third form expresses the same state of affairs as the second form, but reformulates it from the standpoint of "the others" of the producer-possessor of the linen, A, who "was on the side of the relative form of value in the second form" (12: 151). Or, to quote a passage from Hiromatsu's contribution to the book *Reading Capital from the Viewpoint of the Theory of Reification* (『資本論を物象化論を視軸にして読む』):

The third form reconceives the state of affairs of the second form from the point of view of the commodities that stood on the right side in the second form. To this extent, ...between the second and the third forms, there is no temporal or actual development. (HWC 12: 400; cf. 528-9)

In this way, according to Hiromatsu, the difference between the two forms of value is no more than "a difference in expression corresponding to a change in the point of view" of theoretical consideration. This, taken together with his view seen earlier on the relation between first and second forms, leads him to maintain that the development of the value-form stretching from the first to the third form is not a "histor-



ical, factual" development, but a process of "deepening of reflexive determinations" (12: 400).

Marx concludes his analysis of the value-form with the fourth form or "money form," in which the general equivalent in the third form is "restricted to a specific kind of commodity," particularly gold. As he notes, this fourth form of value "differs not at all" from the third form, "except that now, instead of linen, gold has assumed the general equivalent form" (MEGA II-6: 101/162, trans. mod.). In Hiromatsu's account, unlike the development up until the third form, this final phase, and only this phase—the transition from the third to the fourth form—is a "real historical" process (12: 401). Since, however, this final phase does not involve any structural change, we can generally say the following about Hiromatsu's interpretation of the theory of the value-form: Hiromatsu's reading proceeds within a framework of synchronic structure, that is, without any dynamic structuring or structural changes. This is also the reason why, in his view, his fourfold structural analysis of the first form of value as we saw earlier applies to the other forms as well, and thus to the value-form in general.

As we have seen so far, it is crucial for Hiromatsu that the value of commodities as conceived by Marx is not an independent, substantial entity, but exists only in fourfold-structured "relational determinations" (see 12: 173). It is not that first there are substantial values that "secondarily enter into relation to one another," but that value is nothing other than "a node of intersubjective functional relations" (12: 193).<sup>11</sup> According to Hiromatsu, it is along this line of thought that Marx further "explicitly redetermines" his concept of abstract human labor and other notions in the next and fourth section, "The

11. According to Hiromatsu, this does not mean that Marx takes sides with value nominalism as opposed to value realism. Rather, it is through a double critique of "the value nominalism of Samuel Bailey's type and the value realism of classical economists" that Marx develops his own conception of value, thus opening up a perspective that goes beyond "the opposition of 'nominalism versus realism' as a major issue of debate in the history of philosophy" (12: 93-4).

Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret,” which Hiromatsu regards as a pivotal presentation of the viewpoint of reification (12: 209). In Marx’s account, “the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the social-natural properties of these things,” and therefore “it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labor as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers.” In this way, a “definite social relation between men” assumes “the fantastic form of a relation between things,” and it is this state of affairs that Marx calls “fetishism (*Fetischismus*).” More specifically, argues Marx, when the product of labor takes on the form of a commodity, “the equality of the kinds of human labor takes on a physical (*sachliche*) form in the equal objectivity of the products of labor as values”; the measure of the expenditure of human labor-power takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products; and, further, the relationships between the producers take on the form of a relation between the products (MEGA II-6: 103/164). As Hiromatsu comments, it is through this argument that the substance, magnitude, and form of value, which seem to inhere in the commodity itself, are shown to be “reified appearances of certain social relations between humans” (HWC 12: 250).

Having thus interpreted the first chapter of Marx’s *Capital* as we have seen so far, Hiromatsu goes on to discuss Chapter 2, “The Process of Exchange,” with which he concludes his reading of Marx’s theory of the commodity. In his analysis of the process of exchange, Marx examines how the contradiction between the use-value and the value of commodities develops to give rise to money, thereby seeking to solve “the riddle of the money fetish” (MEGA II-6: 121/187). This analysis partly “overlaps” with the preceding analysis of the value-form, where the money form was treated as the forth form of value, and this overlapping has raised a number of interpretive issues among commenta-

tors (HWC 12: 218).<sup>12</sup> In Marx's account, commodity owners bring their commodities into relation as values "by bringing them into an opposing relation with some other commodity, which serves as the general equivalent," and this general equivalent (or money) results from the process by which "the social action of all other commodities... sets apart (*schließt... aus*) a particular commodity" (MEGA II-6: 115/180, trans. mod.).

According to Hiromatsu, this account of the process of exchange, which interposes "a third commodity as the general equivalent," clearly differs in logical structure from the analysis of the value-form, which, "starting from the simple value-form, each time proceeds with a bipolar structure" (12: 222). However, he continues, Marx's analysis of the process of exchange may be understood in the following way on the basis of that of the value-form. The equating in value of commodities with a third commodity as discussed in the chapter on the process of exchange is "not an equating in actual exchange, ... but an imaginative role-playing of equating," and such imaginative acts of equating carried out by those who exchange commodities are, if considered individually, "of the structure of bipolar equating" as already explicated in the section on the value-form (12: 223). What appears as a "tripolar relation" or "tripolar structure" in the analysis of the process of exchange may therefore be conceived as a "compound of bipolar structural relations as studied in the theory of the value-form." That is to say, the two exchangers of commodities each recognize by a "detour" the commodity of a third as a "privileged" commodity, and it is through this process that "what Marx calls the 'exclusion of a particular commodity,' namely, the intersubjective positing of the general equivalent, is carried out" (12: 225). Denoting the general equivalent commodity by "c as [c]," and its owner by "C as [C]," Hiromatsu claims that, "by imagi-

12. As Hiromatsu notes, in the first edition of *Capital*, the money form is not discussed until the analysis of the process of exchange, and thus there is no such overlapping as in the revised editions.

natively taking the standpoint of [C],” the owner A of commodity a “evaluates b as [b] and then a as [a],” and that this applies to the owner B of commodity b as well. In this way, owners A and B both evaluate their commodities from an “intersubjective standpoint” as symbolized by [C]. Further, based on this analysis, Hiromatsu seeks to account for the way in which the fetishism of money arises as a higher-level form of the fetishism of the commodity as seen earlier. That is, since, in the above intersubjective evaluation, “c as [c]” serves as a uniform measure of values, “there arises a money fetish such that the money commodity (gold or silver) fixed as the general equivalent appears as if it were in itself privileged in the form of c” (12: 230).

In this section, surveying Hiromatsu’s reading of Marx’s analysis of the commodity, we have seen how he conceives commodity value from the “relationist” perspective, and largely within the synchronic framework of the fourfold structure. This interpretation of Marx, which is Hiromatsu’s unique approach sustained by his overall philosophical project, may be subject to various questions or criticisms. In the next section, with reference to other authors’ alternative readings of Marx, I wish to inquire critically into Hiromatsu’s analysis, especially his interpretation of the development of the value-form.

#### THE THEORY OF THE COMMODITY AND THE EXCLUSION OF THE THIRD

As we have seen earlier, as regards the transition from the second form (the expanded form of value) to the third form (the general form of value) in Marx’s analysis of the value-form, Hiromatsu claims that “the third form reconceives the state of affairs of the second form from the point of view of the commodities that stood on the right side in the second form.” To be sure, in introducing the third form of value, Marx himself states that “if... we reverse the series [in the second form]..., i.e., if we give expression to the converse relation already implied in the series, we get... The General Form of Value”

(MEGA II-6: 96/157) and, to this extent, Hiromatsu seems to give an adequate account of Marx's argument. Shortly afterward in the text, however, in the course of discussing the third form, Marx remarks that "the general relative form of value imposes the character of general equivalent on the linen, which is the commodity excluded (*ausgeschlossen*), as equivalent, from the whole world of commodities" (II-6: 98/159, translation modified). Further, he also notes that, in the third form, "all commodities except one are ... excluded from the equivalent form," whereas, conversely, the commodity on the right side (the linen) "is excluded from the uniform and therefore general relative form of value" (II-6: 99-100/161, translation modified). How is this point of the "exclusion" of commodities, particularly the exclusion of a single commodity as equivalent, to be understood? Does it not suggest a development of the value-form from the second to the third form that may not be confined to, or differs in character from, the above-mentioned "reversal" of the commodity relation? However, Hiromatsu here does not appear to take interest in this question of exclusion. At least in his interpretation of Marx's theory of the value-form—to this extent, similarly to many earlier commentators—he does not touch on the question of exclusion, but grasps the transition from the second to the third form solely in terms of the logic of "reversal" (12: 137).<sup>13</sup> However, there are commentators and researchers who attend precisely to the above issue of exclusion and make it a conceptual focus in their reading of Marx's analysis of the value-form. In what follows, let us take a brief look at this line of interpretation, specifically by two Japanese scholars Imamura Hitoshi 今村仁司 (1942-2007) and Hiyama Michihiko 日山紀彦 (1943-).<sup>14</sup>

13. See, for example, Kuruma (1979, 139-145). According to Ōtani Teinosuke 大谷禎之介, the third form of value may be characterized as the converse relation of the second form, but at the same time is marked by the fact that the possibility of a series of commodities' "joint relation" to a single commodity comes to the fore (Ōtani 1993, 215).

14. For works by European scholars who similarly interpret Marx's analysis of the value-form with a focus on the exclusion of a commodity, see GOUX 1973, and AGLIETTA and ORLÉAN 1982.

In his book *The Ontology of Violence* (『暴力のオントロジー』) (IMAMURA 1982) and related works, the philosopher and historian of social thought Imamura Hitoshi develops a theoretical account of violence with a focus on the “exclusion of the third,” and in this context situates Marx’s analysis of the value-form. According to Imamura, violence, as a driving force of the formation of social relations, is characterized by its two distinct modes of operation. The first mode of violence is at work when the members of society are mutually opposed and exert violence on one another. Social relations constituted by such a “reciprocity” of violence, however, are constantly threatened by a crisis, and are thus “under the necessity of averting the crisis.” This leads to a second mode of violence that is marked by the exclusion of a “third.” As Imamura puts it: “In order for the system of social relations... to be closed on itself and self-contained as a system, its prime imperative is that all members of the society, except one of them, work together to kill, exclude, or oppress this one” (IMAMURA 1982, 38). As typical cases of this collective violence, one may think of sacrificial offering, exile to the wilderness, and the like, and yet the logic of the exclusion of the third is by no means limited to practices prevalent in primitive or ancient societies. Rather, it pertains to the formation and maintenance of all societies, including our modern bourgeois society.

In Imamura’s view, it is precisely in this context that lies the significance of Marx’s theory of the commodity, particularly his analysis of the value-form. Unlike Hiromatsu, whose point of view is largely limited to synchronic structure, Imamura conceives the development of the value-form of commodities as “the development of the structural form of the capitalist mode of production” (1982, 51).<sup>15</sup> He starts by noting that the first and second forms of value are characterized by the “reciprocity of violence.” The relative form of value and the equivalent form are “mutually exclusive” poles, and the relation between the two

15. Imamura considers this development not so much as a real historical process, but rather as an “indefinitely repeated” movement built into the capitalist mode of production (1982, 51; see 1989, 129).

constitutes a “structure of violent reciprocity.” In the first form of value, a commodity in the relative form of value (e.g. linen) expresses its value by “borrowing the body” of another commodity (e.g. a coat), and this borrowing of the other’s body is an exercise of violence that “objectifies (reifies)” the other. In the second form, a commodity violently objectifies not only another single commodity, but an indefinite series of commodities, and all these commodities in their turn each objectify a series of others, so that an “exchange of domination and violence” is indefinitely repeated (1982, 66). However, since such mutual violence drives the social order into a crisis, one attempts to avert the crisis “by violently producing a third” (1982, 69). That is to say, in order to stabilize the social order, “the members of bourgeois commodity society jointly exclude a *single commodity* and concentrate all their violence on it” (1982, 67). Precisely this exclusion marks the transition from the second to the third form of value, and the single commodity excluded, namely the third, is nothing other than the general equivalent—and ultimately money.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, Imamura dynamically reconceives Marx’s analysis of the value-form and specifically interprets the transition from the second to the third form as a process of exclusion of the third commodity. While, however, Imamura sees in the analysis of the value-form an important case of the exclusion of the third, the interpretation of Marx’s thought as such does not constitute the main focus of his argument here.<sup>17</sup> Let us next turn to a more recent work by philosopher Hiyama Michihiko, who, based on a detailed reading of Marx and

16. In a manner similar to Imamura, economists AGLIETTA and ORLÉAN conceive the transition from the second to the third form of value as a transformation of “reciprocal violence” into “generative violence” (1982, 40)—a view developed under the strong influence of René Girard’s work on violence (see GIRARD 1972). Although Imamura has developed his idea of the exclusion of the third independently of Girard, he finds a close affinity between his own and Girard’s approaches (see IMAMURA 1982, 234ff.; 1989, 274).

17. Imamura thematizes Marx’s thought elsewhere in such writings as Imamura (2005), which includes a section representing his final views on Marx’s theory of the value-form (2005, 188–200).

Hiromatsu and also inspired by Imamura's idea of the exclusion of the third, has newly investigated the thematic of the value-form.<sup>18</sup>

In his 2006 book *Philosophy of the "Theory of Abstract Human Labor"* (『「抽象の人間労働論」の哲学』), Hiyama largely accepts the basic orientation of Hiromatsu's philosophy and his reading of Marx along the lines of the theory of reification, and more or less follows his views on the nature and significance of Marx's theory of the value-form. That is, like Hiromatsu, Hiyama also holds that Marx's apparently substantialist account of value and abstract human labor in the first two sections of *Capital* is not an ultimate, but a provisional formulation, and is reconceived relationally "on a higher level" in the subsequent sections on the value-form and fetishism (HIYAMA 2006, 117). In his view, value and abstract human labor are thus redetermined as "relational concepts" based on the socially mediated relation of commodities (2006, 400).

However, as regards the development of the value-form within the third section of *Capital*, especially the transition from the second to the third form, Hiyama diverges significantly from Hiromatsu's reading. While Hiromatsu grasps the third form of value simply as a reformulation of the second form from the reverse point of view, Hiyama claims that these two forms represent "logically different structures" that are separated by "a qualitative leap or a kind of rupture" (2006, 358, 383). That is, the transition from the second to the third form is, as suggested by Imamura, a structural change of the commodity relation through the exclusion of a single commodity from the relative form of value. What is important here is that, contrary to Hiromatsu's view, the third form of value consists not simply of two-term relations of commodities, but of three-term relations with one excluded commodity serving as the general equivalent. As Hiyama puts it:

18. In a broad thematic of the critique of modern civil society, Takahashi Jun'ichi 高橋順一 also analyzes Marx's theory of the value-form under the influence of Imamura's account of the exclusion of the third (TAKAHASHI 1988, 146ff.).



The commodity relation in the “third form” fundamentally differs from those in the “first and second forms” in that it exists as a multiple and complex totality of three-term relations mediated by a social third commodity that monopolizes the role and status of the “general equivalent form,” thus standing out against all other commodities (HIYAMA 2006, 378).

In this sense, the transition from the second to the third form of value may be characterized as “a transformation of two-term into three-term commodity relations” (2006, 441). Therefore, in Hiyama’s view, it is the formation of the third form that constitutes the very core of the “logic of reification” (2006, 449). For, in the structure in which the third-term commodity expresses the values of all other commodities, the movement of social relations constitutive of commodity values is “concealed,” and this strongly prompts the erroneous notion that “commodities are exchangeable because they are from the beginning homogeneous as ‘values’” (2006, 388–9). In other words, with the formation of the third form of value, “the world of fetishism based on reificatory delusions” is firmly established, and this reification may thus be theoretically elucidated by focusing on the third form (2006, 466).

In this way, unlike Hiromatsu, both Imamura and Hiyama dynamically grasp the development of the value-form, and specifically interpret the third form of value along the lines of the exclusion of the third commodity. This interpretive difference, especially concerning the transition from the second to the third form, seems to be closely connected with the question of how to understand the second form itself. As we have seen, Marx introduces the second or expanded form of value as the relation in which the value of *one* commodity is expressed in terms of a series of commodities, and Hiromatsu seems faithfully to follow this definition. On the other hand, in Imamura’s view, not only does a certain commodity, say linen, objectify an endless series of other commodities, but what can be said about the linen “may also be said about all other commodities” (1982, 66). That is to say, every commodity objectifies all other commodities, or, in other words, expresses its

own value in terms of all other commodities as its equivalents.<sup>19</sup> Here, if we again follow Hiromatsu in denoting the commodities by small letters a, b, ... and, for the sake of simplicity, abstract from the quantitative ratios of the value relations of commodities, Imamura's reading may be expressed by the following set of equations:

$$a = b, c, \dots$$

$$b = a, c, \dots$$

$$c = a, b, \dots$$

...

In this way, interpreting the second form as what may be called the expanded form of value of *all commodities* opens up the way to account for the transition to the third form not through the reversal of the two sides, but through the exclusion of a single commodity.<sup>20</sup>

It might be objected that this interpretation differs from Marx's own conception of the second form, and rather represents another form of value that is called "Form 4" in the first edition of *Capital* (see MEGA II-5: 43).<sup>21</sup> To be sure, most of Marx's account of the second form is about the value relations in which only one commodity (linen) stands in the relative form of value. However, toward the end of the discussion of the second form (in the revised version of *Capital*), he himself states that "if, as must be the case (*wie dies geschehen muß*), the relative value of *each* commodity is expressed in this expanded form, it follows that the relative form of value of each commodity is an endless series of expressions of value" (II-6: 95/156, my emphasis). Here Marx is hypothetically *assuming* ("if...") that every commodity expresses its

19. In this respect, Uno Kōzō similarly interprets the second form of value, saying that "all commodity-owners... select commodities other than their own to function as equivalents to theirs" (Uno 1964, 26/6). See also Goux (1973, 59) and Karatani (2004, 96/69).

20. Hiyama does not explicitly present this interpretation of the second form (as the expanded form of value of all commodities), but it seems to me that he cannot help but presuppose such an interpretation insofar as he conceives the transition to the third form as the exclusion of the third.

21. See Hiromatsu's comment on Form 4 (HWC 12: 116).

value in terms of all other commodities, and at the same time claiming the *necessity* of what is assumed (“... must be the case”). From this it follows that Imamura’s reading of the second form as the expanded form of value of all commodities, on which basis he accounts for the transition to the third form in terms of the exclusion of a single commodity, may hardly be considered as a misreading of Marx. In this way, Marx’s account of the transition from the second to the third form of value turns out to contain both logics of “reversal” and “exclusion,” which are intermingled in his text without being clearly distinguished or interconnected. We can now say that, in his reading of Marx’s analysis of the value-form, Hiromatsu follows solely the former logic of reversal and disregards the problematic of exclusion.

To be sure, as we saw in the previous section, Hiromatsu grasps Marx’s analysis of the process of exchange—as distinct from that of the value-form—in terms of a “tripolar structure.” That is, according to Hiromatsu, while the analysis of the value-form basically proceeds with a bipolar structure, that of the process of exchange revolves around a tripolar relation or structure that combines any two commodities with a third commodity. In contrast, Hiyama maintains that the “three-term relation,” which he identifies with what Hiromatsu calls tripolar structure, already establishes itself in Marx’s theory of the value-form as it constitutes the third form of value (2006, 443).<sup>22</sup> Thus the views of Hiyama and Hiromatsu are opposed to each other with respect to the question of whether the tripolar or three-term relation may be recognized within Marx’s analysis of the value-form, or not until that of the process of exchange. However, such an issue concerning the textual composition of Marx’s work lies beyond the scope of the present study.

22. Imamura’s account of Marx’s theory of the commodity in *The Ontology of Violence* seems to have some exegetical shortcomings, particularly as he cites without notice a passage from Chapter 2 on the process of exchange while discussing the theory of the value-form (1982, 71). By contrast, Hiyama, in his discussion of the exclusion of the third, strictly limits himself to Chapter 1 of *Capital*, without entering into the chapter on the process of exchange.

Rather, what seems to be more important in terms of the content of thought is the question of the validity of Hiromatsu's account of the tripolar structure itself. As we have seen earlier, Hiromatsu conceives the tripolar structure in Marx's analysis of the process of exchange as a "compound of bipolar structural relations as studied in the theory of the value-form" (my emphasis), specifically, the structure in which commodity owners A and B intersubjectively evaluate the two commodities (a as [a], b as [b]) "by imaginatively taking the standpoint of [C]." To this extent, it might seem that, ontologically and epistemologically, the analysis of the process of exchange can be traced back to that of the value-form as interpreted within the framework of synchronic structure, and itself be interpreted synchronically. However, from Hiromatsu's general philosophical point of view, the "compound" of bipolar structures may hardly be conceived as a mere sum of individual bipolar formations brought together—a kind of substantialist notion that he critically examines in other contexts (see 3: 275). In more general terms, elements or factors (here two bipolar structures) cannot simply be joined together into a compound while each of them preserves its pure self-identity. Then what exactly occurs in the combination of bipolar structures in such a way as to go beyond a simple conjunction of self-contained entities? This question seems to remain unanswered in Hiromatsu's arguments.

Let us take a brief look at passages, cited by Hiromatsu, of Marx's analysis of the process of exchange. As regards the state of affairs prior to the exclusion of a third commodity, Marx remarks that "to the owner of a commodity, every other commodity counts as the particular equivalent of his own commodity," and therefore that "his own commodity is the general equivalent for all the others." Since this applies to the owner of every commodity, "there is in fact no commodity acting as general equivalent," and from here he goes on to discuss the exclusion of a single commodity (II-6: 115/180, translation modified; see HWC 12: 221). This may be rendered symbolically as follows: For the owner A of commodity a, there exists the relation  $a = b, c, \dots$ ,

where the commodities of others  $b, c, \dots$  serve as “particular equivalents”; for the owner  $B$  of commodity  $b$ , there exists the relation  $b = a, c, \dots$ ; and for the owner  $C$  of commodity  $c$ , the relation  $c = b, a, \dots$  and so forth. Starting from this state of affairs, we can see how commodity  $c$  is excluded, or rather what exactly takes place in the exclusion of  $c$ :  $A$  and  $B$ —and, furthermore, all commodity owners—exclude  $c$  from the left side of the equations, that is, from the relative form of value, and also exclude their own commodities  $a, b, \dots$  from the equivalent form. To put it in more relational terms, all value *relations* other than the relations in which  $c$  is in the equivalent form are excluded, and the values of all commodities other than  $c$  are expressed in terms of  $c$  as the general equivalent. If we call the structure thus established a tripolar structure, the tripolar structure may *not* simply be viewed as a compound or combination of bipolar structures. Rather, the transition from bipolar to tripolar relations is a structural transformation mediated by the exclusion of commodity  $c$ , or rather the exclusion of the value relations in which  $c$  is in the relative form of value.

As we have seen earlier, according to Imamura and Hiyama, a three-term relation of commodities being established through the exclusion of a single commodity is already in the third form of value in Marx's analysis of the value-form. Although Hiromatsu holds that the tripolar structure is not established until the analysis of the process of exchange, my inquiry above has shown that this is also to be conceived as a structural change mediated by the exclusion of a single commodity. In any case, the formation of the tripolar structure or three-term relation turns out to be the product of a dynamic structuring that revolves around the exclusion of the third. Here the largely synchronic framework of Hiromatsu's interpretation of Marx's theory of the commodity appears to be faced with a serious challenge.

In the present study, I have surveyed and critically examined Hiromatsu's reading of Marx's theory of the commodity with a focus on the question of the development of the value-form. With reference to Imamura's and Hiyama's alternative readings, my analysis has shown

how Hiromatsu's approach is limited by its largely synchronic framework. That is to say, the conception of the exclusion of a third commodity as dynamic structuring of the commodity relation is missed in Hiromatsu's reading. This seems to have further implications to his overall philosophical project, which are worth exploring in a separate study.<sup>23</sup> It should also be noted that in the present paper, while focusing on the question of the *development* of the value-form, I have not directly examined Hiromatsu's fourfold structural analysis of the value-form itself. These two questions appear to be closely related, however, insofar as his structural analysis is made on the supposition that the commodity relation as expressed by the third form of value is established from the outset—thus already at the stages of the first and second forms. This being the case, with reference to the findings of the present study, Hiromatsu's analysis of the value-form in terms of the fourfold structure may perhaps also be investigated critically.

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23. I have critically examined Hiromatsu's theory of the fourfold structure on the general philosophical level (KATSUMORI 2009). In the third section of KATSUMORI 2013, I have also sought to connect that analysis with the issues discussed in the present paper concerning his reading of Marx.

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