

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Concise Guide

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This study provides a summary of my book, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners* (Boer 2021). In some cases – such as the material on China’s socialist economy and socialist democracy – I have updated and restructured the material in light of subsequent research. In order to keep it relatively brief, I do not include the vast bulk of citations and references from the book. These are overwhelmingly from Chinese-language Marxist sources, since I was keen to make it clear that my presentation and arguments are solidly based on such research. Rest assured: everything in this concise guide relies on Chinese Marxist scholarship, which still remains largely unknown outside China.

Let us begin with an observation from Mao Zedong, the pertinence of which should be obvious:

Some foreigners say that our ideological reform is brainwashing. As I see it, they are correct in what they say. It is washing brains, that’s what it is! This brain of mine was washed to become what it is. After joining the revolution, it was slowly washed, washed for several decades. What I received before was all bourgeois education, and even some feudal education (Mao Zedong, quoted in Shao 2017, 2).

If you are unfortunate enough to have been brought up in one of the few countries in the world that espouse the Western liberal tradition, then you will need to undertake a more thorough washing of your brain so as to understand socialism with Chinese characteristics. This also means that studies of China that use a Western framework – philosophical, economic, political, and cultural – are by and large unhelpful, if not offering misrepresentations. In China, they call this 以西解中 *yixi jiezong*, using Western categories and frameworks for trying to understand China. And when Western Marxists follow the same path, it is a case of 以西解马 *yixi jiema*, using Western categories to try and understand Marx.

Instead, the approach I take in the book is to rely primarily on Chinese Marxist scholarship. As one would expect, there is an immense amount of such material, so I had to exercise a strict discipline: only works published in core (核心 *hexin*) journals and those approved for the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) were those I cited.

Finally, in the book I worked with Chinese texts throughout, but in this overview I will cite – for ease of reference – English translations where available, or provide English translations of Chinese language works. All translations are my own.

1. Marxism as China's Special Skill (看家本领 *kanjia benling*)

Let us be very clear from the outset: China is on the socialist road and Marxism is in the driver's seat. Note carefully how I have written the previous sentence. I did not write "is" socialist, since this is a typically Western way of framing the question, in terms of the ontological categories of "is" or "is not." Instead, I wrote "socialist road." In other, socialism is a process, a path, a direction in one moves, rather than a simple state of "being."

More specifically, Marxist philosophy is China's 看家本领 *kanjia benling*, the stock-in-trade, the special and honed skill that one has for looking after the home, by which is meant the country. Philosophy? *Marxist* philosophy? Yes, as with other socialist countries such as Vietnam, Laos, or the DPRK (North Korea, as it is informally known), it is precisely Marxist philosophy that is front and centre in China. There was a time – the "wild 90s" (see Sections 4.1 and 5.3.3) – when this reality was not so clear. But it has become so once again, especially during the tenure of Xi Jinping as General Secretary.

In a crucial speech from 2016, Xi stressed the vital role that Marxist philosophy plays in China's socialist path (Xi 2016b).¹ But what does he mean by Marxist philosophy? The definition comes straight out of the full Marxist-Leninist tradition: dialectical materialism as the philosophical framework, which applies to nature, society, and thought; and historical materialism as its concrete application to history, society, and economics (Xi 2019a; 2020a). I will have more to say about dialectical materialism later (Section 3), but here I emphasise that this philosophical framework is an inescapable part of the mainstream of Marxism – in contrast to the truncated and indeed distorted version in Western Marxism, which restricts itself to "historical materialism."

Xi Jinping went on to speak of the crucial need for revolutionary theory (so Lenin), its role in shaping China's struggle for Liberation, and the guide it has provided for China's socialist path. He also observed that the current international status of Chinese philosophy and the social sciences is not commensurate with China's international economic and political standing. So he called on those present, and indeed all who were listening and read the speech afterwards, to lift their game and work towards making Chinese Marxist philosophy a global leader in all respects. A tall order, perhaps, and one can imagine not a

¹ The English translation cited here is an excerpt from the fuller speech in Chinese.

few hesitant at the prospect of increasing their international engagement so as to “tell China’s story well,” of working towards ensuring that global researchers would look first to Chinese presses and journals for publication, and to propagating Marxist philosophy throughout society. But this is the agenda, and we can be rest assured that it will be carried out with detailed planning and diligence.

It should be no surprise that the rest of this overview will be undertaken in a philosophical spirit. After all, I am seeking to present a Chinese Marxist perspective on socialism with Chinese characteristics. One final question for this part: how do we assess the role of the General Secretary as a thinker? Those who find themselves in one of the few Western countries will be well used to the reality that a political career attracts the self-interested with limited abilities, those who not given and indeed not able to think deeply about matters of state. The communist tradition is quite different: already from the time of Lenin – the first communist leader to be in a situation of state power – it has become the norm that a General Secretary will also be a thinker. Some may have written less than others, but they all made notable contributions to the development of the Marxist-Leninist tradition. It should be no surprise that I will mention regularly the works of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Xi Jinping, among others.

2. Reading Deng Xiaoping

With that in mind, I turn to Deng Xiaoping, the architect of the reform and opening-up. I must admit to being quite fond of Deng, not least because he so often plays second fiddle to Mao Zedong (much like Engels to Marx). Too few study Deng’s life and writings seriously, apart from taking a quotation out of context – think of “black cat, white cat” – and suggesting that Deng was a “pragmatist” rather than “ideologically” driven. Caricatures abound, so let us clarify the facts.

To begin with, Deng was a lifelong communist, committed to the cause of constructing socialism and ensuring that China rose out of its dire poverty and backward economic situation (Vogel 2011). Further, Mao Zedong never called Deng a “capitalist roader (走资派 *zouzipai*),” or “one who follows the capitalist path (走资本主义道路 *zou zibenzhuyi daolu*.)” I have made a careful study of the documents from the 1960s and 1970s, especially when Deng was demoted for a period of time. It is very clear that Mao always knew that his old comrade was a genuine communist and would be restored in due time. So who is responsible for this misleading term, “capitalist roader”? It was the Gang of Four,

especially in the last few months of the tumultuous year of 1976, when Mao was on his deathbed and they knew that public support was shifting decisively in favour of Deng.

Deng Xiaoping was above all a man of action and of few words. Let us pause for a moment and think about this observation. Deng was born in August of 1904, so when the reform and opening-up was launched in 1978, he was almost 74. For most people, this time of life is not one of action, of making one's greatest contribution. In fact, Deng would continue for another 14 years, until his last and famous "Southern Tour" of 1992, when he made some of his most well-known observations. These were absolutely crucial years and they found Deng in his 70s and 80s. A man of action indeed. That said, he made some profound theoretical contributions, based upon the realities on the ground.

For Chinese scholars, the key text is a speech from 1978, which is best translated as "Liberate Thought, Seek Truth from Facts, and Unite as One in Looking to the Future" (Deng 1978). In the book, I provide a rather detailed analysis of this speech, so let me summarise here.

To begin with, Deng deals with the negative effects of the disruptive deviation of the "Cultural Revolution," especially ideological taboos that led to "blind faith"; the undermining of democratic centralism through over-centralisation; the distortions of right and wrong in light of "phony (假 *jia*)" Marxism with the result that people lost their bearings and stopped thinking; and the lingering effect of feudal habits of small production. The outcome was that people had stopped thinking creatively, that "socialism" had ossified in a specific moment, and that the "two whatevers" determined everything.² In reply, Deng adhered to Engels's (1890, 18) observation that socialism would "be in a constant process of change and transformation."

Deng makes four main points, each of which contains a dialectical opposition. He begins by clarifying that *liberating thought can happen only if one follows the correct ideological line*. This line is, of course, Marxism-Leninism. Those who are unfortunate enough to have been brought up in one of the few Western countries that promote a now defunct liberalism might wonder: how can thought be free if it must follow a specific theoretical and political line? For Deng Xiaoping and indeed Chinese Marxism, this is not an either-or. Instead, the reality of the Marxist-Leninist tradition is that when one follows this line, one is able to free one's mind for creative engagement with one's context. In

² The "two whatevers" (两个凡是 *liang ge fanshi*) had been proposed in 1977 by stalwarts of the "Cultural Revolution": "we will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave." The original text may be found at www.wendangku.net/doc/bd9fab3f27284b73f24250fc.html.

other words, it is a freedom for socialism, for the very innovations required for socialist construction. To deviate from this line is to give up this freedom.

Second, liberating thought requires the full exercise of socialist democracy, understood as democratic centralism. A major problem of the period he had just witnessed was over-centralisation, the “rule of a person” much like a Confucian sage-king, and thus a breakdown of democratic practice. In many respects, this is a form of the problem we would expect. However, the dialectic is little more complex. Some years earlier, Deng (1962) had argued that too much decentralisation leads to authoritarianism. How so? If there is a weak centralism and an enhanced decentralisation to regional areas and local party branches, the local leaders may tend to become authoritarian due to lack of direction from the centre. Thus, both too much centralisation and too much decentralisation can lead to authoritarian practices. The answer is not a “golden mean,” but an enhancement of the one through the other – as we will see with contradiction analysis.

Third, liberating thought is the basis of the proletarian world outlook, which is embodied in seeking truth from facts (实事求是 *shishiqiushi*). The slogan of “seeking truth from facts” began with Mao Zedong in Yan’an in the later 1930s, who always advocated that cadres should gain accurate information from local branches by painstaking engagement and research, but the practice was elevated by Deng Xiaoping as a leitmotiv of the reform and opening-up. But we need to be careful, since truth from facts is not simply an empiricist approach. Instead, it needs to be understood in light of the Marxist dialectic of base and superstructure: the facts in question are those of the socio-economic base, which needs to be analysed in detail so as to determine the appropriate plans in light of actual conditions. Of course, the plans themselves are already part of the “truth” component, but they undergo constant revision in light of reassessments. This approach, seeking truth from facts, has become what is known as the “Chinese spirit (中国精神 *Zhongguo jingshen*).” I have personally experienced the detailed and comprehensive assessments and reports at all manner of levels. And woe betide anyone who skips the process and conjures a report from the top of his or her head.

Finally, Deng saw liberating thought as the impetus to innovation, to generating new ideas and new ways to construct socialism. At this point we find the whole project of the reform and opening-up, with its resolute emphasis on liberating the forces of production and the development of a market institutional form – alongside planning – within a socialist system (see Section 5.2).

Much more could be said about Deng Xiaoping's deeply Marxist approach, but in closing I would like to emphasise a particular aspect: the heresy of "poor socialism." In the 1970s, the Gang of Four had begun proposing "poor socialism" as better than "rich capitalism." We can see this now as a response to the failed leftist attempt to leap over backward economic conditions through sheer voluntarist effort. On many occasions, Deng stressed that "poor socialism" is not socialism at all. Apart from the fact that Deng follows Marx and Engels in rejecting what the latter called "ascetic communism," the reason why "poor socialism" is not socialism is the simple fact that socialism is a preparation for communism. In order to achieve communism's "from each according to ability and to each according to need," we need a significantly high level of socio-economic well-being. Communism cannot be achieved on the basis of poverty, but only on the basis of a common prosperity that is the long and arduous task of socialist construction (Deng 1982).

To return to Deng Xiaoping's communist credentials, let me quote two texts: a "true Marxist-Leninist must understand, carry on and develop Marxism-Leninism in light of the current situation" (Deng 1989, 284–85). And in relation to the construction of socialism as a preparation for communism, "We'll be ashamed to go to see Marx if we fail to solve this problem well" (Deng 1979b, 200).

3. Contradiction Analysis: History, Meaning and Application

Contradiction analysis (矛盾分析法 *maodun fenxifa*) is the main Chinese term for dialectical analysis. This is both an indispensable feature of Chinese Marxism and a topic that requires detailed analysis so as to be understood properly. The overview that follows can deal only with the main points, and I strongly encourage readers to study this topic much further. Such study is particularly important for those overly influenced by the reduction of "Western Marxism," which has lost touch with the rich developments of dialectical analysis. This process began with the rejection of Engels's contributions (Lukács 1968, 24, n. 6), to be followed by the rejection of Lenin's developments, the whole system of dialectical and historical materialism from the 1930s in the Soviet Union, and then Mao Zedong's major steps in works the second half of the 1930s. So let us see what this full tradition actually entails.

3.1 Lenin on Contradiction and Antagonism

To begin the process of understanding contradiction analysis, two texts by Lenin are important. The first is a note made during his critique of Bukharin's *The Economics of*

the Transition Period (1920), where Lenin writes (1920, 391): “Antagonism and contradiction are not at all the same thing. Under socialism, the first will disappear, the second will remain.” In other words, contradictions are not always antagonistic, for contradiction and antagonism are two different categories. While antagonism – between classes, between the forces and relations of production – will begin to disappear in socialism, contradictions will clearly be part of the process. This is by no means the only time Lenin addressed the question of contradictions and dialectics. While he engaged with Hegelian and Marxist dialectics throughout his life (Boer 2015), an influential and concentrated period of study in 1914-1915 led to the concise observation:

The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their “unity,” – although the difference between the terms identity and unity is not particularly important here. In a certain sense both are correct) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature (*including* mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their “*self-movement*,” in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the “struggle” of opposites (Lenin 1915, 357–58).

Three crucial points for subsequent developments arise from this text. First, Lenin follows Engels (1882a, 356) in arguing that contradictions arise as much from nature and mind as from society. Second, Lenin emphasises that qualitative change happens in the process of self-movement, in the internal dynamics of a situation. Elsewhere in the same piece, he stresses that self-movement – and not the quantitative change driven by external factors – is the driving force, source, and motive of motion. Third, Lenin emphasises the simultaneous unity and struggle of opposites. More specifically, “The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative.” By contrast, the “struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute” (Lenin 1915, 358). The full unity of opposites may happen for a time, in light of circumstances, but it never lasts. By contrast, the struggle of opposites is absolute and eternal, even though it takes place in a situation of contested unity. How should we understand this point in light of the distinction between contradiction and antagonism (see above)? The systemic context is crucial: struggle-in-unity may take an antagonistic form, as is characteristic of capitalist systems, or it may take predominantly non-antagonistic forms, as with the construction of socialism. Thus, Lenin’s observation entails that the eternal struggle of opposites also continues under socialism, albeit within a qualitatively different framework. By now Lenin has revised Engels’s well-known laws of dialectics: the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; the interpenetration

of opposites; and the negation of the negation (Engels 1882a, 356). Lenin elevates the second into the prime position, a move that would be followed by all of the Soviet-era material on dialectical materialism, as also Mao Zedong and his comrades (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3).

To sum up: these concise and forceful observations by Lenin indicate that if contradictions are to be found in all phenomena, if self-movement is the mode of qualitative change, and if development is the struggle of opposites in unity, then one cannot escape the conclusion that the internal dynamics of the construction of socialism entail precisely such a struggle-in-unity. And these contradictions are not, as a rule, antagonistic.

3.2 Soviet-Era Dialectical Materialism

After the theoretical struggles of the 1920s in the Soviet Union, there was a flowering of Marxist philosophy in the 1930s and 1940s. During this time, mainstream Marxism came to be defined in terms of dialectical materialism as the overall method and historical materialism as its application to socio-economic processes. Many were the publications of the time, but let me refer to three main works that were translated into Chinese and studied in detail by Mao Zedong and his comrades in Yan'an in 1935 and 1936: the major entry in the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (Mitin et al. 1935; Mitin 1936b), a work entitled *Materialist Dialectics* (Shirokov and Iankovskii 1932b; 1932a) and another known as *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (Mitin 1931; 1936a).

These are comprehensive works indeed, beginning with the earliest forms of European philosophy, tracing a line to Marx and Engels, and then elaborating on the implications for socialist construction. It is far beyond my remit to deal with all the aspects of this well-developed approach, although I have found it quite useful for gaining a comprehensive understanding of what Marxist analysis entails. There are, however, three topics that I would like to emphasise, since they will lead into the next section on Mao Zedong. As one would expect, there is considerable focus on Lenin's initial proposals (see Section 3.1), identifying the unity and struggle of opposites as the fundamental law of dialectical development. More specifically, I am interested in the interpenetration of opposites, especially in terms of the conditional nature of unity and absoluteness of struggle; the differences between contradiction and antagonism; and the dialectic of quality and quantity.

Many are the examples provided in each case, but let us focus on the much-discussed relations between urban and rural workers, or, more strictly speaking, between the working class and the peasantry (since rural workers were not necessarily class conscious). I emphasise the following points:

1) In the immediate aftermath of a proletarian revolution, antagonistic class struggle continues. The new state – as the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry – must deploy all means available for suppressing and crushing the bourgeoisie and landlords, as well as the hooligan and laggard elements at the fringes of the working class, and defending the new socialist project from efforts at foreign intervention.

2) At the same time, new forms of contradiction begin to emerge in the context of socialist construction. It is not sufficient to remove the former ruling class from power and expropriate the means of production from the former owners; instead, the class formations between workers and peasants begin to move in a non-antagonistic direction. Here we find a great emphasis on the “commonality of the fundamental interests of the vast mass of the peasantry with the interests of the proletariat” (Mitin m.fl. 1935, 152), or on “contradictions within the bond” (Stalin 1930, 21).

3) This does not mean that antagonism has disappeared – witness, for example, the struggle with the “big peasants,” or kulaks. However, the new contradictions need to be managed and solved, as, for example, with the rapid collectivisation of agriculture in the 1930s, along with the equally rapid process of industrialisation. The government itself needs to act decisively, primarily through persuasion, but with force if necessary.

4) The nature of contradictions is determined by the system in question. In other words, a socialist system is qualitatively distinct from a capitalist system. While quantitative change may provide the conditions for a qualitative shift, the qualitative context determines the limits of how much can be achieved in terms of quantitative development. Thus, contradictions internal to a process are qualitatively different from contradictions within another self-moving process. For example, the primary contradiction of capitalism is ever more antagonistic, leading eventually to revolutionary confrontation as the way to solve such a contradiction. By contrast, in a socialist system (so Lenin) the new contradictions are primarily non-antagonistic, but these contradictions are necessary for the sake of further development.

Shirokov and Iankovskii (1932b, 150) provide a useful summary of the whole approach:

If in developed socialism there were no contradictions – contradictions between productive forces and relations in production, between production and demand, no contradictions in the development of technique, etc. – then the development of socialism would be impossible, then instead of movement we would have stagnation. Only in virtue of the internal contradictions of the socialist order can there be development from one phase to another and higher order.

3.3 Mao Zedong

After the Long March came to end in Yan'an, Shaaxi province, in October 1935, there was a relatively brief interlude before the anti-Japanese War began in earnest. It was this period, from 1935 to 1937, that laid the foundations – both practical and theoretical – for the New China. Study groups, lectures, translations, and publications took place at a stunning pace. Mao Zedong and his comrades buried themselves in study and the results became landmark works in the development of Chinese Marxism. Out of this material, I focus on Mao's reading notes on translations from Russian and on works written in Chinese, his lectures on dialectical materialism, and the essays that arose from the lectures (Mao 1988; 1937a; 1937b; 1937c). Mao was, as Nick Knight (1990) observes, an active reader, critically engaging with the texts, elaborating points further, and developing his insights. Out of this material, three main themes are important.

To begin with, in light of the Chinese tradition Mao was drawn to the distinction between contradiction and antagonism (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2). Moving beyond the Soviet material, for Mao this became the universality of contradictions in all phenomena, and the fact that at certain moments contradictions can become antagonistic. Further, non-antagonistic contradictions may become antagonistic, while antagonistic contradictions can become non-antagonistic. Many are the examples offered by Mao, but what is the implication for socialist construction? Can the default position, non-antagonism, become antagonistic. Of course it can, and it is precisely this question that Mao addressed two decades later (1957). In terms of contradictions internal to a socialist country and among the people, Mao emphasises that while one may assume they should be non-antagonistic, these contradictions should be managed well so as to ensure this remained the case. Mao would notably ignore this insight a decade or so later with his promotion of internal class struggle in the "Cultural Revolution." However, this chaotic deviation only emphasises more the points from the 1957 essay, where the unity-in-struggle of contradictions is the emphasis: "Socialist society grows more united and consolidated through the ceaseless process of correctly handling and resolving contradictions" (Mao 1957, 393).

Further, Mao distinguishes between primary and secondary contradictions, and the primary and secondary aspects of a contradiction. These distinctions are perhaps the most well-known of Mao's approach, but let me emphasise that they go well beyond the rather brief mentions in the Soviet works. The very fact that one needs to identify a primary contradiction entails a multiplicity, which is not merely an assumption that comes from the Chinese cultural tradition – things that oppose each other also complement one another (相反相成 *xiangfan-xiangcheng*) – but also the concrete reality of revolutionary struggle, imperialist occupation (Japan), feudal relics, comprador capitalism, and multiple shifts taking place in Chinese society. Identifying a primary contradiction is not done on a whim, but is the result of assiduous research on the ground, and it has profound consequences for policy. For example, by 1937 Mao observed that the primary contradiction had shifted from struggle with the Guomindang to the anti-Japanese struggle, so the method of resolution is a united front between the Red Army and the Guomindang for a time. As for the primary and secondary aspects within a contradiction, this is where the inter-permeation of opposites comes to the fore. This is a thoroughly dynamic process: it will not do to identify a primary contradiction and assume it will remain the same. Depending on circumstances and the inter-connected nature of the oppositions, one will find that one aspect dominates only to be dominated by the other. The drawn-out struggle with Japan is an immediate example, but so also the long and winding process of constructing socialism.

To look ahead for a moment: since Liberation and the founding of the New China in 1949, there have been only three principal contradictions. The first was at the Eighth National Congress of the CPC in 1956, where it was resolved that “the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has become the one between the need for building a modern industrial country and the reality of the backward agricultural country, and that between the needs of the people for rapid economic and cultural development and the failure of current economic and cultural supplies to meet their needs.” After the chaos and loss of direction during the “Cultural Revolution,” a second principal contradiction was identified at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1981: “between backward social production and the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the masses” (CPC Central Committee 1981, 8). The third principal contradiction came 36 years later, identified by Xi Jinping at the Nineteenth Congress of the CPC in 2017. Pointing out that socialism with Chinese characteristics has made major developments, a new principal contradiction has emerged, “between unbalanced and inadequate development

and the ever-growing expectation of the people for a better life (美好生活 *meihao shenghuo*)” (Xi 2017b, 12).

Finally, Mao provides the philosophical foundations for what is known as the Chinese characteristics or particularities of socialism. Here too Mao picks up a point from the Soviet works and sharpens it. The key lies in both the self-movement of qualitative change and the qualitative difference between processes and their contradictions. The first point is obvious: if internal processes are the primary contexts for qualitative transformations, then it follows logically that the Chinese revolution, as well as the arduous task of constructing socialism, have their own particular characteristics. Mao denies neither the role of external causes, nor the internal-external dialectic, but he emphasises again and again that internal causes determine the necessity of qualitative change and not external causes.

A notable development occurs in Mao’s emphasis on the particularity of contradictions (which became a whole section in his lecture notes and “On Contradiction”). Whereas the Soviet material focuses on the qualitative differences between capitalism and socialism, Mao includes the distinctive conditions in countries that have long cultural histories such as China. This is an obvious point: it is not merely the specific economic, social, and political conditions of the present that will influence how Marxism becomes concrete, but also the historical influence in terms of social and cultural assumptions. This became a distinct emphasis among Chinese Marxist philosophers such as Ai Siqi (who worked with Mao) and came to the fore in what is arguably the first moment when the Chinese characteristics of socialism, or simply concrete Marxism, were identified:

The history of this great nation of ours goes back several thousand years. It has its own laws of development, its own national characteristics, and many precious treasures. As regards all this, we are mere schoolboys. Today’s China is an outgrowth of historic China. We are Marxist historicists; we must not mutilate history. From Confucius to Sun Yatsen, we must sum it up critically, and we must constitute ourselves the heirs to this precious legacy. Conversely, the assimilation of this legacy itself becomes a method that aids considerably in guiding the present great movement. A Communist is a Marxist internationalist, but Marxism must take on a national form (民族形式 *minzu xingshi*) before it can be put into practice. There is no such thing as abstract Marxism, but only concrete Marxism (具体的马克思主义 *juti de makesizhuyi*). What we call concrete Marxism is Marxism that has taken on a national form (民族形式 *minzu xingshi*), that is, Marxism applied to the concrete struggle in the concrete conditions (具体环境 *juti huanjing*) prevailing in China, and not Marxism abstractly used. If a Chinese Communist, who is a part of the great Chinese people, bound to his people by his very

flesh and blood, talks of Marxism apart from Chinese peculiarities (中国特色 *Zhongguo tedian*), this Marxism is merely an empty abstraction. Consequently, the sinification of Marxism (马克思主义中国化 *makesizhuyi zhongguohua*) – that is to say, making certain that in all its manifestations it is imbued with Chinese characteristics (中国的特性 *Zhongguo de texing*), using it according to Chinese peculiarities (中国的特点 *Zhongguo de tedian*) – becomes a problem that must be understood and solved by the whole Party without delay (Mao 1938, 538–39).

In sum, one can hardly begin to understand China's Marxist project, or indeed the worldview and methodology of the CPC, without understanding the central role that dialectical materialism continues to play, and thus of Marxist philosophy as a whole.

4. The Marxist Basis of the Reform and Opening-Up

The topic of the reform and opening-up involves quite a number of questions relating to Marxist dialectical analysis, and I cannot deal with all of them adequately here. In the book, I discuss the origins of the reform and opening-up, the household responsibility system versus the formal equality of “one big pot,” the reform process itself in relation to revolution, the dialectical process of deepening reform in relation to the “wild 90s,” self-reliance and globalisation, internal and external class analysis, and the one country-two systems approach to Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR, and Taiwan island.

4.1 *Deepening Reform*

Here I would like to focus on the core issues relating to internal reform and then opening-up to the rest of the world. To begin with, how should we understand reform in relation to revolution? Too often has this question been distorted in terms of either revolution or reform. This distortion has arisen from context of capitalist systems, in which one side argues that the system itself needs to be challenged and replaced through revolution, and the other side that incremental reform is the way to go until one is able to bring about a qualitative shift. But what happens when we are in the context of a socialist system, when we need to think socialistically? Lenin already provided the answer in the context of debates in Russia and in Germany: reform is not the answer on its own, but should always be seen in light of the revolution. In other words, reform is absolutely necessary after a proletarian revolution, so much so that reform can be seen as part of the revolutionary process itself. Historically, this has indeed been the approach, whether the massive industrialisation and collectivisation program of the Soviet Union, economic reforms in Eastern Europe in the 1970s, or the reform and opening-up in China.

The reform and opening-up began in 1978 and is now agreed to have unfolded over the following three decades or so. Of course, it continues today but with an important shift. This is now known as deepening reform as a way to deal with the mounting problems and indeed contradictions that had been generated by the process itself. These contradictions have been widely studied and analysed in China: the decline in conditions for workers and consequent labour unrest; appropriation of collectively owned village lands by corrupt city officials; a growing gap between rich (mostly eastern) regions and poor (mostly western) regions; lack of welfare in the countryside; environmental degradation; ideological confusion, with all manner of proposals ranging from a recovery of Confucianism to bourgeois liberalisation; and a significant gap between the common people and the CPC, leading to corruption. These realities were most notable in what may be called the “wild 90s,” although they spilled over into the first decade of the new millennium.

The crucial question here is: what was the Marxist response? A few too many Western Marxists thought they “knew better” and, siding with Western liberals in the international class conflict, assumed that China was heading down the “capitalist road.” By contrast, the Chinese Marxist response adheres to scientific socialism, and argues that these Western critics made a basic error in assuming that the problems were systemic. By contrast, the problems were incidental to the reform process, which is overall heading in a socialist direction. This leads to a second question: how should the government deal with the “wild 90s”? Would it entail a retreat to an earlier phase, negating both the gains and the problems of the reform and opening-up? Again, the answer is clearly Marxist: the answer was to deepen reform as a way to respond to the contradictions that had arisen. As I elaborate later (section 5.3.3), the success of this response is quite stunning.

4.2 Self-Reliance, Globalisation, and Class Analysis

When Xi Jinping (2017c) gave the keynote speech at the 2017 Davos economic forum, he spoke frequently of the need to enhance globalisation. For those accustomed to the faux globalisation promoted for a while under the tottering neoliberal agenda, this advocacy by Xi Jinping sounded somewhat strange. It soon became apparent that “globalisation” in Xi Jinping’s lexicon had nothing to do with the neoliberal mantra, for it arises from a distinct Chinese model of the harmony of opposites, of mutual benefit that is expressed in a phrase Xi likes to use: “All things are nourished together without their injuring one another (万物并育而不相害，道并行而不相悖 *wanwu bingyu er buxiang hai, dao bingxing er buxiangbei*).” This saying comes from the Confucian *Book of Rites*, in

the “Zhongyong” section,³ and it is embodied in many term used now in the international arena, which may be best summed up with “two win, many win, all win (双赢, 多赢, 共赢 *shuangying, duoying, gongying*),” or simply “win-win (共赢 *gongying*).”

Again, the question arises: what has this got to do with Marxism? Chinese Marxists are fond of quoting a text from Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1846, 50–51), where they speak of the effect of advanced modes of production influencing the course of history so that it becomes “world history.” Any country that seeks to promote itself at the expense of others will end up being isolated and left behind by history. To be added here is the crucial point that the Communist movement has always been an international movement, against capitalist exploitation and for liberation, against colonialism and for national self-determination. It is these senses that China uses the terminology of globalisation.

At the same time, there has always been an emphasis on the need for self-reliance. This reality goes back to the struggle for Liberation and the Red Areas, which needed to develop self-sufficiency not merely in response to blockades by the capitalist-supported Guomindang, but primarily because self-sufficiency was always seen as a necessary internal feature of socialist construction. While it has never been absent in China’s drive for modernisation and rejuvenation, this self-reliance does come to the fore from time to time. It was a distinct feature of Mao Zedong’s focus on economic development in the 1950s, so as to avoid becoming dependent on other countries for vital necessities (then it was food). And it has become a key element in the policy announced in 2020: dual circulation (双循环 *shuang xunhuan*).

A casual observer may suggest that dual circulation was a response to failed trade war launched by the USA, or the disruptions caused by the West’s woefully inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but this is to mistake external causes as the main driver for qualitative change. Instead, we need to consider internal factors: the achievement of a moderately well-off society in 2021; the overcoming of absolute poverty; the considerable advantages in terms of China’s workforce (900 million); the growth of the world’s largest middle-income group (almost 500 million) and the associated desire for a better life; the reality that it is the only major country to have a complete industrial chain, along with global leadership in more and more areas of technological innovation. In light of these developments, the time is ripe for a new stage of high-quality development, so as

³ The online bilingual version, with James Legge’s translation, may be found at <https://ctext.org/liji/zhong-yong>.

to deal more completely with problems that have lingered from the rampant and uneven growth of the 1990s and early 2000s (Cheng and Zhang 2021).

Does this exclude the rest of the world? Not at all, for the approach should not be understood in terms of “zero-sum,” of “I win, you lose.” Instead, the “dual circulation” strategy is yet another manifestation of contradiction analysis, and may be defined as taking internal circulation as the mainstay, and domestic and international cycles as mutually reinforcing one another. This is not to say that such a contradiction will not be without its struggles, which need to be managed carefully to as to forestall the potential for antagonism, or indeed to respond resolutely and clearly to external antagonism. However, such external challenges are limited to relatively few countries of the world, mainly found in the fragmenting and declining “West.” Among the majority – nearly all developing countries – the benefits may be expressed in terms of enhancing one’s own capability as the way to enhance the capabilities of others (think of the Belt and Road Initiative). We may call on another Confucian phrase here, now drawn from *The Analects* (1993, 6.3): “if one wants to sustain oneself, one must sustain others (己欲立而立人 *ji yu li er li ren*).”

Let me pick up the question of antagonism and struggle from the previous paragraph, for it brings us to the nature and practice of class analysis in Chinese Marxism today. A casual observer may feel that class analysis has been dropped in China, but this assumption would be profoundly mistaken, for it is alive and well. To understand how it works, we need to recall the crucial distinction between the universality of contradictions and the particularity of antagonism. In other words, the default in a socialist system is that contradictions are present and indeed manifold, but that they are non-antagonistic. Of course, these contradictions need to be managed so as to forestall the potential for antagonism, as we have found most recently in the rule-of-law solution to the antagonistic class struggle in Hong Kong SAR. Within socialist society classes clearly exist and develop: urban or industrial workers, rural workers (farmers), intellectuals, a middle-income group that has been lifted out of poverty and achieved moderate prosperity.⁴ The ideal is that

4 What should we call the growing middle-income group in China? In the 2010s, there was a significant debate in China as to whether this group should be described as a “middle class [中产阶级 *zhongchan jieceng*].” Sociologists in particular began to use the term in their research on this relatively new group. A significant response came from scholars in leading Party schools, warning that the term “middle class” is determined by its history: it is connected with the growth of capitalism in Europe, especially traders and merchants in towns who came to form a “bourgeoisie” (the term originally meant town-dwellers) that eventually were the agents of bourgeois revolutions. It is due to these connotations arising from capitalist development that “middle class” is inappropriate for socialist construction and a socialist system. Thus, the more neutral and specifically economic term “middle-income group [中等收入群体 *zhongdeng shouru qunti*]” should be used. This is now the preferred usage (Cai 2018; W. Li 2018; 2021; Liu and Liu 2021).

they function in a non-antagonistic manner, although the ideal is never perfect and managing the contradictions needs constant work.

So where does class conflict emerge? On the international scene. In one sense, this level of class struggle between capitalist and socialist countries is nothing new, for it goes back to the earliest days of the Soviet Union. In light of more than a century of experience, we can see that the struggle is at times sharper and at others more muted. How does this analysis square with the distinct international emphasis on win-win, on seeking ways for opposites to complement one another as well as oppose one another. Here we need to recall the clarity of the Marxist emphasis on unity-in-struggle (see Section 3 on “contradiction analysis”). Thus, the search for mutually beneficial agreements, for projects that benefit both sides (such as the BRI), and the desire for true democracy – and not zero-sum – between countries at an international level is always predicated on the reality of struggle. In other words, Chinese analysts and policy-makers are hard-nosed indeed when it comes to assessing the international situation and how best to deal with such realities.

5. Planning and Markets in a Socialist System

This section moves considerably beyond what I presented in the book, since I have undertaken significant further research on the realities of China’s distinct economic system. Briefly put, China has both planning and markets as institutional forms or structures (体制 *tizhi*) within an overall socialist system (制度 *zhidu*). All very well, but how does this actually work?

5.1 De-Linking

The first step requires a de-linking: a market economy is not by definition capitalist, and a planned economy is not coterminous with a socialist system. This is a straightforward point, but it remains quite difficult for those within capitalist countries to understand. Part of the reason goes back to a deceptive slogan by one of the godfathers of a now defunct neoliberalism, Count Ludwig von Mises (1932, 142): “the alternative is still either Socialism or a market economy.” Deceptive because von Mises equates socialism with a planned economy and capitalism with a market economy. It is particularly inappropriate for Marxists and Communists to assume such a neoliberal position.

When we consider the history of market economies, we find examples of ancient military market economies (Persians), Greek and Roman slave market economies (Marx 1894, 588–605), and feudal markets, before we arrive at a capitalist market economy. In

other words, there have been market economies throughout human history, but only one has become a capitalist market economy. In a socialist context, we can trace theoretical reflections on the possibility of markets within a socialist system back to the early twentieth century (Walras 1896; Barone 1908), and then its explicit elaboration with a Marxist framework in the 1930s (Lange 1936; 1937). It was precisely this tradition that was picked up and adapted to a Chinese context by Deng Xiaoping (1979c).

5.2 The Institutional Form of a Market Economy within a Socialist System

In order to understand how a market economy can work within a socialist context, we need to be very clear about the terminology. After considerable debate in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, a specific terminology began to be used (Deng 1992, 370; Jiang 1992; Huang 1994): there is an overall socialist system – 制度 *zhidu* – and within such a system are specific institutional forms or structures – 体制 *tizhi* and at times 体系 *tixi*.⁵ In economic terms, we have two main institutional forms: a market economy and a planned economy. The institutional form of a market economy organises the forces and relations of production in a particular way, allocating resources and distributing products by means of the law of value, price signals, and competition. A planned economy organises the forces and relations of production by means of regulation, long-term calculation of means and ends, dealing with challenges, and setting perimeters for what can and cannot be done. Crucially, these two institutional forms are not necessarily antagonistic, for they can also be complementary within an overall system.

Is this really possible? Here a further point is crucial: an institutional form like a market economy is not simply an instrument or tool (which was the main position in Eastern Europe) that can be used in different systems; instead, a market economy and indeed a planned economy is shaped by, determined in its nature, by the system in question. Thus, we can have a socialist market economy.”⁶ Lest one still entertains the illusion that a market economy is an independent entity (“the market” as the neoclassical ideologues would have it), Huang Nansen (1994, 5) observes: “There is no market economy

5 If one consults a Chinese dictionary, one will find 体系 *tixi* translated as structure, organisation, and set-up. But since the terminology became very specific, I translate the word as “institutional form,” a term drawn from “Régulation Theory” (Boyer and Saillard 2002). An “institutional form” is a specific building block or component of a larger system, and it is one among others.

6 As Xi Jinping observes, the “term ‘socialist’ is the key descriptor, and this is something that we must never lose sight of ... we call our economy a socialist market economy because we are committed to maintaining the strengths of our system (制度 *zhidu*) while effectively avoiding the deficiencies of a capitalist market economy” (Xi 2020b, 4).

institutional form that is independent of the basic economic system of society.” One cannot have the institutional form of the market economy separate from the system of which it forms a part.

5.3 *Ownership and Liberation of Productive Forces*

A further step concerns an extremely important dialectic in the context of socialist construction: the dialectic between the liberation and ownership of productive forces, which pertains to the very definition of socialism in economic terms. Let me set the context by returning to the “Manifesto of the Communist Party.”

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production (*Produktionsinstrumente*) in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces (*Produktionskräfte*) as rapidly as possible (Marx and Engels 1848, 504).

Note carefully: Marx and Engels speak of both the centralised ownership of the means of production by the proletariat embodied – at this point – in the state, and the increase of productive forces. In short, socialism entails both ownership and – to use standard Chinese terminology – the liberation of productive forces (解放生产力 *jeifang shengchanli*). A question: does ownership concern merely the instruments or means of production, as suggested in the Manifesto?⁷ Here it is instructive to consider another text by Engels (1877, 193), where he speaks of the “taking possession (*Besitzergreifung*)”⁸ by the proletariat of productive forces,” which “increases (*steigert*) the productive forces of society (*gesellschaftlichen Produktivkräfte*).” Clearly ownership refers not merely to the means of production, but includes the broader category of productive forces. Why make this point? For Marx and Engels the crucial feature of socialist economic construction entails both ownership and liberation of the productive forces, which – as actual experience has shown – entails a constant dialectic. As Stalin was to point out, the one needs the other, with constant readjustments as one side leaps ahead and the other side needs to be brought up to speed (Stalin 1952, 266–74).⁹

⁷ The specific meaning of “means of production” would come to be clarified as all of the materials necessary for human beings to engage in production. The relative looseness of the terminology used by Marx and Engels would come to be clarified – out of direct experience – in the Soviet Union, and one may consult this development in the three editions of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Berestnei 1940; Malyshev 1955; Vasilchuk 1975).

⁸ The semantic field of *Besitzergreifung* includes seizure, possession, and control.

⁹ Stalin pointed out that certain economic laws have a valence in socialist construction – not least the contradictions between the forces and relations of production. On the one hand, the radical shift in relations

5.3.1 Stage 1: 1949-1978

Let us see how the main stages of socialist economic construction look in light of this dialectic. We may distinguish between three main stages, the first of which focused on radical changes in ownership (relations of production) so as to liberate productive forces. The logic behind this move was straightforward: drawing from Marx and Engels, the main contradiction of a capitalist system was understood in terms of socialised labour and the private ownership of the forces of production by the bourgeoisie and remnants of the landlord class. Thus, a Communist Party in power should solve the contradiction by socialising the ownership of the forces of production. Other factors made this a necessary move, particularly the need to prevent counter-revolution and instigate the economic structures needed both to overcome the previous system and begin the process of socialist construction – abolition of bourgeois private property, industrialisation in light of “backward” economic conditions, collectivisation of agriculture, and a fully planned economy.

This approach produced what is known as the “first economic miracle” in China. From being one of the poorest countries in the world, there were great improvements in socioeconomic well-being, population growth (in numbers and life expectancy), significant developments in science and technology, an independent industrial and national economic system, development of education, culture and health, and China’s emergence in international affairs, all the way from the UN to increased appeal in and engagement with developing countries (Cheng and Cao 2019, 6–8).

5.3.2 Stage 2: 1978-2012

Nonetheless, internal contradictions began to mount: the relations of production became a drag on productive forces, since the latter had leapt ahead and the former had not kept pace. Poverty was still a major problem in rural areas and many regional cities, the non-antagonistic contradictions between classes broke out into open struggle in the second half of the 1960s, the economy was stagnating, and creative solutions dwindled.

of production – public ownership and collectivisation – had a profound effect on unleashing productive forces after the October Revolution; on the other hand, the dialectic of forces and relations and production changes in light of specific conditions. In a certain situation, the forces of production lag and become a fetter on production relations, while in another situation the reverse applies. The solution: the laggard needs to be brought up to speed.

The response was to seek alternative ways to liberate productive forces, with what is now known as the period of the reform and opening-up. As the life-long Communist, Deng Xiaoping (1980, 310), put it: the “development of the productive forces ... is the most fundamental revolution from the viewpoint of historical development.” As we saw earlier (section 2), for Deng “poor socialism” is not socialism; instead, socialism should seek to develop productive forces, improve the country’s strength and the lives of the people. And as Chinese scholars and policy-makers have made very clear, the reform and opening-up had nothing to do with neoliberal policies; instead, the policy arose in response to internal contradictions.

It is during this period that we find the combination of both planning and market institutional forms within a socialist system, public ownership as the mainstay and other forms of ownership alongside, incentives to innovate as the way to solve problems, and a resolute emphasis on the socialist principle, “from each according to ability, to each according to *work*.” As a result, China launched itself on a path that has led to it becoming a global economic power. While nominally the “second largest economy” in terms of GDP, it contributes more than any other country to the global economy (more than 30%), its industrial output and foreign exchange reserves are the highest in the world, it has the largest internal market, it has developed a comprehensive system of quality education, health, and welfare, and it has seen Hong Kong and Macao return (Cheng 2018, 2–3).

5.3.3 Stage 3: 2012-Present

However, by the 1990s the reform and opening-up was revealing its own contradictions, due to an at times over-emphasis on liberating productive forces. As already noted above (Section 4.1), in the midst of China’s stunning economic success, a spate of well-documented and widely-studied problems became apparent during the “wild 90s,” and even into the early 2000s: declining conditions for workers and consequent unrest; illegal appropriation of collectively owned village lands; a growing gap between rich and poor regions; environmental degradation; ideological disarray; and a rift between the CPC and the common people, leading to corruption, loss of trust, and lack of knowledge of Marxism even by leading cadres. As I pointed out earlier (Section 4.1), these contradictions are seen as incidental to the process of reform, which means that the method to solve them is to deepen reform itself.

One way to consider the results is in terms of public ownership. In light of repeated warnings from scholars and policy advisers concerning a drift away from public

ownership as the mainstay, there has been a notable reform and strengthening of state-owned enterprises so that, as efficient hubs of innovation, their role as the backbone of the economy is being enhanced. They now contribute to over 50% of China's total economy. But this is only one perspective, and it risks seeing the shift in emphasis as a type of return to the features of the first stage. Instead, the process of deepening reform is far more comprehensive, covering a full range from the economic base to superstructural components. We can already begin to see clear results: about 800 million rural and urban workers have been lifted out of absolute poverty, with almost 500 million now in a "middle-income" group; a comprehensive welfare system continues to be rolled out for 1.4 billion people; the gap between rich and poor has been decreasing now for about a decade; rural and urban workers are in control of China's path through the ever-strengthening socialist democratic system; in light of ecological civilisation, China has become a world leader in 'green growth'; and the 92-million strong CPC is more united, more knowledgeable about Marxism, and more focused on people's needs and the task ahead than at almost any time in its past.

The formulations of the new stage vary, such as the great leap "from prosperity to strength (从富起来到强起来 *cong fu qilai dao qiang qilai*)," the "third economic miracle (第三个经济奇迹 *di san ge jingji qiji*)," or "socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era (新时代中国特色社会主义 *xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi*)" (Xi 2017b; Cheng and Cao 2019, 6). However, it is best captured with the resolute emphasis on "taking the people as the centre (以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*)," or, more simply, a "people-centred" approach, which is seen as a dialectical transcendence or sublation (超越 *chaoyue* and 扬弃 *yangqi*) of market and planning in a socialist system.

6. Seeking a 小康 *xiaokang* Society, or, Socialist Modernisation

This section summarises my research on the origins and reinterpretation of a central policy position known as a 小康社会 *xiaokang shehui*, a moderately well-off, peaceful, healthy, and safe society. This term was used neither by Mao Zedong, nor by Communist Party circles before the 1970s. In fact, the term was first mentioned by Deng Xiaoping, who famously proposed in 1979:

The so-called four modernisations are aimed at changing the poor and backward situation in China, gradually raising the living standards of the Chinese people, restoring China to a position in international affairs commensurate with its status, and making more contributions to humankind. The four modernisations we are going to achieve are those with a Chinese style (中国式 *zhongguoshi*). Our concept of the four modernisations is not a concept of

modernisation like yours, but a concept of a “moderately well-off family (小康之家 *xiaokang zhi jia*)” (Deng 1979a, 240).

The four modernisations (四个现代化 *si ge xiandaihua*) – in agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology – had initially been developed by Mao Zedong and especially Zhou Enlai in the 1960s, so Deng is explicitly claiming a continuity with that line. But what gives these modernisations their Chinese style (中国式 *zhongguoshi*)? At this point, Deng picks up a term from the Confucian tradition: 小康 *xiaokang*.

To understand what this means we need to turn to the ancient *Book of Rites* (礼记 *Liji*), which was compiled in the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE.

When the Great Way (大道 *dadao*) was practiced, all-under-heaven was as common (天下为公 *tianxia wei gong*). They chose men of worth and ability [for public office]; they practiced good faith and cultivated good will. Therefore, people did not single out only their parents to love, nor did they single out only their children for care. They saw to it that the aged were provided for until the end, that the able-bodied had employment, and that the young were brought up well. Compassion was shown to widows, orphans, the childless, and those disabled by disease, so that all had sufficient support. Men had their portion [of land], and women, their homes after marriage. Wealth they hated to leave unused, yet they did not necessarily store it away for their own use. Strength they hated not to exert, yet they did not necessarily exert it only for their own benefit. Thus selfish scheming was thwarted before it could develop. Bandits and thieves, rebels and traitors did not show themselves. So the outer gates were left open. This was known as the period of the Great Unity (大同 *datong*) ...

Now the Great Way (大道 *dadao*) has fallen into obscurity, and all under heaven is as family (天下为家 *tianxia wei jia*). Each loves only his own parents and cares only for his own children. Wealth and strength they consider to exist only for their own advantage. Hereditary succession among the great men [the lords of the land], they take to be a sufficient rite. Inner and outer walls, ditches, and moats, they take to be adequate defenses. As for the rites and duties, they think them the main structures by which to rectify relations between ruler and subject, to consolidate relations between father and son, to induce concord between elder and younger sibling, to induce loving harmony between husband and wife. By them, they set up institutions and measures; by them, they lay out fields and hamlets; by them, they judge men of courage and understanding to be worthy; by them, they consider merit to accrue to men's personal advantage. Thus selfish schemes are invented. Warfare derives also from this ... This was known as the period of 小康 *xiaokang*.

I have – with some small modifications – used the translation by Nylan (2001, 196), although one may consult other translations of this famous and deeply influential passage.¹⁰ Much could and indeed has been said about this material, and the tradition of more than 2000 years has key moments that would be immensely influential. Let me emphasise the following.

To begin with, in the text attributed to Confucius the age of 大同 *datong*, the Great Harmony, Unity, or Togetherness, precedes that of the age in which he lives, namely 小康 *xiaokang*. That he longs for the earlier age of 大同 *datong* should be obvious.

Second, a crucial moment of reinterpretation would come with He Xiu (129-82 CE), who came from the more esoteric *Gongyang* tradition of commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋 *chunqiu*). He Xiu distinguished between three ages, with one superseding the other: the “decayed and disordered (衰乱 *shuailuan*)” world; one of “rising peace (升平 *shengping*)”; and one of the “great peace (大平 *daping*).”¹¹ Note carefully: these are not direct references to the two ages of 大同 *datong* and 小康 *xiaokang*, since He Xiu was commenting on a different text. Further, He Xiu speaks of the “great peace (大平 *daping*),” which would later come to be known as the “greatest peace (太平 *taiping*).” In fact, the connection between He Xiu’s three ages and the Confucian ages in the *Book of Rites* would come much later, with the work of the (liberal) reformer, Kang Youwei, and his *Book of Datong* (1935).

Third, He Xiu characterised each of the three ages as follows:

a) The decayed and disordered world (衰乱 *shuailuan*) = one of rumour (所传闻 *suochuanwen*), that is, a chaotic era in which the country is broken up into small states and records are non-existent, so that rumours and hearsay abound and behaviour is inappropriate in light of established rituals.

b) Rising peace (升平 *shengping*) = what is heard and thus recorded (所闻 *suowen*), that is, an era with written records and a united country of all the Chinese peoples, but also with foreigners outside the country.

c) Great peace (大平 *daping*) = what is seen (所见 *suojian*) and thus experienced and verifiable, leading to world that is united – both near and far, large and small – and in which one’s inner being (心 *xin*) is deep and thoroughly known.

¹⁰ The online version, with the classical translation by James Legge, may be found at <https://ctext.org/liji/li-yun>.

¹¹ The text may also be found on a number of websites, such as www.guoxue123.com/jinbu/ssj/gyz/index.htm.

Fourth, note carefully the implications. It would be too easy to connect the Confucian Great Harmony and He Xiu's Greatest Peace with Western ideas of utopia. This would be a mistake, for Western ideas of utopia are determined by the inescapable influence of ontological transcendence (whether in religious or secular terms). Thus, the ideal world is one that is beyond human experience and cannot be verified; it becomes the topic of speculation, mythology, and metaphor. It is not for nothing that the term used is "no place" (*utopia*), which is at the same time the "best place" (*outopia*). The contrast with the Chinese tradition is sharp: the ideal world of the Greatest Peace is precisely one that is "seen" and thus experienced and verifiable. By contrast, a world that can be known only by rumour and speculation is one of chaos and disorder.

Fifth, a question arises: given that the Great Harmony and Greatest Peace are the most desirable, requiring much arduous work and much patience, what are we to make of the lower or more moderate level, the one of Rising Peace and Moderate Well-Being (小康 *xiaokang*). If we consider the text from the *Book of Rites*, a 小康 *xiaokang* society is a step down, a less desirable state of affairs.¹² Let us consider now another and even earlier text, the *Book of Songs* (诗经 *Shijing*) from the tenth century BCE. In the section called "The People are Hard Pressed (民劳 *Minlu*)," from Part III, Book 9, it presents five stanzas stressing the alleviation of intolerable burdens on the people. I quote the first eight characters of each stanza:

The people indeed are heavily burdened,
But perhaps a little ease (小康 *xiaokang*) may be got for them.

The people indeed are heavily burdened,
But perhaps a little rest (小休 *xiaoxiu*) may be got for them.

The people indeed are heavily burdened,
But perhaps a little relief (消息 *xiaoxi*) may be got for them.

The people indeed are heavily burdened,
But perhaps a little repose (小偈 *xiaokai*) may be got for them.

The people indeed are heavily burdened,

¹² We should be wary of reading these ages in an evolutionary sequence, for their relationship is more often characterised in cyclical or dialectical terms, with the risk of chaos increasing the closer one gets to the Great Harmony or Greatest Peace.

But perhaps a little tranquillity (小安 *xiao'an*) may be got for them.¹³

In short, for the *Book of Songs* 小康 *xiaokang* – and the associated rest, relief, repose, and peace or tranquillity – provides a more positive image, of people relieved from the burdens of struggle.

Finally, let us return to Deng Xiaoping, who clearly deployed 小康 *xiaokang* in the sense of the *Book of Songs*. After the century of humiliation, revolutionary struggle, and the arduous task of constructing socialism in the search for common prosperity, to achieve a 小康 *xiaokang* society would be a significant achievement. That this term was reinterpreted in light of the long process of socialist construction should be obvious by now, providing an excellent example of the sinification (中国化 *zhongguohua*) of Marxism.

When we study Deng Xiaoping's works, we find 小康 *xiaokang* very frequently indeed. It should be no surprise that the term would become a core policy of the CPC and of the government itself (Jiang 2002; Hu 2007; 2012; Xi 2017b). What was the target date for achieving such a society? 2021, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. What were the benchmarks? Abolishing absolute poverty, ecological civilisation, and managing risks (think of COVID-19). Each were indeed achieved by 2021.

7. Socialist Democracy in China

I now turn to socialist democracy, concerning which there is precious little knowledge outside China. Let me propose the following thesis: China's socialist democratic system is already quite mature and superior to any other democratic system. Actually, this is not my proposition, but that of a host of Chinese specialists. They are very clear that China's socialist democratic system is already showing its latent quality.¹⁴

What does “democracy (民主 *minzhu*)” mean in China? The key term used to describe democracy is “people as masters of the country (人民当家作主 *renmin dangjia*)”

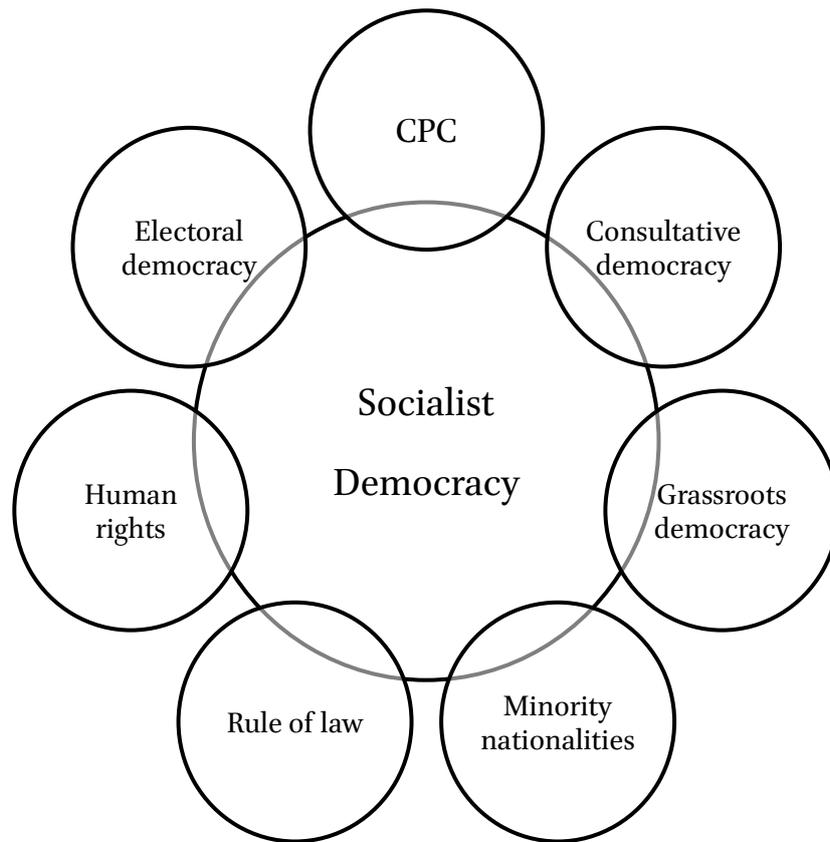
13 Legge's translation may be found at <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/min-lu>.

14 The reader will need to put aside – or wash your brain – of preconceptions concerning “democracy.” There is no such thing as “democracy” per se, but only historical forms of democracy. Of these, Western-style capitalist democracy is only one form, and quite thin at that. As Xi Jinping observed in a crucial speech on democracy in October, 2021: “If the people are only awakened for voting but enter a dormant period soon after, if they only listen to the song and dance (天花乱坠 – flowers cascading from the sky, and thus wildly extravagant claims) during an election but have no right at all to speak afterwards, if they are only favoured during the canvassing of votes but left out in the cold afterwards, such a democracy is not a genuine democracy.” See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2021/1014/c64036-32253744.html>.

zuozhu.” The phrase means that the people (人民 *renmin*) act as the master or take responsibility for (作主 *zuozhu*) the affairs of the house (当家 *dangjia*) – the “house (家 *jia*)” in question being the country as whole. From the CPC’s eighteenth congress onward, we also find “people centred” or “according to the people as centre (以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*)” (Hu 2012, 639).

Further, the system of socialist democracy in China has seven integrated structures: electoral democracy; consultative democracy; grassroots democracy; minority nationalities policy; rule of law; human rights; and leadership of the Communist Party. As Xi Jinping observed in 2021, this people’s democracy is “a full-chain, all-dimensional, all-encompassing democracy, and the most extensive, authentic, and effective socialist democracy.”¹⁵ Let me use a diagram to illustrate:

¹⁵ See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2021/1014/c64036-32253744.html>.



In this section, I deal with electoral, consultative, and base-level (grassroots) democracy, and in the following sections I will deal with the remaining components.

7.1 Electoral Democracy

In China, electoral democracy is practised mainly with regard to the people's congresses. Given that China has stepped onto the centre of the world stage, there is increasing attention – albeit misguided in some parts – on the National People's Congress (NPC) that meets once a year, usually in March or April. Thousands of elected delegates come to Beijing to make major decisions. Indeed, the NPC is the highest legislative authority in China, and for anything to become law it must be approved by the NPC.

However, the NPC is part of a much wider structure. There are five levels of people's congresses, with the most basic level found in villages, minority nationality townships, and towns.

1. National People's Congress (first met in September 1954)
2. Congresses in provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly administered by the central government
3. Congresses in sub-districts of larger cities and in autonomous prefectures
4. Congresses of cities not sub-divided, municipal districts, counties, and autonomous counties
5. Congresses in villages, minority nationality townships, and towns

Given that China has a population of 1.4 billion, this means that there are many, many people's congresses across the country.

How do elections work? All of the congresses require delegates to be elected.

All very well, but do people vote? Every citizen over the age of 18 has the right to vote and there are strict regulations concerning the number of candidates and number of voters required for an election to be valid. Only when more than 50% of eligible voters in a district actually vote is an election valid. The candidate with the majority of votes is elected.

Who can stand for election? Any citizen may stand for election. Candidates can be nominated by all political parties and mass organisations. A candidate can also be nominated by ten eligible voters in direct elections and by ten delegates in indirect elections.

How many candidates stand for election? The basic rule is that the number of candidates must be more than the number of delegates to be elected. In direct elections, the number of candidates must be 30%-100% more than the number of delegates elected; in indirect elections, the excess of candidates to delegates elected must be 20%-50%.

Why do I distinguish between direct and indirect elections? Elections to the lowest two levels of the people's congresses are direct, with local people voting for candidates. The next three levels are indirect, which simply means that delegates from the lower levels of people's congresses can be elected to higher levels. Thus, by the time the 3,000 or so delegates prepare to go to Beijing for the NPC, there has already been an extraordinarily detailed process to elect them for this task.

Are candidates vetted? Of course, since you need experienced and quality people, with the necessary skills and abilities to make a real contribution to people's well-being. That they should be supporters – albeit well-informed and constructively critical – of China's socialist system goes without saying.

Can electoral democracy be improved? Unlike the few Western countries, which have stagnating and now fragmenting political systems, China's electoral democracy is seen as a constant work in progress. When you immerse yourself in the immense amount of analysis and research in China, you will find many proposals, such as improving the system of elections to people's congresses; ensuring the principle of the same vote in urban and rural areas; enhancing the ability of the standing committees of people's congresses so as to undertake the work of the congresses when the latter are not meeting; further education as how the system works so that people can participate in a more informed manner; ensuring that all eligible voters can physically vote, including migrant workers from the countryside; and improved supervision of the organs of governance so as to eliminate bribery and ensure more efficient functionality.

One question remains: observers used to the antagonistic politics of Western countries – in which everything becomes a focus of political point-scoring (think of COVID-19) – struggle to understand how voting works in the NPC. Most resolutions are passed, usually with a huge majority. Is the NPC, then, simply a “rubber stamp” for the will of the CPC? Not at all, but in order to understand how this works, we need to turn to consultative democracy.

7.2 Consultative Democracy

Some history: while people's congresses date back to the 1940s,¹⁶ the reality and practice of consultative democracy is even older and more deep-rooted. The key is to be found in the “mass line (群众路线 *qunzhong luxian*),” which was developed in liberated Red Areas during the long revolutionary struggle. While we find early elaborations on the practice and theory of the mass line in the works of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Zhou Enlai and others, it was, of course, Mao who coined the slogan “from the masses, to the masses” – a practice that arose from concrete experiences of integrating the will of the non-Party masses with the policies of the CPC.

¹⁶ The practice followed Mao's instruction in 1940: “China may now adopt a system of people's congresses, from the national people's congress down to the provincial, county, district and township people's congresses, with all levels electing their respective governmental bodies” (Mao 1940, 352).

We need to understand the terminology used here. To begin with, the term “masses (群众 *qunzhong*)” is rich in its connotations: it designates the rural and urban workers who form the bedrock of the CPC. At the same time, the term “masses” overlaps significantly with the term “people (人民 *renmin*).” In this light, expressions such as “the Party leads the people” or “taking the people as centre (以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*)” also mean “the Party leads the masses” and “taking the masses as the centre.” Further, “mass organisations” play a crucial role in China’s political system. They are neither social organisations of the sort found in bourgeois civil society and in tension with the state, nor are they Communist Party organisations. Instead, mass organisations are distinct and have a “mass character (群众性 *qunzhongxing*),” with deep political roots and a long history. In short, they represent public concerns that are not directly connected with the structures of governance.

How does the mass line work? Let me quote the scholar Ma Yide (2017, 27): the mass line “is inclusive, as the opinions of the broad mobilised masses are listened to; it is guided by reason, as the views of the masses are studied and become the views of the central system; it achieves balance through reflection, as opinions are constantly tested through the actions of the masses; and it links consultation and decision-making, as the views of the masses are elevated into action.”

From this long history of practice, what is known as consultative democracy arose in the New China. Today it takes many forms, including:

1) Institutionalisation in the many levels of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conferences (CPPCC). The top-level CPPCC meets at the same time as the CPC, providing detailed advice and consultation concerning legislation to the many committees and delegates at the NPC.

2) The many levels of CPPCCs include delegates from all representative groups, including the eight other political parties, minority nationalities, religious bodies, mass organisations, and new social groups such as migrant workers. This is not to say delegates from these groups cannot be elected to the people’s congresses, for they are elected to those bodies as well.

3) The ever-expanding forms of consultation and feedback. These include the old-fashioned but irreplaceable practice of face-to-face discussion, but this is now supplemented by a plethora of methods such as on-line consultation and feedback, soliciting proposals, and much, much more. Here too can we find the myriad apps on mobile phones, which one can use for feedback and voicing opinion. With many decades

of experience, Chinese people are well accustomed to such practices and are vocal indeed about all manner of issues.

4) Consultation is the standard practice in the multitude of meetings that take place, whether in mass and social organisations, multi-level people's congresses, CPC organisations at all levels (which are also concerned with Party building), rural and urban community self-government organisations, and migrant labourers from the countryside. This democratic practice has influenced the forms of urban and rural governance, policy agendas (from local budgets to the national five-year plans), the structure of direct elections at the grassroots level, and labour-management relations.

5) Base-level or grassroots democracy is also a form of consultative democracy, but I will discuss this practice in the next section.

So we have two substantial forms of democratic practice in China, each with a long history and – crucially – each engaged with and influencing one another. The way they work together has both deep cultural roots and a distinct Marxist emphasis, in which non-antagonistic contradictions are the key to socialist construction.

To return to the question I raised at the close of the previous section: voting patterns in the NPC. For those used to Western-style antagonistic politics, to “mud-slinging,” political point-scoring, and “parliamentary privilege” under which a politician is free from being prosecuted for defamation and slander, the practices in China may seem a little strange. The key lies in the dialectical interaction of both electoral and consultative democracy, in which they complement one another through their strengths and are able to resolve respective limitations. By the time a piece of legislation comes up for a vote in the NPC, it has undergone an extremely long and arduous process of deliberation and consultation. Multiple meetings – in the many bodies mentioned earlier – take place, feedback is sought, and differences in opinion are aired without holding back. Indeed, contrary arguments are encouraged and expected, with debate, revision, and further debate until a consensus is reached. Only then can the legislation arrive at the NPC for a vote.

7.3 Grassroots Democracy

A distinct type of consultative democracy is “base-level (基层 *jiceng*)” democracy, or what is known in English as “grassroots” democracy. At one level, this type of democracy is the oldest in human history. We may call it “base-level communism,” and it goes back – in different forms – for millennia. Friedrich Engels (1882b), for example,

devoted considerable attention to old European practices, especially in Germany's "Mark association (*Markgenossenschaft*)."

At a more specific level, grassroots democracy has developed its own forms over many decades in China as part of the socialist democratic system. We find it emerging during the period of revolutionary struggle and in the political structures of the Red Areas, as well as the "small parliaments (小议会 *xiao yihui*)" typical of rural areas and the mostly spontaneous urban committees in the 1950s. My interest here is in a new stage of developing grassroots democracy from the first decade of the new millennium. By now there are tens – if not hundreds – of thousands of local examples from which to draw insights. And if you dig into the analysis and research on the practices of grassroots democracy, you will find an immense amount of material.

Many of these practices began with participatory budgeting, and then expanded into many other areas of local governance. We find them in villages in remote mountainous areas, in the urban districts of major cities, and in many towns and smaller cities. Out of a very large number of examples, let us consider two examples, the first concerning participatory budgeting in Wuxi city, Jiangsu province, and the second from Dengzhou, a small county-level city in Henan province.

7.4 Wuxi, Jiangsu Province

The practice of participatory budgeting in Wuxi dates from 2006 and is known as "sunshine finance (阳光财政 *yangguang caizheng*)."¹⁷ It signals an earlier stage in the long process of combating corruption among some city administrators, and was developed to include local people in the crucial matters pertaining to budgets and projects. The process in Wuxi can be divided into three stages.

Stage 1: This the stage of comprehensive consultation and is known as "projects recommended by the masses before the meeting." Opinion and feedback is sought at all levels, making the most of community neighbourhood committees, residents' groups, and residents themselves. Social media is also used to garner opinions and conduct surveys.

Stage 2: This is the decision stage and is known as "items decided by popular vote at the meeting." The steps are as follows: a) selecting residents to participate in the meeting by drawing lots and selecting from previous representatives, with an emphasis on including common people and deputies of the local People's Congress; b) calling a meeting, which begins with a detailed report, item by item, from the proposal developed

17 I draw this example from Shen Jianlin and Tan Shizan (2016).

in stage 1; c) extensive consultation, debate, and dialogue with people's representatives, which includes explanations of any items the people do not understand or with which they are dissatisfied; d) a vote by the residents' representatives, with a focus on identifying priority expenditure items and those lower on the list of priorities..

Stage 3: The final stage is known as “follow-up supervision by the masses after the meeting,” and focuses on implementation. In this stage, project managers are required to keep the residents' committee informed about each stage of the project, with regular onsite inspections. After completion, public representatives and experts make an evaluation of the project, and local residents can also provide feedback on project performance to the local government. These assessments form part of the process for developing a new project.

7.5 Dengzhou, Henan Province

Dengzhou is a small county-level city focused on primary industries. By now, the items subject to democratic consultation in Dengzhou concern much more than budgets.¹⁸ They run all the way from long-terms plans for rural construction to family planning and rural cooperative medical care. In these democratic activities, participants are elected in light of a reputation for honesty, fairness, and political consciousness. A quota applies, ensuring that representatives also come from new interest groups and emerging social organisations. Clearly, they are not “hand-picked” to give a prearranged result, and the approach is not tokenistic, as one finds in Western systems in which bodies pretend to seek public opinion and then proceed as already decided. Instead, Chinese grassroots has substance and real representation.

Dengzhou's takes what is known as the “4+2” approach, which entails “four meetings and two public announcements.” In more detail:

First meeting: the local CPC branch engages in wide consultation and detailed investigations to make preliminary proposals.

Second meeting: the village's “two committees” debate the CPC branch proposals.

Third meeting: all village CPC members meet to debate opinions from the village's “two committees,” and engage in further gathering of public opinion.

Fourth meeting: the villagers' representative meeting or villagers' resolution meeting discusses and votes on proposals from the previous gathering.

¹⁸ The example of Dengzhou is drawn from Bu Wanhong (2015).

First public announcement: resolutions from the villagers' meetings are publicised for no less than seven days.

Second public announcement: results of implementation of the decisions are announced to villagers in good time.

Wuxi and Dengzhou are merely two examples out of thousands upon thousands of such practices. Importantly, they do not take a one-size-fits-all approach, but use the well-tried targeted approach. By this I mean that each practice of grassroots democracy arises from local concerns and realities. Constant analysis and proposals for improvement lead to refining the methods and indeed – as with Dengzhou – expanding them. The growing experience also ensures that participants become familiar with the practice and can participate more effectively.

7.6 Socialist Democracy in Practice

I have been able to provide only an outline of electoral, consultative, and grassroots democracy in this section, but I hope that it gives an insight into how extensive such practices are in China, and indeed how long a history lies behind them. Let me close by emphasising that socialist democracy in China is not seen as a given. They do not feel they have “arrived” at socialist democracy – unlike Western countries where their political systems have stagnated and are now atrophying. Instead, socialist democracy in China is a constant work in progress. Targeted practices, careful expansion, further education in socialist democracy, ensuring full representation from all groups, enhancing and encouraging participation – these and more are simply part of a constant process of reform and renewal.

8. The Chinese Marxist Approach to Human Rights

A significant component of China's socialist democracy concerns human rights. While the socialist tradition has a much longer history of the development of human rights, I focus here on the Chinese Marxist approach.¹⁹ Let me begin with two images:

¹⁹ The best work in English is by Sun Pinghua (2014).

European Liberal Tradition

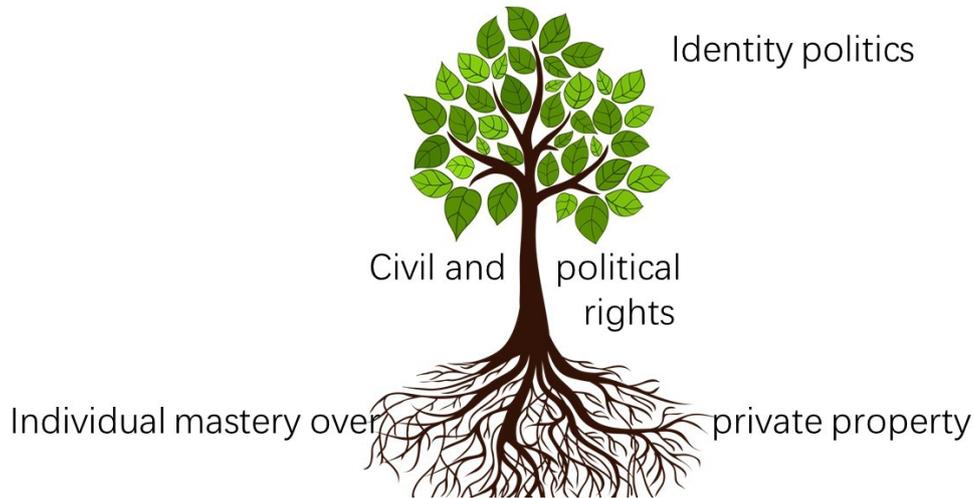


Diagram 1: Western liberal tradition of human rights

Chinese Marxist Tradition

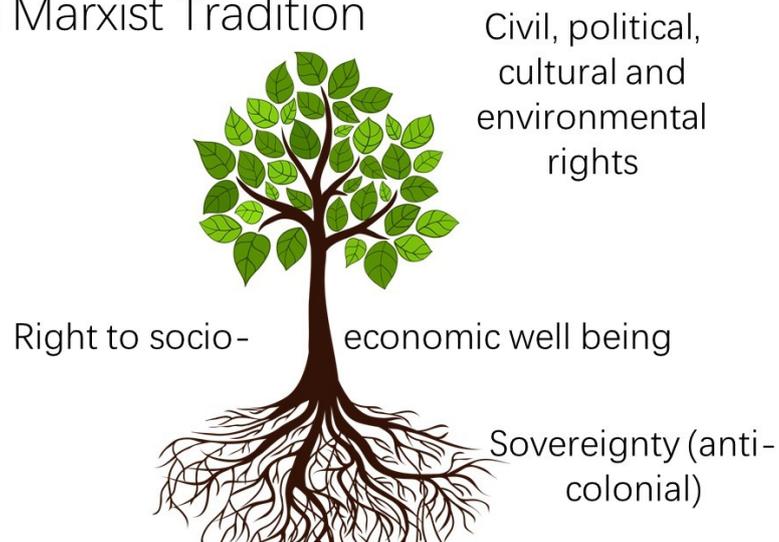


Diagram 2: Chinese Marxist tradition of human rights

If you study each of these images – which I have used on a number of occasions now – you will notice some distinct differences. Let us begin with the roots of each approach. In the European liberal tradition, the roots lie in individual mastery over private property. These roots have a somewhat longish history, going back to the twelfth century CE. In the wake of the rediscovery – under the “lawyer popes” – of ancient Roman law

concerning private property, the term for law – *ius* – came to have the primary sense of an innate power – embodied in reason – that leads a human being to act rightly. Crucially, *ius* was intimately connected with another Latin term, *dominium*, which means mastery. For the ancient Romans it meant mastery over a slave (as a thing – *res*) and thus private property. In the European middle ages, *dominium* came to mean the mastery of a rational and free-willing individual over his or her actions. Thus, *ius* was exercised through *dominium*: a right is determined by the category of private property and can work only if an individual has power to enact it.

Contrast these roots with the Chinese Marxist approach. These roots lie in anti-colonial, or anti-hegemonic sovereignty. Why this emphasis? A country subjected to colonial or semi-colonial domination has no rights whatsoever, and no foundation on which to build rights. Let us be clear: this is not some European (“Westphalian” is the usual term) notion of sovereignty, in which the states of Europe by and large agreed not to impinge on the territory of one another – although the excuses were frequent – but spent much of their time trampling upon other countries around the globe. Instead, for China and other formerly colonised countries sovereignty is predicated on the anti-colonial struggle and national liberation. Externally imposed hegemony and interference will be prevented at all costs; but one also does not seek to impose hegemony on anyone else. This is a position held by the vast majority of countries in the world, namely, those still working hard to develop their economies after the colonial plunder of European powers.

Let us now turn to the core human rights (the trunk). For those former colonisers, with their emphasis on mastery over oneself in terms of private property, the core human rights have become civil and political rights. The number of such rights is quite small: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of assembly. They used to espouse the right to life, but their woeful mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that they abandoned this right some time ago. The end-run – the foliage – is in identity politics. Not only can one choose any number of identities, but the definition of “progressive” has been hijacked by such identity politics.

For a Chinese Marxist approach, the core human right is that of socio-economic well-being. This may have different formulations, such as the right to survival, work, and development. Why this emphasis? It follows from anti-hegemonic sovereignty, since formerly colonised countries suffered chronic poverty and underdevelopment when they finally achieved liberation. Their main emphasis has been to improve the socio-economic well-being of the people – food, shelter, clothing, heat and so on – and the means to do so,

such as science and technology, a strong state, and a resolute emphasis on the productive forces. This is the core human right in the Marxist tradition, and so also for Chinese Marxism. While socio-economic well-being is improving, the other rights – the foliage – can gradually develop. These include civil, political, cultural, and environmental rights. Obviously, such rights develop historically, are granted by society, and require an adequate level of development to be enacted – always within a socialist context.

In one sense, this Chinese Marxist approach to human rights undergirds all of the economic, social, and cultural policies in China, from the minority nationalities policy (especially in poorer areas such as Xinjiang and Tibet), through common prosperity, to the international Belt and Road Initiative. We can also see how it lies behind the Marxist reinterpretation of a 小康 *xiaokang* society, which I discussed in earlier (Section 6).

One final question: how do the two approaches to human rights relate to one another? Are they mutually exclusive, in an either-or manner? The Chinese preference is a both-and approach. Let me put it this way: human rights as such comprise a universal or commonality, but the way such rights are manifested depends on the concrete conditions of each location. Even more, the very idea of a universal must always include the conditions of its emergence and its history in any analysis. To do otherwise is to engage in a false universal, in which one set of values is assumed to be applicable to – and is at times imposed on – others in very different situations.

9. Minority Nationalities Policy

A further component of China's socialist democratic system concerns the minority nationalities preferential policies (少数民族优惠政策 *shaoshu minzu youhui zhengce*).

9.1 Defining 民族 *minzu*

Let us begin with the word 民族 *minzu*, which is best translated as “nationality” and not as “ethnic group,” for which 族群 *zuqun* is the proper term.²⁰ Why? A nationality is not determined by ethnicity. A range of determining features play a role, such as cultural or regional commonality, religion, or the appropriation of an identity initially proposed by government agencies.²¹

20 The semantic field of 族群 *zuqun* also includes “race.”

21 The origin of 民族 *minzu* is somewhat complex. See further the authoritative *Cihai* (2009, 2734).

To give an example: the Hui nationality (a Muslim group) has its roots in the era of the Tang Dynasty more than a millennium ago. The Tang emperors began to invite Muslim peoples from further west to come to Chang'an (now Xi'an), due to their reputation for hard work and trade. Over time, especially with the later Song and Yuan dynasties, more were encouraged to come to China and they spread across the country. A long history of intermarriage with Han people, as well converts among the Han, led eventually to a distinct nationality. Now for the twist: the Hui have become strongly conscious of being a nationality. This means that the long history of the Hui, with migration, intermarriage, state decisions and policies, has led to, if not produced, a strong sense of a distinct identity. This example can be multiplied across nationalities, which throughout China's long and continuous history have developed through constant interaction with others (R. Ma 2007, 26). Thus, a nationality is distinct group within a state, a group defined by language, location, cultural history, economic shape, and at times religion.²²

How do the preferential policies (优惠政策 *youhui zhengce*) work in China? After an intense process of research and identification in the 1950s (R. Ma 2012), the government eventually came to identify 56 official 民族 *minzu*, including the majority Han and 55 other groups, ranging in size from almost 20 million to a few thousand.²³ The policies are among the earliest enacted, since the realities of nationalities is one of the basic structural features of Chinese governance. Thus, in the "Common Program" of 1949, we find: 'All minority nationalities have the freedom to develop their spoken and written languages, to maintain or reform their customs and religious beliefs. The people's governments shall assist the people of the minority nationalities in developing the construction of their political, economic, cultural and educational institutions' (CPPCC 1949, s. art. 53; see also NPC 2018, s. art. 4). As with the Soviet Union, nationalities have been an integral part of the political structure from the beginning – for this reason, there are part of the socialist democratic system.

9.2 Economic Development

There are four key features of the minority nationalities policy: economic development; cultural autonomy, with a focus on language, customs and education;

22 The basis for such policies was Stalin's (1913, 307) much-studied definition of a nation or nationality: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological storehouse manifested in a common culture."

23 By far the best works in English on China's nationalities are by Mackerras and Hao (Mackerras 2003; Hao 2020).

political autonomy; and the inviolability of China's borders. I begin with economic development, since the underlying Marxist approach to minority nationalities policy focuses heavily on the economic base and the right to socio-economic well-being. Since most minority nationalities live west of the Aihui-Tengchong line,²⁴ and usually in mountainous areas, they have typically lagged behind in economic development, especially during the reform and opening-up. To compensate, economic policies entail central government incentives and investment – especially in infrastructure and transport – along with encouraging targeted projects and enterprises suited to local conditions and proclivities. These two elements – central and local – are particularly notable in large-scale projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (for which Xinjiang in particular has become a major hub) and in targeted poverty alleviation.

9.3 Cultural Development

Culturally, local languages continue to be fostered, which entails media, education and literature. Local customs, rituals, festivals and especially religions are not merely permitted but actively supported,²⁵ with temples, churches and mosques constructed and maintained with state funds – so much so that minority peoples are far more religious than the Han nationality. In terms of education, school children receive classes in their local language, alongside the obligatory classes in Mandarin – needed for communication across China and for work. At university level, not only are there 民族 *minzu* universities in all regions, but students are also assisted – through quotas and extra points – for the all-important university entrance examinations, or 高考 *gaokao*. While these cultural policies are well-established in China, with significant resources devoted to enhancing their effectiveness, they are not fixed and unchangeable. This is particularly so in light of the rapid changes brought about by the reform and opening-up. Ma Rong (2010) puts the tension in terms of “protecting the traditional culture” and “realising the modernisation” of

24 The Aihui-Tengchong line was initially proposed by Hu Huanyong (1935). On the basis of population data, Hu found that more than 90% of China's population has historically flourished south-east of a line that runs from Aihui (Heilongjiang province in the northeast) to Tengchong (Yunnan province in the southwest). Political power too has historically been located in the same zone, but there is a problem: most of the mineral resources and headwaters of the major rivers are northwest of the line, as also are border regions such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The outcome: from earlier forms of the state until today, the focus remains on the unification of diverse areas (with wars fought only for securing such unification), state-directed redistribution of resources, stability and – especially – continuity. With the reform and opening-up, development took place first in the southeast, with the northwest lagging.

25 The most authoritative and comprehensive study of the religious faith of the Chinese is by Zhuo Jinping (2018).

minorities, especially in terms of the mobility of labour and participation in the political, cultural, and economic life of China.

9.3 Political Structures: Autonomy and Unity

In light of this outline of the preferential policies for minority nationalities, we may deal with political structures. On the one hand, autonomous regions and prefectures now number almost 160 in China, with significant autonomy in policy development. On the other hand, all minority nationalities are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), along with delegates who may be elected to the annual National People's Congress. Thus, when issues arise relating directly to minority nationalities, the consultative role of the CPPCC comes into full force.

However, it is at the level of governance that a tension arises between autonomy and unity, concerning which three points are relevant. First, ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China, there have been efforts – usually coming in waves – to break up the country, with a particular focus on autonomous regions. Already in 1949, Zhou Enlai observed that every country has the right to self-determination, so that the New China should be on its guard: “Today the imperialists want to split Tibet, Taiwan and even Xinjiang; in this case, we hope that all nationalities do not listen to the provocation of imperialists” (Zhou 1949, 140). Over the decades since 1949, we can see how these efforts have unfolded: the United States' occupation of Taiwan island and turning it into an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” (Deng 1984, 93); attempts to foster counter-revolutions in Tibet so as to undo its progress in economic improvement and democratic reform (SCIO 2019a); funnelling arms, trained fighters, and drugs into Xinjiang, while promoting “atrocious propaganda” and downplaying the real problems of terrorism promoted by such acts (SCIO 2019b);²⁶ revisiting the old practice from the nineteenth century of trying to use Hong Kong SAR as a lever to destabilise the mainland.²⁷ All of these externally fostered efforts are of course framed in terms of the empty slogan of “freedom and democracy,” which is seen in China as a Western neo-imperialist agenda, all the while peddling a line that completely ignores the fact that such regions have been part of China for centuries, as well as avoiding any recognition of China's minority nationalities policy and its significant

26 On Xinjiang, it is worth noting that Muslim-majority countries support China's efforts to counter Islamic extremism and terrorism in Xinjiang, since they too have similar problems and work with China to deal with them.

27 As far as English-language material is concerned, the best studies on Tibet and Xinjiang are by Sautman (1998; 2003; 2006; 2010).

achievements. In all of these cases, the observation of Mackerras (2003, 46), based on the experiences of those who actually live in such regions, is pertinent: “what strikes me most forcefully about the period since 1980 or so is not how much the Chinese have harmed Tibetan culture, but how much they have allowed, even encouraged it to revive; not how weak it is, but how strong.” The same can be said of Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and many other minority areas.

Second, the approach to dealing with such problems draws heavily on a Marxist approach, with short-term and long-term solutions. In the short term, the need is to ensure safety, stability and harmony, which entails strict measures to clamp down on the “three evils” of separatism, extremism, and terrorism – the three are on a continuum – and counter the waves of foreign and imperialist interference.²⁸ In the long term, the underlying economic lag in development is the focus, with programs – all the way from education to economic incentives – focused on improving socio-economic well-being. Given that such improvement is the core human right in China, it is very clear that China has always sought to promote human rights among its minority nationalities.

The third point entails returning to contradiction analysis, specifically in terms of the contradiction of unity and diversity. The question is: how to manage a unitary socialist republic with multinational diversity? The main approach is thoroughly Marxist (Fei 1989; Wang 2009; 2010): the way to manage this complex contradiction is not in terms of emphasising one element and playing down the other, not a delicate balance and constant readjustment, but rather a full dialectical move: the greater the autonomy, the greater the unity; the more people’s lives are improved through the preferential policies, the more do they see themselves as part of the whole. To integrate means to diversify, and vice versa (Xi 2016a, 328–29)

10. Rule of Law and the Leadership of the Communist Party

A distinctive feature of China’s socialist democratic system is the leadership by the Communist Party of China (CPC). Earlier (Section 7 introduction), I mentioned that the Chinese definition of democracy is the “people as masters of the country (人民当家作主 *renmin dangjia zuozhu*),” as well as a “people centred (以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*)” approach. But how does this people-centred approach relate to CPC leadership? For a Chinese Marxist approach, the two are not seen as either-or, which is a

²⁸ For example, in 1933 the declining British Empire tried to establish the “Islamic Republic of East Turkistan” in an effort to break up China. The effort collapsed the following year.

typical Western liberal approach, but as both-and: CPC leadership is enhanced by and ensures that the people are the centre and masters of the country; so also does people's democracy ensure and strengthen CPC leadership.

Chinese Marxist scholars differentiate between two types of CPC leadership: one is based on the founding of the New China, and other concerns governing China today. These may also be described in terms of historical and practical legitimacy. While historical legitimacy is derived from founding the New China in 1949, the practical legitimacy entailed in governing today is crucial. On this matter, the emphasis is that CPC does not rule directly, but rather indirectly: the will of the CPC can become government policy and the law of the land only through the rule-of-law statutory processes found in the entire socialist democratic system in China.

10.1 Founding and Ruling the New China

The CPC's leadership relies on the fact that it represents the vast majority of the people, initially rural and urban workers and now also the 500 million strong middle-income group that has arisen as a result of the thorough poverty alleviation program. This foundation is only the beginning. Chinese scholars go much further, distinguishing between founding and ruling.²⁹ The first – founding – relates to the historical fact that CPC was responsible for prevailing in the long revolutionary struggle and establishing the People's Republic of China in 1949. As is often said in China, there would be no New China without the CPC. At the same time, the CPC has since that time become responsible for the construction of socialism and thus ruling the country. The CPC cannot simply rely on the historical fact of founding the New China more than 70 years ago; it must continue to rule today during the ongoing and lengthy task of constructing socialism.

For a Communist Party that has ruled for so long, the question of legitimacy is crucial. This leads us to the next distinction: while the CPC's core role in founding the New China provides it with *historical* legitimacy, the shift to governing the country entails *practical* legitimacy.³⁰ Any political system and indeed any political party requires legitimacy to function and to rule. At this level, the CPC is no different. Where it does differ is that the very definition of socialist democracy requires the Communist Party to be the ruling party. This point leads to two questions: how does a Communist Party enable

²⁹ The following draws from two insightful and very useful articles by Ma Yide (2015; 2017).

³⁰ We may see this distinction in the preamble to the Constitution, with historical legitimacy emphasised in the first four paragraphs, and practical legitimacy in the tenth paragraph.

the transition from historical to practical legitimacy? And how does practical legitimacy work? The transition from historical to practical legitimacy relies on the legitimacy generated by the necessary Communist practice of consultation and the mass line (see Section 7.2). Initially, this consultative legitimacy provided the groundwork for Liberation and establishing the New China, but it also provided the necessary background for the transition to the practical legitimacy of ruling.

10.2 Rule of Law and the Statutory Procedures of Indirect Leadership

In regard to practical legitimacy, can the Communist Party simply enact its decisions directly and simultaneously maintain legitimacy among the people? Obviously, the answer is no. Instead, the CPC's "will is sublimated into that of the state through the state's organs of power by virtue of a specific logic and the systemic structure directed thereby" (Ma Y. 2015, 15). In other words, any proposal or decision by the CPC does not automatically and directly become law: it must go through a complete statutory procedure in order to become a decision of the state as such, finalised by the National People's Congress. Thus, the CPC's leadership is indirect rather than direct. A shorthand for this statutory procedure is "ruling the country according to law (依法治国 *yifazhiguo*)."

This term – ruling the country according to law – continues to be a resolute emphasis by Xi Jinping. His term as General Secretary and President has seen an equally firm insistence on developing and strengthening China's socialist rule of law (法治 *fazhi*) (Xi 2017d). This development has a longer history, which was initially focused on developing the legal system (法制 *fazhi*), the experience of "rule by a person (人治 *renzhi*)" during the disruptive deviation of the "Cultural Revolution," and the subsequent emphasis on developing an overarching rule of law (法治 *fazhi*) as the framework for the legal system. We need to be very clear: this is a socialist rule of law, which arises from the socialist system and reinforces this system. Further, and most importantly, rule of law relies on and ensures leadership by the CPC, which includes comprehensive legal structures within the Party. But a question lingers: is the Communist Party above the law or is the law above the Party? This is a false question, framed in a Western form as "either-or." Instead, as Li Lin observes (2018, 310), there is an organic unity between rule of law and the Communist Party: "the Party's leadership is the basic guarantee of ruling the country by law whereas ruling the country by law is the basic strategy by which the Party leads the people to administer state affairs and the basic mode by which the Party rules the country." In short, it is "both-and": they complement rather than oppose one another.

In regard to the indirect process of CPC leadership through statutory procedures, this did not appear suddenly: it required a rather lengthy process of development. We need to go back to Deng Xiaoping's (1986, 179) initial emphasis that the CPC's "functions should be separated (分开 *fenkai*) from those of the government." In other words, the government of the country, embodied in the many levels of people's congresses and people's political consultative conferences, would become separated from the role of the CPC. Deng was, of course, responding to the aberration of the "Cultural Revolution" when the will of one person was taken as law. While Jiang Zemin (2002b, 553) would take this a step further in emphasising the crucial role of a socialist rule of law as the way to ensure the mutual role of CPC leadership and socialist democracy, it fell to Hu Jintao to spell out exactly what this meant. One of Hu Jintao's most important points was that the whole structure of socialist democracy would ensure that "the Party's proposals become the will of the country through statutory procedures (法定程序 *fading chengxu*)." How so? As Hu (2012, 633) observes, the "basic strategy by which the party leads the people in governing the country is through governing the country according to law (依法治国 *yifazhiguo*)."

10.3 *Democratic Centralism*

It would fall to Xi Jinping to clarify that these processes are required for democratic centralism to work at a country-wide level. Up until this point – from the time democratic centralism was initially identified among Communist Parties in Russia in 1905 – democratic centralism has been seen as an inner-Party form of governance. It was assumed that democratic centralism could be directly extended to country-wide governance. But this extension was not so easy, and it would take quite some to identify how this might happen. This is Xi Jinping's specific contribution. He also stresses the need to improve even more the CPC's indirect leadership through the legal or statutory procedures of rule of law governance. When the Communist Party's policies become state laws, "implementation of the law will mean putting into effect the will of the Party, and acting according to law will mean carrying out Party policy" (Xi 2017d, 23). All of this entails that the organs of state power are independent, proactive, and responsible in terms of adhering to the constitution and relevant laws. For Xi, this is nothing less than democratic centralism.

I have had to summarise a rather complex development, but let me quote Ma Yide's description of the basic logic of China's system of governance:

First, the Party's leadership is political leadership, and the Party's views are a combination of historical and practical legitimacy based on multi-party cooperation and political consultation. Second, the Party's views, which have solid legitimacy, are transformed into the will of the state through people's congresses, and the concrete expression of the will of the state is democratic legislation. During this process, the people re-examine and substantiate the Party's views through the system of people's congresses. Third, as the legal procedure for transforming the will of the Party, democratic legislation constitutes the basis for governing the country according to law, and is the governance basis for the direct links between the modern state and citizens. Fourth, the leadership of the Party should advance with the times through consultations between the Party and the masses and social consultation, thereby entering the logical chain of direct governance consisting of legitimization of the Party's views and their transformation into the will of the state and thence into the rule of law, thus successfully coordinating state governance and social development (Ma Y. 2017, 31).

All of this leads to a dialectical point: the full system of socialist democracy does not weaken but strengthens the CPC's leadership; conversely, only through the CPC's leadership are the institutions of socialist democracy strengthened.

10.3 Inner-Party Governance

This inescapable connection between country-wide socialist democracy and CPC leadership means that there is always a great emphasis on democratic supervision, transparency, and clean governance. In fact, this emphasis is far greater than in any capitalist democracy. But it also means that inner-Party democracy must be even more rigorously practised by all members so that all views are aired and extensive criticisms made. This is to ensure either that mistakes are not made, or that mistakes can be corrected in time.

Of course, the CPC has not always lived up to this high standard. Recall the chaotic deviation of the "Cultural Revolution" and its "rule by a person (人治 *renzhi*)," or the deep corruption that resulted from a split between the masses and the Party during the "wild 90s" and persisted for almost a decade later (see Sections 4.1 and 5.3.3). But these were not – as I have pointed out – systemic contradictions; instead, they were incidental or cyclical and could thereby be addressed. The fact that the excesses of the "Cultural Revolution" could be corrected, and that the gap between Party and people that led to the problem of corruption has been addressed in the most-consistent anti-corruption campaign since Mao Zedong, indicates a democratic self-correcting process that lives up to the high calling of "governing the country according to law." That the CPC's esteem is higher than it has been for a long time is clear testament to this reality.

It should be no surprise that a constituent feature of speeches and texts by CPC leaders typically conclude with a section dealing with improving the Party's functioning, mass line, unity, and representative nature. This feature was already found in the Soviet Union. Depending on the circumstances, the speeches may focus on improving inner-Party democracy, dealing with excess and corruption, promoting clean living and hard work, or on Party unity. Occasionally, such points may have been window dressing, but to ensure they are followed a leader is needed who is a 'needle hidden in silk floss (绵里藏针 *mianli cangzhen*)," who has "firmness cloaked beneath gentleness (柔中有刚 *rouzhong yougang*)," as Mao advised Deng Xiaoping (Research Office 2003, 1674). In other words, it needs a leader who can be tough when needed and so can ensure that the measures are enacted through systemic, law-based procedures. Ultimately, the point is that a Communist Party simply cannot continue to lead without a robust democratic system – democratic centralism.

11. Xi Jinping on Marx and Engels

In the same way that I began with an analysis of Deng Xiaoping's thought, I close with a deeper presentation of the work of Xi Jinping. While his works are constantly growing, I have selected what is to date Xi Jinping's most comprehensive statement on Marxism. More specifically, it engages extensively with the texts of Marx and Engels and explains how they are important for China today.³¹ The speech covers the biography an engaged intellectual and partnership between Karl and Jenny, as well the basic principles of the method developed by Marx and Engels: it is scientific and not utopian; it is a theory of the people's hope for a society without oppression and exploitation, and not a ruling-class theory; it is a theory of practice, specifically the practice of liberation; it is an open and developing theory, a guide to action rather than a dogma (教条 *jiaotiao*). There is also a welcome emphasis on the way Marxism took root in a semi-colonised country like China, gained widespread and enthusiastic support among the masses, and became a key driver for the anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic struggle.

The main part of the speech is devoted to nine topics, urging CPC members and indeed the whole country to study (学习 *xuexi*) Marx and Engels. Each topic begins with a quotation or two from Marx and Engels, followed by an elaboration of the point in a Chinese context. To summarise:

³¹ The text was initially published in a series of Party-building journals. To date, there is no full translation of the speech, so I rely on the Chinese text. Only an excerpt from the speech was published in the English translation of the third volume of *The Governance of China* (Xi 2018).

11.1 *Development of Human Society* (人类社会发展 *renlei shehui fazhan*)

Here Xi tackles the long-term project of constructing communism. He quotes from Communist Manifesto, where Marx and Engels speak of a future society, beyond bourgeois society, which will be “an association (*Assoziation*), in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” And in the words of the final flourish of the Manifesto, “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” (Marx and Engels 1848, 506).³² The Chinese translation of the German “*Assoziation*” is “联合体 *lianheti*,” which designates an organic whole, a connectivity of all parts. It is, of course, another way of speaking of Communism. Is this a “utopian” and never to be achieved ideal? Not at all. As we saw earlier (Section 6), the Chinese approach to a 小康 *xiaokang* society, as well as the Great Harmony (大同 *datong*) itself, is that such a world is not an unknown, but one that can be experienced and is verifiable – quite unlike Western approaches. Thus, Xi Jinping constantly emphasises the “step by step (一步一步 *yibuyibu*)” approach, the need for “one-by-one phased goals (一个一个阶段性目标 *yige yige jieduanxing mubiao*),” meaning that the achievement of Communism requires careful planning, implementation, and assessment.

11.2 *Sticking to the People’s Standpoint* (坚守人民立场 *jianshou renmin lichang*)

On this point, Xi quotes *The Holy Family*: “Historical activity is the activity of the masses” (Marx and Engels 1845, 82).³³ Not only does this evoke the mass line, but it also enables – as we have seen – an emphasis on the core feature of Xi Jinping’s tenure as General Secretary: a “people-centred (以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*)” approach, which is also expressed in terms of “putting the people first (以人为本 *yiren weiben*).” This approach is absolutely foundational to all of the policies pursued in China, resulting 80-90% of people in China being confident in the direction the country is going, trust in governance and public institutions, and in approval of the way the COVID-19 pandemic was handled (Ipsos 2019; Edelman 2020; Cunningham, Saich, and Turiel 2020).

32 In this section, I cite only the English version. This for reference only, since the translations are my own. Xi quotes from the authoritative scholarly edition of the works of Marx and Engels, published in 2009, 马克思恩格斯文集 *Makesi Engesi wenji*.

33 A difficult text to render from the German: “Together with the thoroughness of the historical action, the size of the mass whose action it is.”

11.3 Productive Forces and Relations of Production (生产力和生产关系 shengchanli he shengchan guanxi)

The quotation around which this important point turns comes from *The German Ideology*: “the amount of productive forces accessible to human beings determines the condition of society” (Marx and Engels 1846, 43). This is a well-known feature of Marxist political economy, but Xi points out that this approach also provides the basis for socialist construction in terms of liberating (解放 *jiefang*) and advancing (发展 *fazhan*) the productive forces, as well as the constant need to adjust the relationship between productive forces and relations of production. We have already seen how this approach works in China (see Section 2 on Deng Xiaoping and Section 5.2 on the overall economic system with its planning and market components), but I would also emphasise here another text in which Xi (2020b) stresses the increased relevance of Marxist political economy not only for understanding the repeated and intensified crises of capitalist systems, but also for plotting China’s socialist development in the current situation.

11.4 People’s Democracy (人民民主 renmin minzhu)

Xi Jinping has for some time been emphasising socialist democracy, but he has also given the go ahead – in light of the urging to tell China’s story well throughout the world – for Chinese speakers to address this question directly in international contexts. On this occasion, Xi quotes two texts by Marx and Engels: “The proletarian movement is the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority” (Marx and Engels 1848, 495). And: “The working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine,” for it requires a “replacement by a new and truly democratic state power (国家政权 *guojia zhengquan*)” (Engels 1891, 110–11). While the first text focuses on the quantitative superiority of socialist democracy in terms of giving genuine voice to the vast majority of rural and urban workers, the second concerns the qualitative difference of the new system, which requires a new and “truly democratic (真正民主 *zhensheng minzhu*)” system. I have already presented the material concerning China’s socialist democracy, so all I need do here is stress the increasing confidence in China concerning the qualitative superiority of its maturing socialist democratic system.

11.5 Cultural Construction (文化建设 wenhua jianshe)

Here Xi Jinping does not quote Marx or Engels directly. Instead, he points out that Marx “held that in different (不同 *butong*) economic and social environments, people

produce different ways of thinking and cultures.” The pertinent reference point is Marx’s observation – in a letter to the Russian socialist Vera Zasulich – that the processes of capitalism to which he had devoted a lifetime of research were in many respects “expressly limited (*expressément restreinte*) to the countries of Western Europe” (Marx 1881, 71). This realisation occasioned some struggle for Marx, but it makes his admission all the more important. It should be no surprise that this text – and the drafts Marx wrote – continue to be the subject of much study in China. In short, the cultural and civilisational histories of different parts of the world will entail distinct methods and solutions in light of these concrete conditions. Even more, it requires a thoroughly dialectical approach to one’s own cultural traditions. As Xi observed at the 2565th anniversary of Confucius’s birth: “Chinese Communists are Marxists, adhering to Marxist scientific theories and upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, but Chinese Communists are neither historical nihilists nor cultural nihilists.” Instead, “Marxism must be closely integrated with China’s actual conditions,” arming itself with and treating in a scientific manner China’s fine cultural traditions as well as those of other countries (Xi 2014, 12). Indeed, it is precisely Marxism that has enabled a new flourishing of Confucian culture in China, albeit in a way that one can speak of socialist “spiritual civilisation (精神文明 *jingshen wenming*),” with an emphasis on “core socialist values (社会主义核心价值观 *shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi guan*),” and the development of “advanced socialist culture.”

11.6 Social Construction (社会建设 *shehui jianshe*)

On the question of social construction, Xi Jinping quotes from three texts. Note the emphasis in these quotations: for all, of all, by all, and to all. The first comes from Marx’s economic manuscripts of 1857-1858, where Marx observes that “production will now be calculated to provide wealth for all” (Marx 1858, 94). The second comes from Engels: a communist society would enable “the participation of all in the material benefits created by all” (Engels 1847, 354). The third text – originally in English – sums up the direction of the previous two, if not the aims of Communism itself: a socialist society should “give healthy and useful labour to all, ample wealth and leisure to all, and the truest and fullest freedom to all” (Engels 1887, 482). We can see here the background to the program of “common prosperity (共同富裕 *gongtong fuyu*) that has been promoted in 2021.

11.7 Human-Nature Relationship (人与自然关系 *ren yu ziran guanxi*)

Xi Jinping has been promoting for some time the concept and practice of “ecological civilisation (生态文明 *shengtai wenming*).” The quotation here comes from

Marx's earlier texts, with the statement that "human beings live on nature" (Marx 1844, 276). Alluding to the rest of this sentence from Marx, Xi observes that it is an interactive (互动 *hudong*) relationship: if human beings treat nature well (善待 *shandai*), nature will present gifts (馈赠 *kuizeng*) of food – an old agricultural assumption. But – and here Xi quotes an important text by Engels – "if human beings, by dint of their knowledge and inventive genius, have subdued the forces of nature, the latter avenge themselves upon them" (Engels 1873, 423). All of this requires not simply the protection of the natural environment, as though human beings are separate from it, but working in terms of "harmonious symbiosis (和谐共生 *hexie gongsheng*)" in the "community of life (生命共同体 *shengming gongtongti*)," or taking seriously an organism's relation to its environment (the meaning of 生态 *shengtai*). In China, such words have power; they are not merely discussed, but enacted, so much so that China has rapidly become a world leader in ecological policies, projects, and technologies.

n.8 World History (世界历史 *shijie lishi*)

As for world history, Xi quotes from *The German Ideology*: "the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is destroyed by the advanced mode of production, by intercourse and by the natural division of labour between various nations arising as a result, the more history becomes world history" (Marx and Engels 1846, 50–51). This text – and others like it – is often used in Chinese Marxist scholarship and in the CPC, with the sense that this prediction by Marx and Engels has already come about today in an integrated world, where the one who rejects such a world will be rejected by it. Here we find phrases and slogans that have become common parlance: win-win (共赢 *gongying* – more literally "win in common"), and "community of common destiny for humankind (人类命运共同体 *renlei mingyun gongtongti*)." These are Chinese expressions that give voice to the majority approach in the world today, especially by many countries that have suffered in the past under the Western colonial yoke. This approach respects each country as equal, does not seek to impose hegemony or interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and thus operates in terms of the mutual respect of sovereignty. There are many formulations of this approach, such as: the "five principles of peaceful coexistence (和平共处五项原则 *heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze*)" (Zhou Enlai); or, in terms of a text from the *Book of Rites* often quoted by Xi Jinping, "all things are nourished together without their injuring one another (万物并育而不相害, 道并行而不相悖 *wanwu bingyu er bu xiang hai, dao bingxing er bu xiangbei*)." Any country that rejects such approach in a "zero-sum" mentality will be left behind by history.

11. 9 *Marxist Party Building* (马克思主义政党建设 *makesizhuyi zhengdang jianshe*)

A characteristic feature of speeches by Communist Party leaders since the time of the Soviet Union is to conclude a major address with a discussion of Party building (党建 *dangjian*). This speech also does so, but the question here is what Marx and Engels might have to say on the matter of Marxist Party building. More than one might initially expect, especially in the second section of the manifesto, which is, after all “The Manifesto of the Communist Party.” Xi offers four quotations: 1) “In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they [the Communists] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole” (Marx and Engels 1848, 497); 2) “They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole” (op. cit. 497); 3) The Party works “in the interest of the immense majority” (op. cit. 495); 4) And the Communist Party has “to set up milestones (里程碑 *lichengbei*) before the whole world, by which people can measure the level of the Party movement” (Marx 1875, 70). Xi emphasises major themes also found elsewhere: Party unity and strength, strict management, correcting mistakes, political and theoretical knowledge of Marxism, and the unity of the Party’s central authority. The result after a decade of resolute Party building and reform: a Communist Party in China that is now stronger and more united than it has been for a very long time, arguably since the time of Mao Zedong. In typical fashion, Xi uses two four-character sayings to conclude this point: “tested by wind and waves (风浪考验 *fenglang kaoyan*)” and “full of youthful spirit and vitality (朝气蓬勃 *zhaoqi pengbo*).” These are the characteristics of a Marxist Party in power.

12. Conclusion

Even though this summary of my book, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners*, has turned out to be somewhat longer than originally planned, it can still give only an overview. Each topic requires much further study – as I have done and continue to do. We have covered material from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, from contradiction analysis to a 小康 *xiaokang* society, from planning and markets in a socialist economy to the many components of China’s socialist democratic system.

By now it should be very clear indeed that Marxism is core and centre of the Chinese project, and it is the Marxism that has its foundations in the thought of Marx and Engels and includes the richness of the whole Marxist-Leninist tradition. Not Marxism as a

dogma, but as a guide to action; not mere theory, but as a means the change the world. As Engels (1859, 469–70) puts it: “The prospect of a gigantic revolution, the most gigantic revolution that has ever taken place, therefore presents itself to us as soon as we pursue our materialist thesis further and apply it to the present time.” It should also be obvious that there is an increasing cultural confidence (文化自信 *wenhua zixin*) in engaging with the world in terms of Marxism. The days when China deferred to “the West” or bided its time is well and truly past. This confidence is expressed in many ways, but – especially for our purposes – we find an increasing confidence that Chinese Marxism is Marxism, that socialism with Chinese characteristics is socialism, that it is part of the mainstream and will be recognised as an “original contribution to the development of Marxism” (Xi 2017a, 69).

A final question: what is the goal of China’s socialist path? In terms of a saying popular in China: forget not the original desire, keep the mission firmly in mind (不忘初心, 牢记使命 *bumang chuxin, laoji shiming*). What desire and what mission? Communism. As Xi Jinping (2019b, 3) observes, the “lofty ideal (远大理想 *yuandalixiang*)” of Communism should never be abandoned, since the “faith (信仰 *xinyang*) in Marxism, the belief (信念 *xinnian*) in socialism and communism is the political soul (政治灵魂 *zhengzhi linghun*) of Communists and the spiritual pillar (精神支柱 *jingshen zhizhu*) for them to withstand any test,” since the CPC’s “highest ideal and ultimate goal is to realise Communism.”

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