

Mao Zedong, Sinicization of Marxism, and Traditional Chinese Thought Culture

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Abstract

The informed perspective presented here may rouse a sensitivity to the differences in reading Marxist philosophy from the perspective of the Inseparability of One and Many worldview and philosophy (a doctrine of internal, constitutive, relations—“intimacy”) on the part of Chinese intellectuals, particularly Mao Zedong, a great campaigner for philosophical and discursive Sinicization of Marxism. Marxism has provided an opportunity for a philosophical conversation with Chinese tradition, and this conversation was not launched by a government or official campaign, but instead by the efforts made on the part of countless grassroots intellectuals. It is argued that the reason for this was perhaps due to the fact that certain of Marx’s cosmological assumptions, in contrast to those of the main Western categories, are more capable of being understood and Sinicized in terms of particular philosophical currents in the Chinese tradition. This was particularly so for the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s, and until the end of the 1970s when Deng Xiaoping came to power and openly declared the start of his “Economic Reform” with the slogan “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.”

Keywords: Sinicization, inseparability of One and Many, vocabulary, Ai Siqi, *bianzhengfa* (dialectics)

Mao Zedong, sinizacija marksizma in tradicionalna kitajska miselna kultura

Izveček

Perspektiva informiranosti, ki je predstavljena v tem članku, lahko pripomore k večji dojemljivosti za različne možnosti branja marksistične filozofije z vidika svetovnega nazora neločljivosti enosti in mnogoterosti ter filozofije (oziroma doktrine) interne, konstitutivne relacije – »intimnosti«, ki so jo razvijali kitajski izobraženci pod vodstvom Mao Zedonga, ki si je zelo prizadeval za filozofsko in diskurzivno sinizacijo marksizma. Marksizem je nudil možnost za filozofski dialog s kitajsko tradicijo, ki pa ni bil vedno vladna ali uradna kampanja, temveč je temeljil na prizadevanjih številnih nevladnih intelektualcev kot posameznikov. Članek izhaja iz predpostavke, da razlog za to tiči v dejstvu, da so bili določeni marksistični kozmološki elementi Kitajcem bolj razumljivi in zato primernejši za sinizacijo v smislu

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razvijanja posamičnih filozofskih tokov kitajske tradicije kot preostale prevladujoče zahodne kategorije. To je še posebej veljalo za obdobje 50. in 60. let 20. stoletja in je trajalo vse do konca 70. let, ko je prišel na oblast Deng Xiaoping, ki je javno objavil pričetek kapitalistične »ekonomske reforme« pod imenom Socializem s kitajskimi posebnostmi.

Ključne besede: sinizacija marksizma, sinteza marksizma s kitajsko tradicijo, kozmološki vidiki marksizma

Introduction

Marxism is definitely the most significant element in Western thought that has provided an opportunity for a philosophical conversation with Chinese tradition in modern times. In the process of this conversation, a Chinese version of Marxism started to develop and finally came to fruition in the thought of Mao Zedong. What is particularly worth noting are firstly that this conversation was not a government or official campaign, but the efforts made on the part of countless individual intellectuals who felt deep concern for the future of China after the downfall of the Qing Manchurian rule. Secondly, it is worth nothing that the philosophical conversation had a striking feature of “dialectics,” or *bianzhengfa*, which not only pervades philosophical levels of discourse in China, but also the thinking and speech of ordinary persons in their everyday lives, particularly for the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

A Different Form of Marxism

We need to understand that the form of Marxian dialectics, wherever one finds it in the West, is different from what appears to be the Chinese analogue. Marxian dialectics in China is not the same as the inherited legacy of Marxian dialectics in Europe. What are the differences between the Chinese form and the original Western one? This study aims to address directly how and why Marxism has assumed the form it has adopted in China. There are at least five corollaries to its thesis:

1. There is a clear style of “thought,” or philosophy, that is distinctly but not necessarily uniquely Chinese, that is available to Chinese intellectuals.
2. There is a strand of Chinese Marxism, which draws on the Chinese tradition and overcomes some of the difficulties having attended Western Marxism.
3. This form of Chinese Marxism finds itself in many writers, and finally in Mao Zedong. It exemplifies a powerful strand of Chinese philosophy.
4. Mainstream Western Marxism finds its roots in Engels, whose formulations are alien to Chinese thought.

5. Although Chinese Marxism finds some of its roots in Engels, Chinese Marxists read his philosophy in a different way. Chinese Marxism is clearly similar to Western Marxism in some important respects; however, we can safely conclude that it represents a third alternative between Marxism on the one hand and traditional Chinese thought on the other.

In fact, in the West, the word “dialectics” has different meanings in the writings of different philosophers, and the early Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Lenin, all understand something different by the term. A comprehensive comparison of the many doctrines of dialectics in the West and then a comparison with the dialectics in China would be too enormous an undertaking for this project to pursue. So this work is then rather about how and what the Chinese conceived the dialectics of Marxism to be at about the start of the 20th century and after this. It is an account of *bianzhengfa*—a Chinese translation of “dialectics”—in terms of how that term encountered China and was and is understood there.

Arif Dirlik suggests that the articulation of Marxism in China underwent a process of “re-creating,” “rephrasing,” and “restructuring.” Mao Zedong, as well as many others of his time, did not just read Marxism in accordance with a Chinese historical experience, but also insistently read the Chinese historical experience into Marxism. As Dirlik points out, the Sinification of Marxism was a theoretical project with special relevance for the problem of a Marxist revolution in agrarian China (1997, 602). The Chinese vernacularized Marxism, and as Dirlik states: “The Marxism (Marxism-Leninism) that Chinese Communists inherited was a Marxism that had already been ‘deterritorialized’ from its original terrain in European history,” and was reterritorialized upon a Chinese terrain (1997, 613–14). As he notes, there are tantalizing traces in Mao’s philosophy of various traditions in Chinese thought (*ibid.*, 611); any parallels drawn between his Marxism and native traditions are of necessity speculative (*ibid.*, 593–615). What then is the role of Chinese thought in the vernacularization or reterritorialization of Marxism upon Chinese terrain? How are we to understand this process? The questions remain undealt with satisfactorily in Chinese or English.

Tongbian: A Form of Correlative Thinking since the *Yijing*

This paper tries to draw attention to the fundamental issue that certain cosmological assumptions of the Western tradition have led to the differences between Western Marxism and a particular philosophical current in the Chinese tradition, known as *tongbian* 通变, that developed independently of Western Marxism. Following the assumptions of David Hall and Roger Ames concerning a “correlative” modality of thinking, I argue here that the philosophy of *tongbian* has considerable significance in the discourse of “dialectical materialism,” or *bianzheng*

weiwu zhuyi. Moreover, it facilitated reading Marxist “dialectics” in a worldview of continuity between all things or events, a worldview devoid of transcendence and order, in which the complementary and contradictory interactions of the two basic elements of a polarity, like yin-yang, constitute the related forces and produce change. This distinct modality of thinking has precluded the dichotomy and related difficulties that have attended Western Marxism.

The kind of correlative polar “metaphysics” in Chinese Marxism’s “dialectics” (*bianzhengfa*), as can also be found in Confucianism’s “polarity,” may be traced back to the ancient philosophical text of the *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*), wherein the functional analogue of the meaning of *bianzheng* is conveyed in terms of *dao* (way), *yi* (change), *yin-yang*, and, in particular, *biantong* (change with continuity). The *Yijing* tells us:

A door’s being shut may be called [analogous to] *kun* 坤, and its opening, *qian* 乾. Opening succeeding shutting may be comprehended as an [event] of *bian* (change); getting through a process of [one] opening to shutting to another may be called *tong* 通 (the constant course of [things or events]). (*Yijing, Xici Zhuan* I, ch. 11)

In this passage, both *bian* and *tong* have analogical relations with the two events—the door’s opening and being shut—and both refer to the process of changing from opening to being shut, or *vice versa*. While *bian* suggests becoming in light of difference, *tong* expresses the kind of becoming in light of continuity—a “becoming” from one event to another. This suggests that there is a continuum in becoming; or if there were not a continuum between this and that, there would not be a becoming. In turn, if this does not vary from that, then there could not be any becoming.

Many notable Chinese thinkers find *bian* 变 and *tong* 通 in all relationships among all the *wanwu* 万物 (ten thousand things) under the sky—which can be seen as something discovered in the objective material world, in a Western sense. Moreover, *bian-tong* 变通 is also seen reversed, i.e., as *tong-bian* 通变, which means “knowing *bian*,” here *tong* has changed from meaning “the opening succeeding the being shut” and “the passing from one of these states to the other endlessly” to “comprehending changes and doing in accordingly changing manners” and “what to carry out and what to operate with.” This indicates that *bian-tong* extends its analogical relations into *tong-bian*; *tong-bian* is to comprehend *bian-tong*, to comprehend is thus a continuum and to do a process of getting through to *bian* and *tong*. Or to put it briefly, to think and do correlatively as the world does.

According to the classical texts, “to comprehend change(s) is [our] affair” (*Yijing*, *Xici Zhuan* I, ch. 11);¹ “transforming and shaping is what we called *bian* (change)” (*ibid.*);² and “following and carrying this out is called *tong* (*ibid.*).”³ Now the meaning of “*tong*” has changed from “the constant course of [things or events]” into “following and carrying it out,” which suggests that “*tong*” entails a continuum of getting through the changes of the ten thousand things under the sky as well as one getting through humanity’s thinking and doing accordingly. These two “continuums” are interdependent and correlative. This is how the modality of the strand of Chinese thought *tongbian* establishes itself as a correlative way of thinking.

Tongbian involves four significant ideas. First, everything (or event) in the world correlates with another. Second, the manifold and diverse relationships of things (or events) to any other things (or events) are a matter of interconnectedness, and can be viewed as following the same basic pattern as *yin* and *yang*, namely, the interaction and interdependence of complementary opposition. Third, it is this basic pattern of *yin* and *yang* that ceaselessly brings everything (or event) in the world into constant change or movement. Fourth, everything is in a process of change and presents itself as a focus-and-field relationship.

Each item is understood as “this particular focus,” which articulates the totality of things from its perspective; and, with regard to the totality, it focuses totality in its entirety. The totality is itself nothing more than the full ranges of particular foci, each defining itself and its own particular field. In characterizing an item as focal, we are indicating that it inheres in its immediate context in such a manner as to shape while being shaped by that context as field.⁴

Tongbian is a clear style of “thought” (or philosophy) that is distinctly but not necessarily uniquely Chinese. As typical as the assumptions of Hall and Ames, the world in terms of *tongbian* is one of correlations and self-so-ing, or one of continuity through change. The patterns of correlation are many and diverse, multi-level, multi-dimensional, multi-fold, and multi-category. Continuity goes through change whereupon the sky, earth, and ten thousand things correlate with each other; humanity thus considers itself as continuous with nature through

1 “*Tong bian zhi wei shi* 通变之为事”

2 “*Hua er cai zhi* 化而裁缝之”

3 “*Tui er xing zhi* 推而行之”

4 The focus/field model results from understanding an item’s relation to the world to be constituted by acts of contextualization. A correlative order emerges from the coordination of so many “this’s” and “that’s” as various foci and the fields they focus. The act of contextualization involves appreciation of harmonious correlations of the myriad unique details (*wanwu*), which make up the world. For this model, see Hall and Ames (1998, 234, 236, 239, 242–44, and 268–78).

correlations, as well as through a thorough comprehension of nature. In *tongbian*, there is no concept of God, but rather a spirituality that depends entirely on how much a person can develop his or her intelligence. Change itself is an embodiment of correlation in motion, or continuity between differences and varieties that are not strictly contrastive. *Tongbian* is the constant way of alternating one with another, changing into each other, exchanging with each other, displacing each other, and so on, that follows the occurrence of change, where *shen* (the indescribable) describes the efficacy of these interactions of complementary opposition. The nucleus, or the most salient feature, of *tongbian* is that it is not God but the complementary and contradictory interactions of the two basic elements of a polarity like *yin-yang* that constitute the forces, and produce change.

It is a way of correlative thinking that tends to preclude the kind of metaphysics, dualisms, ontologies, epistemologies, and even the foundations of objective certainty itself, which include the forms of Plato, the will of God, the spirit of Hegel, and the impersonal reason of Kant. For this reason, when Western versions of dialectics are engaged in a dialogue with the style of correlative thinking that developed in the light of *yin-yang* and *tongbian*, they undergo a process of development which results in their being altered, and calling upon the meaning of *xiangfan xiangcheng*, that is, “complementarity in opposition.” If we say, “the relationship between *yin* and *yang* is *bianzheng* or “dialectical,” we are in fact saying that it is *xiangfan xiangcheng*. Here *xiangfan xiangcheng* and *bianzheng* (“dialectic”) convey exactly the same understanding, that is, “(of two things to) be both opposite and complementary to each other, opposite to each other and yet also complementary to each other” (*A Chinese English Dictionary* 1985, 752).

The explanation of the creative process in terms of the interaction of complementary opposition is fundamental to the Chinese tradition. In the absence of the Western-style dualisms that establish an ontological separation between some determinative principle and that which it determines, the interconnectedness of all things promotes a correlative mode of philosophizing and of explaining order in the world. Tradition played an important role in the understanding and representing of Marxist philosophy in China. Let us look into a Chinese version of Marxism, which eventually developed and came to fruition in Mao Zedong.

Mao's Study of Western Philosophy

In the engagement of dialectical materialism with the thought of *tongbian* of the Chinese tradition, which involved thousands of Chinese intellectuals and translations of a voluminous foreign literature, a Chinese version of Marxism eventually

developed, reaching its peak in Mao Zedong. We note that Mao's infatuation with philosophy starting in the 1930s involved a voracious consumption of texts and almost entirely depends upon Chinese translation. As he read widely the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, Mao paid most attention to the texts of a number of Soviet and Chinese authors, like Mitin, Shirokov, Li Da, and Ai Siqi. Mao's view of dialectical materialism could have been contaminated by positivism and dualism, since he obtained his knowledge mostly from Russian texts, which are full of terms and formulas of Soviet orthodox Marxism. Nevertheless, Mao identified many elements in dialectical materialism with the *tongbian* and appealed to classical Chinese expressions in his reading.

Mao's version of Marxism is saturated with correlative thinking. Although he did not formulate a view that has in some way "recovered Marx" from 2nd International Marxists, we do see that on certain points Mao seems close to Marx, and thus that there is a dialogue between them. For instance, both Marx and Mao have a similar view on "internal relations." In Ollman's reading, Marx's dialectic is categorized as the philosophy of internal relations that does not allow absolute distinctions between society and the natural world, which is similar to Mao's. Mao had not been able to read any Marxist literature in a foreign language though, until he read the English version of *The Communist Manifesto* at the age of 63, even though he did study English as early as 1920.⁵ However, he did read the *Manifesto, A Critique of Gotha Programme, the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, and some texts in English on logic, and he made detailed marginalia (Lin 1987, 249–51).

Mao read a Chinese translation of the *Manifesto* and Karl Kaustky's *Class Struggle* as early as 1920. He first quoted Lenin's *State and Revolution* in May and September 1926 when he taught at the Peasants Movement Lecture School. Mao read Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, Lenin's *Two Strategies of the Social Democratic Party in the Democratic Revolution*, and "Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder during the Long March, according to the memoirs of Wu Liping and Peng Dehuai (ibid., 23–25). In the years of Yan'an, Mao consumed many Marxist-Leninist works, which included Marx's *Capital, The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science, Selected Works of Lenin*, Lenin's *the State and Revolution*, and Stalin's *Theory and Strategy* (a collection including *The Foundation of Leninism*), and *Several Issues of Leninism*, and also *Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin on Arts* (ibid., 24).

Once in preparation for one of his inspection trips in October 1959, Mao ordered hundreds of works of Marx, Engels, Linin, and Stalin, including *Capital, Selected*

5 Mao told of his study of English, philosophy, and newspapers in his letter of June 7, 1920 to Li Jinxi (see Chen 1996, 704).

Works of Marx and Engels, Wage, Price and Profit, The Critique of Political Economy, Anti-Dühring, the Dialectics of Nature, the Letters of Marx and Engels, Selected Works of Lenin, Lenin's From the February Revolution to the October Revolution, the Proletariat Revolution and the Traitor Kautsky, State and Revolution, "Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, and so on (ibid., 18).

Mao read a great deal of Lenin and loved his writings. However, his interest was rather in articulating Lenin's theory of reflection with specific issues around him, and more precisely the problem of some people's pessimistic attitude, which Mao believed was due to their inclination to think in merely abstract terms that separated thought from the actual situation. For Mao, "idealism," or *weixin zhuyi*, refers to ways of thinking that lack continuity with the actual situation, and pessimism arises as a result of this "idealism" (Lin 1987, 704).

Besides Marxism, Mao had adequate knowledge of other Western philosophies. He had showed great enthusiasm about Western thought as a young man, and actively participated in preparation for the visits Dewey and Bertrand Russell to Hunan in October 1920, and was one of the stenographers at the symposiums where Dewey and Russell gave presentations. Mao also studied Hegel when he was in the Hunan First Normal School between 1914 and 1918. Hegel was an important topic on the agenda of his study group with Li Weihan and Cai Hesen. Even more than forty years later, when once he met with a foreigner in August 1965, Mao still claimed that one must read Hegel (ibid., 694). Mao read even more on Western thought in the period of Yan'an and after 1949 when the People's Republic was established. He demonstrated good familiarity with Western philosophical history, particularly some classical philosophical works. In Mao's view, ancient Greek philosophy and classical German philosophy, which is represented by Kant, Hegel, and Feuerbach, could be regarded two pinnacles in Western philosophy (ibid., 694–95).

Mao's Roots in *Tongbian*

It is not difficult to assume that Mao's appeal to many classical Chinese expressions when reading Marxist dialectical materialism was a result of his deep roots in *tongbian*. Like many Confucian scholars, by the age of sixteen Mao had been well-educated with the *Four Books*, namely *The Great Learning (Daxue)*, *The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)*, *The Analects of Confucius (Lunyu)*, and *Mencius (Mengzi)*, as well as the *Five Classics*—namely *The Book of Songs (Shijing)*, *The Book of History (Shujing)*, *The Book of Changes (Yijing)*, *The Book of*

Rites (Liji) and *The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu)*, and he always loved Confucius. Mao has never suspended his study of classical Chinese philosophy, especially Pre-Qin Confucianism, Daoism, the Li Learning (*lixue*) of Song and Ming Dynasties.

Nurtured in classical Chinese thought, Mao had a worldview fostered with striking characteristics of *tongbian*. First, *tong*: in his view, the world was one with the continuity of *tian-di-ren*, or a view of continuity running through nature and humanity, which gave a “world” as a dynamic process. In the letter to Li Jinxi of August 23, 1917, Mao claims that “all the human beings under the sky constituted a continuity of the universe” (Zeng 1991, 61).⁶ Second, *bian*: in his *Classroom Notes* of October and December 1913, Mao writes: “There are ten thousand events under the sky and they are changing in ten thousand ways without pause” (Li 1991, 206);⁷ “for instance, so deep as water is and so scorching as fire is, it is nothing but movement that is presenting itself (*ibid.*).”⁸ In his marginal notes to Friedrich Paulsen’s *A System of Ethics*, Mao pointed out that “changes make ten thousand varieties (*ibid.*).”⁹ There is no thing that never revolves, and never changes. Human ideas and their physical conditions are all the time changing. “We love change and have a sense of curiosity. We cannot even suspend changes in ourselves for even a minute (*ibid.*).”¹⁰ As he believed, humanity and the ten thousand things are alike in revolving and changing without pause, “human bodies are changing every day,” and “The sky and earth are nothing but rather movement (*ibid.*).”¹¹

Mao’s deep roots in *tongbian* are seen in two concurrent respects, on the one hand, his comprehension represents a *tongbian* reading of Marxist texts, and on the other, he read elements of classical thought as “dialectical materialism” (*weiwu bianzhengfa*). Mao was particularly interested in classical Chinese “dialectics,” and especially in the “dialectic” of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Mozi, Qu Yuan, Sima Qian, Zhu Xi, Zhang Zai, and Wang Fuzhi, and finally developed his early “dialectical” style of thought and employed it in his own thinking and writings (Li 1991, 234). He regarded Mozi as a “Great Master” (*dajia*) of “dialectical materialism” (Mao 1983, 140)¹² and celebrated Mozi as a “Chinese Heraclitus” and “a Great Ancient Master of ‘Dialectical Materialism.’”

6 “Tianxia zhi shengmin gewei yuzhou zhi yiti.”

7 “Tianxia wanshi, wanbian wuqiong.”

8 “Ru shui yi shen, ru huo yi re, yi yun zhi er yi yi.”

9 “Bianhua wanshu.”

10 “Wuren you hao bianhua, haoqi zhi xin, ren buneng you e qing bu bianhua zhe.”

11 “Ren zhi shen gai ri ri bianyi zhe,” “tiandi gai weiyong dong eryl.”

12 “Gudai bianzheng weiwu lun dajia,”

A considerable proportion of the classical philosophy that nurtured Mao's *tongbian* thought had come from Laozi. By the age of twenty, Mao was very familiar with Laozi. In his *Classroom Notes*, we find perhaps his earliest quotation from Laozi: "In the world there is nothing more submissive and weaker than water, Yet, for attacking that which is harder and strong nothing can surpass it" (Laozi, ch.78). One time Mao picked up a conversation with an old hermit on traveling together with one of his friends in 1917. He mentioned Laozi and Zhuangzi, stating that he had read *The Thirteen Classics (shi san jing)*, *Laozi*, and *Zhuangzi*, and commented that Wang Bi made the best annotations to *Laozi*, and Guo Xiang, to *Zhuangzi*. We find his following marginal notes to Paulsen's *A System of Ethics*:

I am sure that once we entered a reign of Great Harmony, waves of competition and friction would inevitably break forth that would disrupt the reign of Great Harmony. It is for this reason that the conception of a society in which the sage is exterminated and the wise discarded, and the people of one stage grow old and die without having had any dealings with those of another, put forward by Laozi and Zhuangzi, remains but an ideal society and nothing more.¹³

The passage was a condensation of Chapters 19 and 80 of Laozi's *Daode jing*. Mao referenced Laozi's "simple dialectics," and particularly, continuity of opposites, and mutual transformation between *mao* and *dun*. Mao quoted the same analogue from Laozi, the interdependence of good and bad fortunes, in his "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,"

We must learn to look at problems from an all-around perspective, seeing the reverse as well as the obverse side of things. In given conditions, a bad thing may give rise to good results, and a good thing to bad results. Laozi had said even two thousand years ago that good

13 Mao wrote this marginal note to the following passage of Paulsen:

But not this alone; the content of historical life is also lost. The forms of historical life are nothing other than the forces of the struggle between good and evil that develop with the times. If states had no schemes for aggression there would be no military preparations. If no one acted improperly there would be no need for laws. Military forces and laws are the means by which the state fights against foreign and domestic disorder. If all disorder, both domestic and foreign, were eliminated, and all observed the way of justice, peace, kindness and tolerance, then war and diplomacy, courts and police, and all the aggressive features of government would disappear, and the perfect state would also vanish. Religion, too, is nothing but a form of the struggle between good and evil. If there were no evil acts, human beings would all be gods, and religion too would vanish. (Li 1991, 109–10; see Schram 1992, 238)

fortune lieth within bad, bad fortune lurketh within good. (Mao 1957, 66–67)

Mao had studied Zhuangzi before he was twenty, and quoted him in many of his writings from 1913 to 1965. In particular, we find that, of the several paragraphs of the quotations in his *Classroom Notes* from Zhuangzi, there is the famous anecdote of *Hundun* (*Chaos*):¹⁴

The ruler of the North Sea was “Swift,” the ruler of the South Sea was “Sudden,” and the ruler of the Central Sea was Lord of *Hundun*—“Chaos.” Swift and Sudden had on several occasions encountered each other in the territory of Chaos, and Chaos had treated them with great hospitality. Swift and Sudden, devising a way to repay Chaos’ generosity, said: “Human beings all have seven orifices through which they see, hear, eat and breathe. Chaos alone is without them.” They then attempted to bore holes in Chaos, each day boring one hole. On the seventh day, Chaos died.¹⁵ (*Zhuangzi, Yingdiwang*)

Mao found “dialectical elements” in Confucius, too, even though Mao did not particularly like him as he thought he was too “metaphysical.” There are many “dialectical elements”, however, Mao suggests, as Confucius explains the correlations of “naming” (*ming*) and “actuality” (*shi*), of “culture” (*wen*) and “quality” (*zhi*), and of “talking” (*yan*) and “doing” (*xing*). So it is still, as Confucius expresses his view on “nature” (*ziran*) by the famous phrase: “While standing by a river, the Master said, what passes away is, perhaps, like this, day and night it never lets up (Mao 1983, 148; also see Chen 1995, 664).”¹⁶

Besides *bianzhengfa* (dialectic method), *duili tongyi* (the unity of opposites), *xiangfan xiangcheng* (contradictory but complementary), Mao has other expressions to suggest “dialectics,” which are *mao-dun* (spear-shield), *yifenweier* (one divides into two), and *liangdian lun* (the two-point theory). These expressions all come from classical text of *tongbian*. Hanfei zi, a pre-Qin dynasty thinker, first

14 According to David Hall and Roger Ames, the anecdote describes the positive contribution of “chaos” and provides an ontological rendering of the characteristic of Chinese correlative sensibility. “Chaos” makes a dynamic sense of order which, rather than separating what orders from what is ordered, locates the energy of change within chaos itself by insisting that order is always richly vague. (see Hall and Ames 1995, 230–31)

15 “*Nanfang zhi di yue Shu, Beifang zhi di yue Hu. Zhongyang zhi di yue Hundun. Shu yu Hu xiangyu yu Hundun zhi ye, Hundun dai zhi shen hou. Shu yu Hu mou suoyi bao zhi, yue: “Ren jie you qiqiao, yi shi ting shi xi, bi du wu you, chang shi zao zhi? Ri zao yi qiao, qi ri er Hundun si.”*”

16 “*Zi zai chuan shang yue, zhi zhe ru si fu, bu she zhouye,*” As for Mao’s dislike of Confucius, see Chen (1995, 665). Mao made it plain in his speech at the 12th Plenary Session of the 8th Central Committee of CCP that he perhaps was a little biased, not liking Confucius too much.”

used the analogue of *mao-dun* in referring to something or idea that entails “inconsistency,” “internal contradiction” or “self-contradiction.”¹⁷ Many intellectuals used *maodun* as equivalent to “contradiction” when Western dialectics was introduced into China. Mao adopted the analogue in his *tongbian* reading of dialectical materialism, especially the law of the unity of the opposites, or *duili tongyi*. He entitled his famous essay on *duili tongyi* “On *Mao-dun*” (“On Contradiction”).

Mao frequently used *yifenweier* (one divides into two) for dialectics in 1960s; the expression was first used in the classical texts of the *Yijing*:

In the *Yi*, there is *taiji* (the Supreme Ultimate), from which grow the two elementary aspects. From them then grow the four emblematic images; and from the four emblematic images grow the eight Triagrams. (*Yijing*, Xici I, ch. 11)¹⁸

Shao Yong, a *Lixue* School philosopher of the Song dynasty, further developed the passage as “*Taiji* indeed means one, which never moves and begets two. Two is spirit-like, and from the spirit-like grows numbers, from numbers grow images, and from images grow tangible things (Shao 2006, col. 8, II: 23).”¹⁹ Furthermore, Zhu Xi, the best-known Song Dynasty *Lixue* School philosopher, explained the passage as follows:

Here it means simply “one divides into two,” and things go generation after generation as such as a continuity without an end. Everything grows from one to two. (Zhu 1986, vol. 67)²⁰

As for *liangdian lun*, or the two-point theory, Mao himself confirms that it has roots in the *Yijing*. He examined in the first part of the book the passages “*gang* and *rou* push themselves each into the place of the other, and hence produce changes and transformations (*Yijing*, Xici I, ch. 2),”²¹ and “A *yin* and a *yang* are what is called *dao*.” As Mao makes it plain, these two analogues describe “dialectical materialism,” that is, the *pubianxing* (“universality”) of motion and change and developmental processes of the unity of opposites. For him, *gang-rou* and *yin-yang* are functional analogs of the meaning of

17 Hanfei zi (c. 280?–233 BCE) The definition of *maodun* in Xiandai Hanyu Cidian contains Hanfei’s first use of the analogue of *mao* and *dun*.

18 “*Yi you taiji, shi sheng liangyi, liangyi sheng sixiang, sixiang sheng bagua.*”

19 “*Taiji yi ye, budong sheng er, er ze shen ye, shen sheng shu, shu sheng xiang, xiang sheng qi.*”

20 “*Ci zhibi yi fen wei er, jiejie ruci, yizhiyu wuqiong, jie shi yi sheng liang er.*”

21 “*Gang rou xiang tui er sheng bian hua.*”

the sources of development in things “as the law of the unity of opposites...” Mao stresses the point by saying, “Ancient Chinese stated that a *yin* and a *yang* were what was called *dao*. There could not be *yin* without *yang*, or *yang* without *yin*. This is somewhat the kind of two-point theory of ancient times.” (Mao 1965; Zeng 1991, 248)

Dialectical Materialism as Seeking Continuity

It was from Chinese classical texts that Mao inherited the expressions as well as the thought of *tongbian* in his reading of the unity of opposites in Marxist philosophical literature. Even though Mao derived all his understanding of “dialectical materialism” from Russian texts—entirely in Chinese translation—there could not be a plausible judgment that Mao’s view of “dialectical materialism” was contaminated with positivism and dualism, or orthodox Marxism. The difference in Mao’s reading is that “the unity of opposites” (or *duili tongyi*) suggests a continuity of two pairing aspects, and that the mutual transformation of quantity and quality and the negation of the negation are rather patterns of the continuity or correlativity of two pairing opposites.

For example, Mao has two interesting analogues for the concept of negation, or *fou ding*; one was from the *Yijing*, the other, *Nangong ciji*.²² Mao wrote “*wanquan fou ding, qian kun huo jihu xi* (entire negation, *qian* and *kun* would almost to cease to act)” in the margin by the paragraph in which Shirokov and Aizenberg quote Lenin, “If I grind wheat grain, or kill insects, I am accomplishing the first action of negation, but the second action becomes impossible.”²³ The phrase that Mao quotes, “*qian kun* would almost to cease to act,” is from the text of *Xici*, the *Yijing* (Sung Z.D., *The Text of Yi King*, 303).²⁴ For another analogue, Mao noted “with the body

22 *Nangong ciji* is a collection of scattered Ming Dynasty verses, compiled by Chen Suowen. They were a particular type of verse, very popular in the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, with tonal patterns drawn modeled on tunes drawn from folk music.

23 The English is my translation, since the original text is not available. However, translating from Chinese to English, it may sound more Chinese, and closer to what as understood by Mao. (see Mao 1988, 123)

24 I did revisions in the English translation of the passage. For example, I changed “system” into “continuity,” which is more appropriate from the *tongbian* perspective. This passage runs: May we not say that *qian* and *kun* (=the *yang* and *yin*, or the undivided and divided lines) are the secret and subtleties of the *Yi*? *Qian* and *kun* being established in their several places thereby a continuity of changes constitutes. If *qian* and *kun* were taken away, there would be no means of seeing this continuity; and if this continuity were not seen, *qian* and *kun* would almost cease to act.

of sister is brother, and with the body of brother, sister (Chen 1996, 812)”²⁵ by the paragraph in which Shirokov and Aizenberg claim, “‘dying out’ is also ‘preserving’” at the same time, dialectical negation is the dynamic cause of development process. On the one hand, it makes sublation, which is, overcoming the old thing. On the other hand it preserves the old thing as a subsidiary dynamic cause.”²⁶ The function of these two analogues in Mao’s reading of negation demonstrates it adequately, that is, to indicate correlativity or continuity. For Mao, negation does not suggest separation, not something clean cut, but rather that something going first entails (or in a continuum with) something else going after it; and *vice versa* (Mao 1988, 121). As he argued, the continuity in *fouding zhi fouding*, or the negation of the negation, is not something that imposes externally (*ibid.*, 126). Mao’s paid close attention to the negation of old things by new things as *yangqi* (sublation), which is not only negation but also continuity (*jishi fouding, you you jicheng*); this is an important characteristic of Mao’s thinking (Chen 1996, 813).

Moreover, on the issue of internal and external contradictions, Mao adopts numerous classical Chinese expressions that suggest a continuity of inner changes with external conditions. As Mao writes,

A thing must be rotten first, and then worms start eating it. A person must be unsure first, and then he would believe slanderous talks. That it was not that I was defeated, but that the Heaven did not want me to win are wrong. Running water never is stale; it is not that flowing water becomes stale. A door-hinge never is worm-eaten; it is not that the door-hinge becomes worm-eaten. How well a thing is in itself makes a primary reason? If one never feels sorry for an inner self-inspection, then there would be nothing for him to be worried about and afraid of. (Schram 1992, 66)

What is dialectical materialism really about? For Mao, it is about “continuity,” or *tongyi*. As he repeatedly states, the kernel of *bianzhengfa* (dialectics) was *duili tongyi*, or continuity of opposites. Mao’s most notable contribution to the science of dialectics was his development of the concepts of “principal contradiction” and

25 The passage runs: “Brother, let’s mould figures of the two of us with brown clay, making one to look like you, the other to look like me. Let’s mould them to be an exact replica of us; let’s make them to sleep in a same bed. Then we dash them and restart molding. Again, we make a figure to look like you and another to look like me. With the body of brother is sister, and with the body of sister is brother.”

26 Like footnote 32, the English is my translation, since the original text is not available (see Mao 1988, 124).

“the principal aspect of the principal contradiction (ibid.).” Indeed, these concepts all mean seeking continuity. In his “On Contradiction” we read,

If in any process there are a number of contradictions, one of them must be the principle contradiction playing the leading and decisive role, while the rest occupy a secondary and subordinate position. Then in studying any complex process in which there are two or more contradictions, we must devote every effort to finding its principal contradiction. Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved. (Mao 1965, 1: 332)

Of the two contradictory aspects, one must be principal and the other secondary. The principal aspect is the one playing the leading role in the contradiction. The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the principal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect which has gained the dominant position. (ibid., 333)

Here, the English translation is rather misleading, for such expressions as “leading and decisive role,” “secondary and subordinate position,” “is determined” and “dominant position,” etc., tend to lead people to the old issue of which determines which. It seems that the principal “contradiction” and the principal aspect of the principal “contradiction” are the determining elements that do not require reference to the determined for explanation, and deny that both the determinate and indeterminate elements in the process are important. It seems that from the determining to the determined is a single causal order that separates what determines and what is determined, and thus can be understood as a “whatever this, then that,” therefore there can be the problems of causal reductionism and simple determinism.

However, this is not the case in Mao; rather, as from the perspective of *tongbian*, Mao’s conception of principal “contradiction” and the principal aspect of the principal “contradiction” is to indicate the correlativity of the determinate with indeterminate aspects of a continuity process. “The principal contradiction” is rather as a focus of correlations in a specific field. To say “leading and decisive,” “secondary and subordinate position,” “is determined” and “dominant position” is to locate the focal center of correlations in the richly vague field of relationships where the energy of change is. To grasp the principal contradiction relies on an appreciation of the continuity of the focus with the field. As corollary to this, the principal “contradiction” and the other elements of the continuity process, as focus and field, are never finally fixed or determinant. This is not a matter of the determining vs. the determined, but rather that of the site-specific, appropriate situation, and proper time on the part of the principal “contradiction.”

The relations of the principal contradiction to its field of relationships are not established in terms of the presumption of “essences” or “natural kinds” defining membership. This is particularly the case with the principal aspect of the principal “contradiction.” For Mao, the principal aspect and the other aspect of the principal contradiction are certainly an analogue of paired aspects *mao* and *dun*. To name one of them as “principal,” “with the leading role” and “dominant position,” and the other, “secondary,” Mao plainly suggests the right time and position on the part of one of them that manifests as the nature or *zhi* of a thing. As the terms “principal,” “with the leading role” and “dominant position” are adopted as analogues of *tongbian*, they do not contain the same implications in English. Perhaps it would be more suitable to say that they mean *zheng* (appropriateness) and *shi zhong* (right time and in a proper situation). This is exactly the same point Mao makes in terms of *zhongyong* (free from being inappropriate, “not change”) in his mentioning Mozi in his letter of February 1, 1939 to Chen Boda, when Mao claims that a *zhi* has two aspects in an ongoing process, with either of them as the principal and comparably stable. And he adds that *zhi* has to be one-sided (or *pian*) toward the principal aspect. *Zhi* exactly means that aspect; it is not *zhi*, otherwise. By “having the two but being free from one-sidedness to each (*liang er wu pian*),” what Mozi proposes is “free from going to a different *zhi* on either the side of left or right. To be one-sided with either aspects of a *zhi* would not make one-sidedness but *zheng* (appropriateness). It is here that we find what Mao’s “principal,” “with the leading role,” and “dominant position” exactly suggest by *pian* (one-sidedness) and/or *zheng* (appropriateness). And *pian* and *zheng* entirely rely on continuity of paired aspects (Mao 1983, 142–43).

An important continuity of paired aspects that Mao is most interested in is that of theory with practice and *yingyong* (using the Marxist position and views as guidance in the revolution). Relevant to this are many of the claims of continuity, that is, the continuity of intention and results of doing (*dongji yu xiaoguo*), thinking and actual circumstances (*sixiang yu shiji*), and knowing and doing (*zhi he xing*). So is it as regards “continuity with the masses” (*lianxi qunzhong*), his analogue of arrow and target (*you di fangshi*), his pet phrases “seeking continuity through actual things” (*shishi qiushi*) and “change the world and remould world views” (*gai zao shijie he gaizao shijieguan*), his emphasis on “active reflection” theory (*nengdong fanying lun*) and so on. Indeed, all these claims were relevant to the classical *tongbian* with regard to viewing humanity as continuous with the world.

We often perceive that there is a material world in contradiction to human subjectivity. *Tongbian* suggests, however, that knowing and doing, exploring and comprehending, and other activities of the like of human subjectivity, have the same reference to continuity through change; all are believed to be continuous with a

world of correlations. Continuity requires humanity not only to have a thorough comprehension of change, but also to do things according to continuity to effect changes in actual circumstances as well as in himself. In such a view of *tongbian*, we see no separation of humanity from nature and no dichotomy of human subjectivity vs. the physical world. As a person makes himself continuous with the physical world, what he comprehends and does is simply the way in which the world changes; and thus there is no contradiction. Human plans are never made away from the continuity of a changing world, and thus would not go wrong. By an ever-varying adaptation, a person achieves successes in his undertakings. Such a perspective from the modality of *tongbian* has been so profoundly rooted in Chinese tradition that it has become a Chinese “logic.” Mao tends to hold a view that Marxism must turn up as a continuity with the specific characteristics of China, and that the real power of Marx-Leninism lay in the fact that it would make a continuity with particular revolutionary practices in different countries (Mao 1965, 449).²⁷

For Mao, doing is continuous with both thinking and actual circumstances; doing (or practice) itself may make a continuum, “practice goes through the entire process of our knowing” (Mao 1988, 33). He even asserts that doing goes first, and then knowing (*ibid.*, 474.); for him, both reading and applying are a kind of knowing, and applying is an even more important kind. It is often not a matter of knowing first, and then doing, but that of doing first, and then learning, for doing itself knows (*ibid.*, 1: 189–90). Of course, doing is more a manifestation of the characteristic of the active role of humanity, if doing is assumed as continuity with actual circumstances, then it does make a continuum of thought and the physical world and would be successful in rendering positive results. If it goes astray from continuity, it would end up with failure. Yet, a person is able to learn from failure, adjust himself not to abandon continuity, and then makes himself a continuity. It is in this sense that Mao regards doing highly and the phrase “failure is the mother of success” (*Shibai shi chenggong zhi mu*).

Many China students in the West view Mao as voluntarist, but they seem to have forgotten that he never assumed that people are capable of doing whatever they want; but rather, from the perspective of *tongbian*, what Mao truly suggested is that a person is unable to accomplish anything if he abandons continuity with actual circumstances. Mao seemingly places heavy weight on the active role of humanity, but also makes the individual a focus of correlations in the field of relationships where he is. It is at this standpoint that Mao

27 “*Makesi zhuyi bixu he woguo juti tedian xiang jiehe...Makesi Liening zhuyi de weida liliang jiu zaiyu ta shi be gege guojia juti de geming shijian xiang xianxi de.*”

emphasizes “the theory of active reflection,” or stresses the need “assume a full play of the active role of subjectivity.” (ibid., vol. 2) Although he develops this concept after mentioning Lenin in the essay, “On New Democracy,” Mao emphasizes the idea of “*far hui zhuguan nengdong xing*” (assume a full play of the active role of subjectivity) in many occasions until it becomes a popular phrase of the masses).²⁸ What this is about is indeed “seeking a continuity of thinking with actuality.” In Mao’s view, even though there is not a dichotomy of thought vs. the physical world but rather that, as foci of correlations with the field of relationships, thoughts are continuous with actual circumstances; continuity could not be comprehended automatically. If it could, then this would indeed be a dichotomy, since continuity is correlative, rather than single-sided. Hence, the active role of thinking is exactly what continuity is about. Only when there is doing (including thinking) on the part and as an active role of humanity, and a continuity of field with focus comprehended, can there be an adequate continuity. Otherwise, there would only be separateness, looseness, and one-sidedness, or what as Mao criticizes, *xing-er-shang-xue*, or *zhuguan zhuyi* (subjectivism), or *pianmian* (one-sidedness).

Continuity of theory with practice lies in *yingyong*, or “applying Marxist theory and method as guidance in doing.” *Yingyong* as an active role on the part of humanity requires taking into full account of specific circumstances and proper time. As regards this point, Mao refers to “attaching importance to study of current circumstances and history,” which include “the current circumstances of politics, economy, military, and culture in both China and the world” and historical circumstances from the time of “Confucius to Sun Yatsen” (Mao 1965, 499). One of Mao’s famous analogues that functions to indicate the active role of humanity in continuity with actual circumstances is that of “arrow and target (*youdi fangshi*).” As Mao states, “the continuity of Marxism-Leninism with Chinese revolution is just like that of arrow and target...the arrow of Marxism-Leninism must shoot the target of Chinese revolution (ibid., 3: 38).”

There are also many more examples that may require a separate project on how Mao reads Marxism distinctly and represents *tongbian*. Mao’s focus of attention has been on reading correlativity or continuity in “dialectical materialism,” or say, wherever relations (relationship) matter, Mao would conceive them as correlativity and continuity. As Mao himself claimed, insofar as people have studied

28 “*Nengdong fanying lun*.” Although he developed this concept after mentioning Lenin in the essay, “On New Democracy,” Mao emphasized the idea of “*fa hui zhuguan nengdong xing*” (assume a full play of the active role of subjectivity) on many occasions until it became a popular phrase of the masses.

“dialectics,” it is exactly continuity and interdependence of the “opposites” that matter (ibid., 81–82).²⁹

It is clear that, for Mao, dialectical materialism is about “continuity,” or *tongyi*. As he repeatedly stated, the kernel of *bianzhengfa* (dialectics) was *duili tongyi*, or continuity of opposites, to juxtapose the three laws, as has been always in the old texts, is not appropriate, and those categories (perhaps there are more than a dozen of them) should all be explained as continuity of contradictions and opposites in things (ibid., 505–7). As Mao stated again and again, as far as “dialectics” is concerned, it is nothing else but continuity as long as we think about “opposites” (ibid., 81–82). It may suffice to say that for a Chinese version of “dialectical materialism,” which has developed amid Marxism’s encountering Chinese tradition, and comes to fruition in Mao, it is explicitly about *tongyi* (continuity), rather than dichotomy. Mao has developed the concept of Sinification of Marxism from the perspective of *tongbian*, that is, to construe continuity of Marxism with particular circumstances of China. His thought with Marxist rhetoric marks a new and more sophisticated phase of the traditional strand *tongbian*. Its sophistication and maturity lie in the fact that Mao not only advocated but also performed it. His modern version of *tongbian* is so articulate that it not only becomes a major thinking modality for the general theoretical realm of Chinese Marxism, but also has a profound impact on the entire history of modern China due to the revolution under his leadership.

Post-Mao Era Marxism

The form that Marxism assumed in China was no longer the same as the inherited legacy of Marxian dialectics in Europe. It is a third alternative, a rendered version that indeed articulates *tongbian*, a traditional Chinese modality of thinking in the language composed of the terminology of Western Marxism yet in Chinese translation. In this sense we can consider it a modernized form of traditional thinking. Known as *bianzhengfa* (“dialectics”), the new strand finally came to a mature formation in the thought of Mao Zedong and is both powerful and available to people in all walks of life in China.

However, this version of Sinicized Marxism has, more than forty years after Mao’s death, changed since the end of the 1970s when Deng Xiaoping came to power and openly declared the start of his capitalist “Economic Reform” with the name of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” We see currently an utterly different situation

²⁹ Here the language Mao uses is Marxist, though, that is, *bianshengfa yaniu zhe xuduo, jiusi duili de tongyixing huo xiangbu shentou*.

in which China has been encountering the domination of the Western idea of liberalism. This shows the Chinese authority's engagement in economic reform, which has appealed to the doctrines of neo-liberalism, and more and more rendered a liberal account of China's future. It seems there is a complete breakup of the trend of *tongbian* or "dialectics" in both official ideology and the community of intelligentsias. This tendency has been well seen as many students and others with an interest in Chinese politics, and both international and Chinese media, have been watching closely so as not to miss any small piece of information which may indicate a significant move towards political reform that the Chinese authorities may have been taking in the direction of liberal democratization. In this respect, Hu Jintao's ascendance to power in 2003 was regarded a great opportunity for such a change.

It may be interesting to find that, however, just like the case of Marxism in China, liberalism, wherever one finds it in the West, may be significantly different from what appears to be now the Chinese analogue. As we pay close attention, it may be that neo-liberalism and liberal democracy have assumed a third form in China, a rendered version that articulates the traditional *tongbian* in the language composed of liberalism's terms yet in Chinese translation. We may call it a Chinese style of liberalism and find, however, as a clear strand of thought of Chinese tradition, *tongbian* is still available. Although Chinese liberalism finds some of its roots in Western ideology, it may have read it in a different way.

In this respect, it is helpful to mention Yan Fu, the case of perhaps the first Chinese liberalist. He produced the first Chinese version of evolutionary theory in 1898. While he was no doubt deeply impressed by Western liberalism, Yan Fu rendered the original form of liberalism as one that was rather focused on the individual as a means to the end of community; beyond this, individual liberty found little room in his intellectual world. (Zhou 2003) This revisionist view was because the ultimate spiritual core of liberalism—the concept of the worth of people within society as an end in itself, did not come through in Yen Fu's approach (Schwartz 1964, 240).

Almost precisely one hundred years later, in 1998, Liu Rong, a professor of philosophy at Zhongshan University, argued in exactly the terms of *tongbian* in his work in defense of Deng Xiaoping's articulation of a "dialectical" way of "incorporating capitalism into socialism,"

"The two systems (socialist and capitalism) under one state are *xiangfan xiangcheng* (contradictory yet complementary);" Deng's wisdom lies in his employing the dialectical method, *duili tongyi* (the unity of opposites), and viewing both contradictory relations and identical elements

(*gongtong dian*) of the two systems, that is, unity, identity, sharing, and agreeability, their reliance on each other, penetrating into each other, and co-operation. Under certain conditions, they complement and benefit from each other, glorifying and promoting each other. (Liu 1998, 405–6)

Right or wrong, capitalism as a practice of neo-liberalism under the current Chinese circumstances is rendered in Liu's hand a new form which is not considered as necessarily contradicting socialism, but rather is supposed to be a means to the end of the community.

What are the typical patterns for Chinese liberals to read Western liberalism? Again, any explanation needs to start with the issue of the absence in Chinese tradition of Western-style dualisms that establish an ontological separation between some determinative principle and that which it determines, and the correlative mode of philosophizing and explaining order in the world. It was in this setting that Chinese liberals produced an ideology and adopted actions. The nearly forty years since this process began have witnessed great changes in the authorities' treatment of the fundamental political concepts in Marxism. thanks to the typical patterns in which the Chinese liberals read Western ideas, as outlined below:

- 1) No Debate (*bu zhenglun*): one of Deng Xiaoping's key phrases, which means that any debate regarding what is socialism or capitalism is rejected, since debate on this issue would lead economic reform to a deadlock.
- 2) Market Economy: Capitalism is an economic system based upon private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. Characteristics central to capitalism include private property, capital accumulation, wage labour, voluntary exchange, a price system and competitive markets. In a capitalist market economy, decision-making and investment are determined by every owner of wealth, property or production ability in financial and capital markets, whereas prices and the distribution of goods and services are mainly determined by competition in goods and services markets. As a concept in terms of neoliberalism, a market economy is primarily related to the 20th-century resurgence of 19th-century ideas associated with *laissez-faire* economic liberalism, which includes such policies as privatization, austerity, deregulation, free trade, and reductions in government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society. These market-based ideas and the policies they inspired constitute a paradigm shift away from the post-war Keynesian consensus, which lasted from 1945 to 1980. However, Chinese reformists tried hard to promote such a neo-liberal style of market economy by saying that it could serve either capitalism or socialism, and thus persuading people that what this market economy is driving at is definitely socialism.

- 3) Preliminary Stage of Socialism: The purpose of stressing this concept is to persuade people of a shifting of the political direction of socialism, which involves restraining capitalism, to productivity development, which means adopting the market economy and science and technology of capitalism.
- 4) Productivity: taken as a pure economic concept, productivity could develop independent of socialist and together with capitalist productive relations.
- 5) “White Cat and Black Cat”: a reductionist view of economic development as a matter of means rather than ends.
- 6) “Science and technology constitute the primary productive force.” This is another of Deng’s pet expression, which renders a misunderstanding of Marx’s view of science and technology for a form of determinism. Here “the economic foundation determines the superstructure” is mistaken for a linear, one-track dualism. This is not Marx’s view, even though for him production constitutes a decisive course because in Marx changes exert impact on the inner-related process of production, consumption, distribution and exchange. “Economic determinism” became a popular term, which is based on the fallacy of scientific and technological determinism. In Marx’s critique, nothing would be worse than a theorist who holds this fallacy. For instance, property relations are the concern of law, which is a superstructure and necessary for production. Furthermore, the human factor is responsible for primary productivity.

It seems all to find that in the *tongbian* reading a more *tongbian* yet empiricist form of Chinese Marxism has become a dualist and philosophic fallacy. As the process of economic reform appealed to the doctrines of neoliberalism, the Chinese have gradually entered a new discourse on the future, a modified interpretation of the Marxism-Leninism that they had followed for over ninety years since the 1920s.³⁰ In addition, they revived discussions of Confucianism. At this time, however, both a modified interpretation of Marxism and the revival of Confucianism were carried out in terms of neoliberalism (Tian 2006).

However, even though in the course of about forty years’ economic reform China has been experiencing a rush for wealth, and the slogan “to be rich is glorious” seems to have become the motto of all society, from the perspective of *tongbian* it is still an unclear situation as for both the masses and government. The attitude is far more paradoxical than models of liberalism can explain. There has not been a sign of any certain direction that China is definitely going to take for the time being; apart from enormous uncertainty, a teleological transition to liberal

30 Since economic reform there has been a popular circulation of Deng Xiaoping assertion—“what socialism is about is not clear, other than to develop productive forces.” Scholars of Marxism have also started an attack on the theory of class struggle in Marx and Mao.

democracy simply does not exist. For this reason, there is less plausibility for abstract theoretical prediction to occur in such a scenario.

President Xi Jinping, the current top leader of China, is seen making particular effort to build an image of affinity with the common people. Xi seems to be reaching back to the Zhou dynasty 3,000 years ago for inspiration in this regard. His idea of a “new era” of global relations based on a “community of common destiny” has drawn from the concept of *tianxia*, or “all under heaven,” that reigned during that ancient era. This might be, however, be an alternative version of the *tongbian* way of understanding of Marx’s idea of communism—*datong*, meaning living in harmonious coexistence.

Attention all around the world will now be paid to the claims of harmonious cooperation along China’s new Silk Road—spanning from Eurasia to Africa—to see how the aspiration of a common destiny is playing out in reality. This is perhaps an indication, just as Hall and Ames observe, that the leadership of today’s China maintains many of the same characteristics that have dominated Chinese government since the Han dynasty—namely, the nation understood as a family, filial respect for the ruler as father, and the consequent sense of rule as a personal exercise (Tian 2006, 213).

There will thus be the possibility at some point that new leadership rethinks the whole process of the campaign of reform and, as a result, turns to traditional virtues and ethical values as both ideology and political solutions for handling elements that affect social stability. In this scenario, what they will be forced to consider is how to assess and even retreat from certain reforming programs that are endangering the future of China. This will be very disappointing to the proponents of teleological liberalism.

For *tongbian*, there is hope if we just try to comprehend historical phenomena through correlations and continuity within a full range of dimensions in contextual settings, and avoid comprehending them as dualistic, separate and unrelated conceptual models. For all the related possibilities, the worldviews, modality of thinking, traditional virtues, and cultural and moral values will play a fundamental role in determining the direction China is going to take, even if there is the use of Western concepts, liberal or otherwise, on the surface.

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