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Reflections on Chinese Marxism

Robert Ware

Few outside China would think of China as a socialist, or Marxist, society. Inside China the views vary widely, but few would say, without qualifiers, as the Constitution does, that China is socialist. No one – anywhere – now sees China as a model for socialism. Nevertheless, socialism is a strong force in China and Marxism a subject of continuing investigation. Just how significant a role socialism and Marxism play is not easily determined, but the importance of that role and some of its complexity is well worth considering.

Recently I have taught Marxism in Beijing and have had occasion to see some of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory and its application. After some remarks on my experiences there, I will discuss my observations about the nature of Marxism in China in theory and practice. Whatever one says about China's problems and about how Marxism is discussed there, a large role for studying, developing, and applying Marxism in China remains.

I argue here that the significance of Marxism in China can be compared to that of democracy in the West, especially in North America. In both settings, the relevant practices are dysfunctional in significant ways, but both Marxism and democracy give a rationale and a tissue of support – and, consequently, a locus of struggle – for efforts to improve life for the majority. Their actual influence can be depressingly weak, but both are worthy of investigation, for political as well as intellectual reasons. I will consider some questions about the kinds of socialism and Marxism that prevail in China, but also, importantly, what topics are rejected or simply ignored.

Visits, courses, and socialists

Teaching Marxism in China is fascinating, although the same can probably be said for teaching most other subjects there, primarily because of China's great development and energy, as well as its complexity and chaos. My observations here come largely from recent

visits to China, including three weeks in the fall of 2007 (accompanied by my wife, Dr Diana Hodson), a month at Renmin University in Beijing in July 2010, and two months at Peking University (again with my wife) in September–November 2011. I have also learned much from many helpful correspondents and subsequent contacts, both inside China and out.

In 2007, I visited five academic institutions in Beijing and Shanghai, lecturing on analytical Marxism and libertarian socialism and discussing Marxism and democratic theory, in China and abroad. (I was revisiting universities, where I had taught analytical philosophy in 1984–85 [Fudan University in Shanghai] and 1986–87 [Peking University and the Institute of Philosophy in Beijing]. In the 1980s, I also lectured on analytical Marxism at a variety of universities and institutes throughout the country.) I also participated in a conference in 2007, at a Communist Party university in Shanghai, celebrating the 140th anniversary of Marx's *Capital* with over a hundred economists, mostly Chinese, and a few theorists from other disciplines. In 2010, I taught a summer course at Renmin University of China (RUC) in Beijing and served as a commentator at a conference at the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) celebrating the 150th anniversary of the *Grundrisse*.¹

At Peking University in the fall of 2011, I taught a small undergraduate philosophy course on analytical Marxism and a graduate philosophy seminar on Marxism and radical politics. G.A. Cohen's philosophically acute and influential studies were the central texts for the seminar. We looked at new approaches to historical materialism, the core of Marxist studies in China, and at equality and freedom, which are generally not discussed as Marxist topics.

The first reading assignment I gave for my summer course in 2010 on analytical Marxism at RUC² was Albert Einstein's "Why I am a

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1. This two-day conference was jointly organized by Marcello Musto and CCTB with an equal number of papers from Chinese and foreign theorists from different disciplines. Musto, together with Terrell Carver, George Comninel, Norman Levine, and Kenji Mori, spoke in three other cities as well. In Beijing there were about 50 in attendance. The CCTB was founded in 1953 and is attached to the Communist Party of China.
 2. My course was on analytical Marxism, the subject of a book (*Analyzing Marxism*) edited by Kai Nielsen and myself and translated into Chinese. The 30 students, mostly undergraduates, were from many different departments. They were also from a full range of social strata, including rural and industrial workers. The course was completely in English, including readings from Marx, although translations were compared. RUC is known for its work in the social sciences and humanities as a preparatory university for civil servants, but it also has strong faculties in professional areas such as law and business.

Socialist” and two introductions to analytical Marxism. The first short writing assignment was to answer the question “Why I am a socialist,” or alternatively “Why I am not a socialist.”³ From the start, I had a good opportunity to learn about young people’s views in contemporary China through this small group of university students in Beijing. Of the 30 students, 20 gave reasons for why they were socialists and 10 gave reasons for why they were not. In the 20, I include one who became socialist later, after reading the *Communist Manifesto* (I assume again) in English. I also include two who said they were not socialists because they were communists.

Given what I had heard previously in China, I was surprised that two-thirds of my students were socialist, but of course I could not conclude anything in general about young people from that exercise. Certainly, that the course was on Marxism would be a factor, although there were students in the course who were there for the credits, out of curiosity, and for the opportunity to develop their English. After the assignment was handed in, we talked about what young people in universities and in the country generally think about socialism. Before telling them the results, I asked them to guess the division of the class in the exercise. There was a fair amount of variation about the class and greater variation for figures about the views of other groups. Afterwards, I learned, through quizzing many friends and contacts, that there is little idea of how many people, young or old, are socialists.

I know of no good studies of the number of Chinese who are socialists, but it is also difficult to know what a good study would be. Much depends on how the question is asked and what the meaning of socialism is in the relevant context. The same is true for understanding what significance to give to the 2009 Rasmussen poll that “found” that one third of US young people under 30 believe that socialism is superior to capitalism. What do the people polled think socialism is? In the case of the Chinese, young people would naturally think of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought or socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The reasons that people give, however, tell something about what they mean when they think of socialism. Quite a few of my students explained their allegiance in terms of their beliefs about human

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3. I assured them of confidentiality and that I would not tell their teachers (or parents or friends), but it was soon clear that I need not have worried about any concerns on their part. The discussion afterwards was open and freewheeling. In the month of daily classes and many informal meetings, I got to know the students quite well. Private discussions with them assured me that their comments were generally direct and honest, as much so as comments from my students in Canada.

nature. Several said that they were socialists because it is human nature to be altruistic or collectivist, and a similar number were not socialists because, they said, people are self-interested by nature. Of course, this was a good topic for discussion in the class on a topic that is usually given short shrift in Chinese Marxist studies.

Many students were socialists because of parents or grandparents who were members of the Communist Party or had fought in Korea or the War of Liberation. And there were a variety of personal reasons, including moral reasons. An interesting rhetorical question was: if not a socialist, what would you be? The suggestion was that capitalism is not a viable alternative. The dominant question is what kind of socialism should there be.

With even cursory contact, it is obvious that there are millions of socialists in China. There were 20 in my class, and if two-thirds of the adult population were socialists, China would have about 500 million socialists. That surely wildly overestimates the numbers, even for a country with a constitution that proclaims its socialism. For a more plausible estimate, consider first that the Communist Party of China has about 80 million members. There is certainly a lot of opportunism and cynicism amongst them, but on the basis of my private queries of many members, I cannot imagine that more than a quarter of them would actually reject socialism, even in their hearts.⁴ That leaves at least 60 million socialists in the Party.

Then there are surely several million socialists outside the Party. Many people are principled Maoists – some who see positive aspects of the Cultural Revolution – for example those involved with the Utopian Bookstore in Beijing, which has a wide variety of socialist and anarchist books in translation, where lectures are given, and with a widely followed Chinese website – until early 2012 when it was closed down after the detention of Bo Xilai. Bo, the former mayor of the megacity, Chongqing, is thought to have had millions of socialist followers because of popular social policies with Maoist trappings. These days there are also many “Marxologists” and other socialist theorists who do not want to be Party members. Some committed Marxists reject membership for principled reasons. Some socialists prefer not to undergo the strictures and discipline of the Party.

4. A careful study of private entrepreneurs in China “revealed that a clear majority of our respondents strongly supported...the fundamental values and key political institutions of the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] regime.” Jie Chen and Bruce Dickson, *Allies of the State: China's Private Entrepreneurs and Democratic Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 151f. This result reinforces my estimate of support for socialism within the CCP.

Many lack the enthusiasm and happily go on with their own private lives. I would add another 10 million socialists outside the Party.

Thus, my very rough guess is that there are at least 70 million socialists in China. This should not come as a surprise to anyone who observes the intellectual scene in universities, institutes, and the media. Socialism is a known ideology that many take seriously and many more are curious about. (I also heard of many who scoffed at fellow students studying Marxism and socialism.⁵ There is a lively diversity of opinion.)

This is not to deny that there is also strong interest in capitalism and ideas of neoliberalism in some circles, although there are ways in which such interests are against the grain, historically and politically. Economic decisions might favor private ownership and individual entrepreneurs, but rarely would they be justified on the basis of capitalist ideology or neoliberal theory. Occasionally, ideas are drawn from Western “capitalist” thinkers, but almost always in support of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Most people are embarrassed by and skeptical about ideas of neoliberalism, and private entrepreneurs are largely supporters of the Communist Party, which after all has facilitated their rise to wealth and power. Many would find this claim about support counterintuitive, but in a careful comprehensive study, Chen and Dickson draw their “main conclusion . . . that China’s capitalists are unlikely to be agents of change because their support for the current regime is stronger than their support for an alternative democratic political system.”⁶ Neoliberal ideology does not necessarily lead to Western forms of democracy.

This only makes the question more urgent: what kind of socialism do the millions of Chinese socialists espouse and follow? There is little doubt that most Chinese socialists would consider Marxism the foundation of their socialism, as inscribed in the constitutions of both the Party and the country. However, for the great majority of socialists,

5. In 2011, a sales clerk, learning about my teaching, declared his Christian faith and his conviction that Marxism is “bullshit.” It did not help that I was teaching about a Marxist, Cohen, who is known for attacking “bullshit Marxism.”

6. See Chen and Dickson, *Allies of the State*, 158. They note that “most other scholars have reached the same conclusion” to which they have added many details and new patterns. See also Bruce Dickson, *Wealth into Power: The Communist Party’s Embrace of China’s Private Sector* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008). For a similar view, see Teresa Wright, *Accepting Authoritarianism: State-Society Relations in China’s Reform Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), especially ch. 2. She writes, “it is not just that these sectors [private entrepreneurs, professionals, and intellectuals] have had material incentives to support the status quo; their ideal desires for social respect and approbation have been addressed by the central regime as well” (34).

there is little doubt that the details of theory – and knowledge of Marx – are pretty sketchy. And vagueness allows a diversity of opinions and leanings. Moreover, the Communist Party does not give, if it ever has, clear substantive principles to follow.

All school children get a smattering of socialist thought with emphasis on history, productive development, and socialist superiority. Examples of good behavior take the place of clear moral principles. Patriotism is promoted and Chinese values extolled, all in relation to socialism, as it has come down from Marx. I think there are a lot of parallels to social studies courses in Canada and the US, except that in China socialism rather than capitalism is the accepted model. The ideological forms are similar, but the government institutions and economic structures are significantly different.

University students have more comprehensive courses on dialectics and historical materialism. The curriculum also contains praise of social development in China, which is contrasted with capitalist poverty and corporate malfeasance in the West. Most universities have a separate department of Marxism that offers undergraduate introductions with staid old textbooks on Marxism–Leninism. (I also assigned my summer students a question about something they would change in their textbooks about socialism. There were many criticisms of the rigidity of the historical materialism and the lack of attention to social issues and ethical principles.) Some of the people in departments of Marxism research and teach beyond the textbooks, as is often done in Western courses on economics and politics. The better students see through the weaknesses and appreciate the strengths of classes on Marxism.

The founding texts are, of course, those of Marx and Engels, which have appeared in Chinese translations over the years, with new ones coming out of the ongoing comprehensive MEGA (Marx–Engels Gesamtausgabe) project. There are also translations of the works of many other figures in the history of Marxism, and socialism more generally. Contemporary Marxism and socialism throughout the world are studied widely and in depth as well. All of my students, and others, showed great curiosity about views and theories of socialism beyond what they had been taught. The curiosity is partly driven by the challenges that the Chinese confront.

The context and challenges

China officially, and quite widely unofficially, regards itself as socialist, but it has gone through enormous changes since the time of

liberation in 1949. Besides the changes, there is a great diversity, from one district and province to another, marked in language, culture, traditions, food, and productivity and wealth, which makes it difficult to generalize about what is happening. Still, much can be said about the country as a whole.

The country draws on a large population, a long history, a mature civilization, a vast geography, a committed citizenry, a hard-working labor force, an entrepreneurial economy, and governance with strong appeals to four cardinal principles and human rights (even though without strict adherence).⁷ It is also characterized by chaos, corruption, capitalist fervor, oppressive poverty in the midst of exorbitant wealth, weak social benefits, and heavy pollution.

China has developed economically in dramatic ways since 1949, and since my first visit in 1975. Economic development along the eastern coast during the last two decades has been phenomenal. The infrastructure and architecture is especially spectacular. Shanghai and Beijing have the largest and tallest buildings, but also some of the most avant-garde designs and structures by world-renowned architects. Moreover, the technology is advanced down to some of the smallest details, from hotels to public toilets in city parks.

One also sees the rise of consumerism. There are billboards, signs, and lights everywhere. And people are out shopping like I have never seen before anywhere, certainly not in China in the 1980s. At the extreme, there are many pristine malls with exclusive shops for the fabulously wealthy. But there is also middle-class consumption at a feverish rate in crowded department stores. And locally there are still many street sellers in neighborhoods. One also sees a full range of bakeries, cafes, eateries, restaurants, and boutiques of all kinds. Throughout Beijing, one finds heritage buildings, temples, courtyards, and hutongs,⁸ although I often heard complaints about too many being destroyed to make way for office towers, luxury apartment buildings, and other modern structures, which seem to be everywhere.

Poverty and inequality in China has been of utmost concern, as seen in the state-directed English language Chinese TV channel and the newspaper *China Daily*. In 2007, I saw explicit statistics in the

7. This is very much like a government that appeals to its bill of rights while whittling away at their substance and reach. China's constitution has a long list of rights (and duties) in a framework of four cardinal principles: upholding the socialist path, upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and upholding Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought.

8. The hutongs are the back alleys of neighborhoods in central Beijing with a range of buildings from unserviced hovels to upgraded courtyards of shops and restaurants.

China Daily, and the news from the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party was about a focus on poverty. The concern seemed just as great in 2010 and still today. On 12 May 2010, *China Daily* reported a continuing rise of the Gini coefficient, indicating an alarming rate of inequality. According to Li Shi at Beijing Normal University, “the income of the top 10 percent of the richest Chinese was 23 times that of the bottom 10 percent in the country in 2007, as compared with 1998, when the gap was only 7.3 times.”⁹ Bo Xilai is said to have criticized China for having a level of inequality similar to that of the US.¹⁰ There is much discussion about attempts to improve the conditions of the least well off in order to achieve social harmony. Unfortunately, the changes seem to be slow and small.

At the conference that I attended on Marx’s *Capital* in 2007, I heard one of the most impassioned criticisms that I have heard anywhere, in this case of people being paid far less than according to their labor.¹¹ The speaker spoke of his shame as a Chinese person. His presentation appeared to be received positively by the large audience of Chinese economists. The problem of poverty is disturbing given the enormous wealth of some, although the advances in China for the most impoverished are impressive – especially when compared to other parts of the world. Current studies distinguish between absolute poverty (for those who get barely over a dollar a day in purchasing-power parity) and poverty (for those getting a little over two dollars per day).¹² Between 1981 and 2004, absolute poverty, excluding China, was disturbingly constant – about 840 million people. In China, the numbers decreased by about 80% – from 634 million to 128 million (from just over 63% of the population to just under 10%). Those living in poverty increased by a third in the rest of the world, while the numbers halved in China.¹³

Some people gain vast wealth from the rapid national development, but there is also a significant trickle-down effect to the most

9. *China Daily*, 12 May 2010.

10. *The Guardian Weekly*, 16 March 2012, 2.

11. This, of course, would be understood by all at the conference as an allusion to Marx’s principle of distribution for the first phase of communism (also known as socialism).

12. Note, however, that such determinations do not take account of the additional negative effects, including cultural and political, of relative poverty in a community or society.

13. Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, “Absolute poverty measures for the developing world, 1981–2004” (Development Research Group, World Bank). *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA*, vol. 104, 43 (Oct. 23, 2007), published online, 17 Oct. 2007.

impoverished as well as to masses of middle-class consumers. (My observations of very little extreme poverty in Shanghai and Beijing, including in areas of migrant housing, are confirmed by the statistics that a very small percentage of the poverty is in the urban areas.) The growth of infrastructure in China, like water, electricity, and roads, is also impressive.

It is unclear how Marx would analyze these conditions. The question of what Marx would think about the application of his ideas to China in the twenty-first century is complicated there by old-style thinking about historical materialism as a general principle for all times and places.¹⁴ Unfortunately, this core of Marxism is also taught to the neglect of other issues, such as social relations and morality.

Because of this narrow and rigid focus in China (and elsewhere), I thought it was important to begin my courses (in 2012) with Marx and Engels' claim, in an 1850 review, that the English bourgeoisie had brought China to "the eve of a social upheaval" which might well bear the socialist banner reading: "République Chinoise: Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité."¹⁵ In one short passage of this review, we get Marx's (and Engels') application of the materialist conception of history to the real structures and conditions of China as they appeared in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶

Two important positions, contrary to most Chinese thinking (and that of many outside China), are clear. First, Marx did not simply apply European historical stages to China, and he could imagine, already in 1850, a socialist China. Second, socialist morality follows naturally, for Marx, from such a social upheaval. The place of morality in Marx's thinking is much debated, but it is obvious that he made moral critiques of capitalism and that he was here attaching moral values to an imagined socialist society. My graduate seminar at Peking University was basically a philosophical discussion of these ideas and values, with attention to the work of G.A. Cohen. Cohen's work is especially important because of his careful attention to a modern interpretation of Marx's historical materialism and his

14. This despite the fact that the Chinese translation of Marx's canonical statement in his famous 1859 Preface accurately calls it a guiding thread – not, misleadingly, a guiding principle, as in the English.

15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Review" (January 31, 1850), *Collected Works*, vol. 10, 267.

16. To the extent that this remark by Marx clashes with an interpretation of his materialist conception of history, there is reason to doubt the interpretation rather than to think that Marx has misapplied his own theory.

attempt to provide a clarification of and a foundation for Marxian ideas of justice, freedom, and equality.¹⁷

In the same 1850 review, Marx and Engels surmise that “Chinese socialism may admittedly be the same in relation to European socialism as Chinese philosophy in relation to Hegelian philosophy,” in other words, equally different. As I suggested, a “Chinese Ideology,” along the lines of Marx and Engels’ “German Ideology” needs to be written. I leave this task to Chinese philosophers. As Marx would say, we have to act – and think – in the conditions that we are given. It is of course unclear what the lessons of history should be now. Marxist tracts and books in China talk about modern scientific socialist development in the primary stage of socialism, with Chinese characteristics. These stages of the Chinese economy, however characterized, vary from what can be attributed to Marx and anything that Marx’s subtlety would suggest.

For those who might think that China used to be a Marxist country and now has abandoned all that, what I have witnessed of China’s complex history tells otherwise. Marxism continues to be a strong force, though in changing ways. The Constitution still says that China is guided by Marxism–Leninism, albeit with various tags that keep getting added on: “Mao Zedong Thought,” “Deng Xiaoping Theory,” and “The Three Represents.” I will not try to summarize the bits of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution that I knew in order to extract the Marxism from those years. Opinions vary, but few would think that it exhibited classical Marxism.¹⁸ I will stick to the post-Mao period and what has happened since the early 1980s when I lived and taught in China.

Centers of Marxism and socialist activity everywhere

In the 1980s, people quite generally claimed to be Marxists, but it was difficult to find Marxist ideas in the writings of political leaders.

17. The principal texts by G.A. Cohen are *Karl Marx’s Historical Materialism: A Defence*, expanded ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

18. There is a lot of literature, of course, on the Cultural Revolution, including ‘wound’ literature from urban intellectuals and the misleading diatribe by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday on Mao. For a couple of refreshing contributions to the period from other perspectives, I recommend Mobo Gao, *The Battle for China’s Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008) and Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000). For recent studies of Mao, see Timothy Cheek, ed. *A Critical Introduction to Mao* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

I did not think there was a socialist bone in Hu Yaobang (the Party General Secretary when I lived in China), whose memory the students on Tian'anmen Square in 1989 were honoring. Nor was there much Marxism in the thought of Deng Xiaoping, especially in his slogan that some should get rich first. Marxism was taught, in those years, throughout the school and university systems, although I was told that I sounded more Marxist than the Chinese in my public lectures in 1985 on analytical Marxism. Marx's historical materialism, nevertheless, was widely accepted as a theory to be applied to China in a primary stage of socialism.

Other parts of Marx's writings were less accepted or completely unacceptable. In 1984, I was surreptitiously taken to meet a scholar who had been isolated for writing about alienation and other topics in Marx's 1844 Manuscripts. This was despite the fact that Chinese translations of the relevant works on alienation had long been available. Few were familiar with the ethical and "human" aspects in Marx's writings. In the late 1980s, there was much more openness about topics in Marx beyond those in official writings, even when they applied adversely to modern socialist China. In 1986, I used Wang Ruoshui's *In Defense of Humanism*, and a criticism of it, in one of my courses. In 1987, we had brief discussions of Paul Feyerabend's anarchism in science, and more generally.

Still Chinese Marxism in those days was principally historical (and dialectical) materialism and some of the basics of the theory of surplus value and the critique of capitalism. Their Marxism was a form of economic determinism that ranged from simplistic to Soviet-style ideas. In the mid-1980s, practically everyone knew some Marxism and mostly believed it. There were suspicions, among many professors but not most students, of aspects of Marx and of foreign, especially Western, forms of Marxism.

Nevertheless, at that time there was an opening and theoretical renaissance that applied broadly to social theory, including Marxism. The mid-1980s was a time of fervent discussion and questioning. Socialism was central to a lot of thinking, but little was established about it. Certainly, the writings of Marx were not subjected to detailed scrutiny; nor was the new phrase "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

Since then, there has been more focus on the details in Marx, but there has also been more resistance. Much of the resistance is to the prevailing understandings of Marxism and socialism, but some reject it altogether. I heard much about doctrinaire thinking and rigid interpretations. The strongest complaints were about the lack of attention to

matters of justice, usually without a clear understanding of the place of justice in Marx's theory. Some have abandoned the theory, many search for applications, and many more investigate new developments. Of course, many go about their lives without consideration of the political culture and prevailing ideology, despite its being taught throughout the country.

There are all sorts of universities and institutes in all middle to large cities. Beijing and Shanghai also have large Party schools and universities. Sun Yatsen University in Guangzhou has an Institute of Marxist Philosophy and Chinese Modernization. Practically all of these centers have departments or faculties of Marxism, while the separate disciplines such as philosophy, economics, etc. have sections specializing in Marxist topics. In Beijing, there is the enormous Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), with an important Academy of Marxism-Leninism and numerous institutes in separate disciplines, each with a section on Marxism in the discipline. The Institute of Philosophy has about 300 researchers in 11 sections, including one on Marxism. Renmin University has a faculty of philosophy with about 75 faculty members, of whom more than a fifth are in the division of Marxist philosophy. Renmin University also has a Faculty of Marxist Studies with over 40 professors. Peking University has a large philosophy department and a school of Marxism as well. In Beijing, there is also the Party University, Qinghua University, Beijing Normal University, Foreign Studies University, and many others.

The Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) has published various collections and selections of the work of Marx and Engels and of Lenin. The first Chinese edition of the collected works of Marx and Engels was completed in 50 volumes in 1985. The second edition began in 1995 with major additions and revisions, following the ongoing international MEGA project.¹⁹ Besides the complete works of the founding authors, the CCTB translates many other classical writers and contemporary socialist authors from around the world, sometimes with the help of foreign scholars. There are also many people at CCTB researching Marxist and socialist texts widely and in depth. In 2004, the CCTB began the Marxist Theoretical Research and Development Project with financing from the State Social Sciences Fund. Under the direction of the CCTB, there are over

19. For more on publishing Marx's work in China, see Zhongpu Zhang, "China" in Marcello Musto, ed. *Karl Marx's Grundrisse* (London: Routledge, 2008), 219-222. Zhang ends by noting "the great influence of Marxist theory in China."

200 researchers from a variety of institutes and organizations divided into project teams on 18 important topics.

As Professor Yang Jinhai, Deputy Secretary General, says about recent studies, "particular attention was paid to studying theoretical viewpoints that were neglected in the past but are especially enlightening today. As a result, the research of today is far better than the research of the past in terms of methodology, areas, results and social impact."²⁰ Moreover, the studies are not just of classical or orthodox texts or theories. Sections and whole institutes are set up to study new developments outside China and beyond the Marxist-Leninist canon. Beijing Normal University has a series *Translations of Marxology Abroad* with over five books published annually.

Fudan University in Shanghai has a large Center for Contemporary Marxism Abroad, set up with state funding. CCTB has sections devoted to foreign theorists. Both centers have many visitors from around the world. Fudan has hosted Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Bidet, Bertell Ollman, and many others. Agnes Heller and Ken Megill have been invited to CCTB to discuss Lukács and their own ideas about socialism. Noam Chomsky spoke to thousands at Peking University in August 2010 when he received an honorary doctorate there. Renmin University has an International Summer School with foreign teachers. Most large universities have many visiting and some permanent foreign teachers in the more important departments.

I often heard people say that they should learn from foreign Marxists and socialists. This view is not found only in the Utopia Bookstore run by young people in Beijing. It is prevalent in all the established centers, and it was heard at the 2007 conference on Marx's *Capital* and the 2010 conference on the *Grundrisse*, both of which had strong foreign representation. It accounts for the many conferences held in China with foreign specialists. Attendance by Chinese scholars at international conferences, such as the Left Forum, also indicates the interest in studies of Marxism abroad. The interest includes questions about how to confront the market approach of some of their more western-oriented colleagues. But they also have their own questions about Marxism. Chinese socialist scholars deliberate, discuss, and argue, sometimes vehemently, about texts, interpretations, and theories. The

20. I draw on a very useful manuscript given to me by the author: Professor Yang Jinhai, "Introduction to Marxism Research in China," 18 August 2006, 8pp. I have also benefited from Lu Kejian's "Chinese Marxology Study: Its History, Present Status and Future Trend," which was the basis for his presentation at the Left Forum, New York, April 2008.

city of Beijing is undoubtedly the most active center for Marxist studies in the world, although much work is going on in centers elsewhere in China.

Actually existing Marxism in China: Changes and concerns

Of course there is much to be said about the nature of these Marxist and socialist studies, again with great diversity and frequent changes. First, there is the question of what the principal topics of these studies are. What are the main themes and directions? Second, how are the socialist theorists trying to develop a socialist society? What concerns are there about socialist society, and what policies are proposed for promoting and developing socialism, with or without Chinese characteristics?

Before touching on some relevant answers, it is important to note that most Marxist studies in China today do not rise out of Party dogma or current orthodoxy. There is little that could even be called Party dogma or orthodoxy. Moreover, the Party does not try to secure doctrinal discipline. I have heard Party members express doubts and make strong criticisms of Party policies, including dislike of Deng, support for Tibetan independence, criticism of Party literature, questioning of private enterprise, and even support for multi-party democracy.

There are still some who are pursuing Marxism as a form of propaganda, but I did not hear people who seemed to toe a line out of obligation. There is now even more openness of thinking than in the mid-1980s. This is thought to be true despite the crackdown on dissenters who gain notoriety. The current work on Marxism in China is much less reflective of Communist Party directives and pressures, and much more independently pursued. Marxism may now be less dominant, but it is certainly less dominated. There is a sense of theoretical liberation.

I had already heard quite a bit from researchers, friends, and the media on the first question about the important topics of Marxism. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a strong interest in Marxism and culture, especially Chinese culture. This continues with much attention now to Chinese identity and Chinese characteristics of socialism with a lot of focus on values and ethics, which many Chinese philosophers are taking up.

There is also great interest in Marxist studies outside China, both classical and contemporary. Besides the authors mentioned above, Gramsci and Luxemburg have been studied and translated. Unfortunately, much of the attention is in the form of reporting on the ideas rather than engaging critically with them. My discussions of libertarian socialism and anarchism were new material for most, but clearly of interest. I got the impression that people had heard of Bakunin but

only as the enemy, yet one who could now be discussed. (I think there is still something to John Dewey's observation, during his visit to China in the 1920s, that the Chinese were ripe for anarchism.)

More than ever before, people are exploring new ideas. New works are quickly taken up and translations published. Environmental issues are of widespread interest, especially among young people, so there is strong interest in ecological Marxism.²¹ Analytical Marxism is also part of the wide-ranging investigations.²² I consider analytical Marxism an opportunity to develop careful interpretation and theoretical attitudes rather than passing on particular ideas merely to be applied. The graduate students at Peking University were particularly adept at pursuing fresh criticism and new theoretical paths.

In my summer course in 2010, I did not pass up the opportunity to find out about my students' views. In their final paper they were asked to discuss a topic in Marxism that might be reconsidered in twenty-first century society or, alternatively, in a Confucian society. About half took the former topic and the other half the latter topic. The answers about both topics were diverse.

On Marx in the twenty-first century, a few followed standard Marxist lines about not being able to jump historical epochs or about raising class consciousness. Many wrote about changes necessary for modern globalization and pluralism of cultures in a modern world. Some wrote about individual rights with collective interests and about going beyond class struggle. There were also discussions of the labor theory of value and the market.

Students writing on Marxism in a Confucian society were more generally focused on finding Confucian values for Marxism (in a harmonious society) and on the importance of a plurality of systems. There were a couple of criticisms of Confucianism and one on developing a mixed economy.

In other words, there were few surprises. The interest in questions of Marxist morality – especially justice and equality – is widespread. The lively debate that has occurred on these questions in the West is now of great interest in China, along with the project of introducing Chinese characteristics, particularly Confucian ideas, to a contemporary Marxist morality. This is not new, although it was surprising to me when I first

21. See Zhihe Wang, "Ecological Marxism in China," *Monthly Review*, vol. 63, no. 9 (February 2012).

22. On analytical Marxism in China, see the article by Zhongqiao Duan (author of *Marx's Theory of Social Formation*, Aldershot: Avebury, 1995) and Li Yang: "G.A. Cohen's Influence on Chinese Academia," *Socialist Studies/Etudes Socialistes* (Canada), vol. 8, no. 1, 57–67.

heard it in 1987, after having heard strong criticism of Confucianism in the 1970s. I had a much anticipated private dinner with theorists from the central Party school at which I expected to hear interesting deliberations about Marxism. Instead, I could not get my hosts to stray from their topic of the importance of Confucianism to Chinese Marxism.²³

This is consistent with Marx's observation, "We know that the institutions, customs and traditions in the different countries must be taken into account."²⁴ He also said that people "make their own history... under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past," but he cautioned that the socialist revolution "cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future."²⁵ It is impossible to know what Marx would say about Confucian Marxism and how different he would regard it, for example, from Catholic liberation Marxism. Confucianism has strong influences, but it may also be restrictive. Baogang Guo is not alone in having serious questions about Confucian humanism, which according to him "does not embrace individual freedom and equality."²⁶

Many see promise in the idea of a "socialist harmonious society" as expounded by Hu Jintao, the General Secretary of the Party and President of China, retiring in 2012. This gives hope to some of overcoming contradictions of inequality and other problems of reconciling Confucian ideas with Marxism.²⁷ But there are many Chinese Marxists

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23. On the turn to Confucianism and its growth, see Anne-Marie Brady, "State Confucianism, Chineseness, and tradition in CCP propaganda" in her edited book *China's Thought Management* (London: Routledge, 2012), 57-75.
 24. Report of Marx's speech in Amsterdam, September 8, 1872 in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *Collected Works*, vol. 23 (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 255. On this occasion, Marx applied this general principle to the question of whether a nonviolent revolution might be possible. An important Chinese question is about the sinicization of Marxism. Xu Changfu notes that in the last 20 years 357 books and 3,814 articles have been written on the topic. (Xu, "The Incomplete Transformation of Sinicized Marxism," *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2012), 1-17.
 25. Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *Collected Works*, vol. 11, 103.
 26. Baogang Guo, *China's Quest for Political Legitimacy: The New Equity-Enhancing Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2010), 34.
 27. For an interesting study of this, see Josef Gregory Mahoney, "On the Way to Harmony: Marxism, Confucianism, and Hu Jintao's Hexie Concept" in Baogang Guo and Sujian Guo, eds., *China in Search of a Harmonious Society* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 99-128. Brady (see note 23) discusses some of the ways in which Confucian ideas are being added, "mix[ing] traditional Chinese value systems with Chinese socialist terminology ("State Confucianism...") 66). "The question is whether these additions are integrated and grounded. For a good contemporary discussion of Confucius and other Chinese philosophers, see Puqun Li, *A Guide to Asian Philosophy Classics* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2012), especially ch. 4, "The Analects."

who think there is enough in Marx's own work for developing a substantive socialist morality. This will be a focus of much continuing debate. But there will also be continuing debate on issues of scientific development, social structure, globalization, democracy and political reform, and many other topics. Marx's writings and socialist literature are being scoured for perspectives and answers.²⁸

These theoretical investigations are relevant to our second question, about what policies there should be to promote and develop a socialist society in China. For most Marxists – to different degrees – an important project in China today is to eliminate extreme inequality and to fight injustice. Surprisingly, little attention has been devoted to social benefits and public goods (an important part of any socialist society), even though public goods such as education and public health care were widely available, although often underdeveloped, through agricultural communes and state owned enterprises before the reforms of the 1980s. The alarm about inequality has focused attention on individual distribution often to the neglect of collective goods.

Special attention is given to migrant workers from the countryside, who are mostly poor and have few rights, varying from one jurisdiction to another. In the large cities their treatment varies from strong restrictions in Beijing, to greater laxity in Shanghai, to a humanistic provision in Chongqing (until now) for an improved quality of life including residency rights. Some of the concern about inequality, moreover, goes beyond distribution to look at its roots in widespread corruption. All these issues are obvious concerns for Marxists, but for many others as well.

There are different social principles in China that are all alive in the ideological debates and that will continue to contend for primacy. Mao Zedong said "serve the people"; Deng Xiaoping said "let some get rich first"; Hu Jintao says "develop a harmonious society," and Marx said "people should receive according to their labor."²⁹ Many current

28. Guo, *China's Quest for Political Legitimacy*, studies the discussions, including by Marxists, of many of these topics. Yang Xuegong (Philosophy, Peking University) has written on globalization, as have many others. For a discussion of some of this work, which shows "the persistence of Marxist ideas and discourse" within the Party (33), see Nick Knight, "Contemporary Chinese Marxism and the Marxist Tradition: Globalisation, Socialism and the Search for Ideological Coherence," *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 30, no. 1 (March 2006), 19–39.

29. Marx applied his principle to the first phase of communism (often known as socialism) in his "Critique of the Gotha Program." That, like the other principles, is just a slogan. I discuss Marx's view in greater detail in "Marx on Some Phases of Communism" in Rodger Beehler et al., eds., *On the Track of Reason: Essays in Honor of Kai Nielsen* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 135–153.

labor struggles are being fought out on the basis of such principles about what a fair and just distribution is. Social policies are often said to be closely connected to the scientific development of socialism in China, but the precise links are not always clear. There are many variations of what even Marxist foundations will support. More generally, there is a lot of disagreement and much vagueness about the structure of the Chinese economy. One view that I heard from several sources is that China has a capitalist economy and socialist politics. This does not sound like good Marxism and in any case is too simplistic – a view on which many students and scholars agree.

I got widely varying answers about how much of the Chinese economy is socialist because of regional variations, with a variety of (sometimes hidden) government roles, and vague and conflicting conceptions of what socialism is, all in the context of constant experimentation and change. There are wholly state-owned enterprises, but there is also a wide variety of private and mixed enterprises with State investments and regulations, as well as joint-stock enterprises and various forms of cooperatives.³⁰ The role of the State goes far beyond the state-owned enterprises. It also has powers, resources, and influences in the various forms of private enterprise.

As Bruce Dickson has said, “[p]recise and accurate definitions are essential for empirical research, but the rapidly changing Chinese context often makes such precision and accuracy hard to come by.”³¹ There is a complex variety of policies for better development and new forms of industry, some introduced regionally on an experimental basis. In many cases, the economic laws are still being developed, and sometimes yet to be written. This is one more area where we can see the socialist nature of China being fought out, and about which there are diverse views, even amongst committed Marxists.

In another area of concern, it is easy for socialists to appeal to Marx’s emphasis on worker participation and proletarian democracy, as seen in his debates with Bakunin. Chinese socialists are continually testing the limits of discussion and the possibilities of independent candidates in elections. This is happening in factories, villages, and local elections. All of these struggles are framed by competing ideas,

30. I discuss the Gung Ho association that promotes cooperatives in Robert Ware, “Gung Ho and Cooperatives in China,” *Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) Newsletter*, vol. II, issue 7, www.geo/coop/node/603.

31. Bruce J. Dickson, “Surveying Prospects for Political Change: Capturing Political and Economic Variation in Empirical Research in China” in Allen Carlson *et al.*, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 210n.

making it urgent to develop clear concepts and good arguments in Marxist theory.

Some roles for socialism in Chinese society

Given that there are so many socialists with Marxist views and committed to socialist policies, what do they do? What are the influences and effects of active Marxist and socialist studies? What pressures can be applied for the development of socialist policies and practices?

Granted, as Marxism gains social and political independence in China, it is in danger of becoming marginalized and irrelevant. As the ties to power loosen, intellectuals escape certain restraints, but their influence on institutions and people of power is often diminished. Given the influences of capital and the rigidities of the Party, one might be tempted to argue that socialist and Marxist thinking has no influence in China. This would, however, be wrong. There has not been a simple reversal of 1980s attitudes, when support for capitalism was considered weird or suspect. Now, although ideas of capitalism, competitive markets, and deregulation are frequently heard, one can still easily interject and promote ideas of Marxism. One can ask for books on Marxism at a bookstore without embarrassment. One can still have serious discussions with taxi drivers about socialism.

Before investigating the influence further, however, an obvious dissonance needs to be acknowledged and considered. Despite the richness of debate about socialism and Marxism, even the most sympathetic observer has to be concerned about the distance between the socialist thinking and ideals on the one hand and the social reality of poverty and control on the other. Premier Wen Jiabao reportedly "thinks that equality and justice are the first virtues of the state system of a socialist country,"³² which may be right, but, when applied to China, some might be tempted to think that "virtues" might better be read as "victims." Marxism in China has moved from intellectual and doctrinal propaganda, with its own dissonance, to independent theoretical dissonance. The principles and ideals that most of us consider central to Marxism seem weak or even foreign as characteristics of Chinese society.

This kind of a dissonance is not especially unusual, however, when one looks to theory and reality in other societies. The situation of

32. Cheng Meidong's words in "Gradual Development of Chinese Politics in the Past 30 years," *Studies on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (May 2010), 32.

Marxists in China is not unlike that of democratic theorists in Canada researching ideals that are barely recognizable in Canadian life. Any democratic idea of the power of the people is a joke in Canada (and elsewhere in the English-speaking world) if taken literally. Some even say that Canada is not a democratic society, but this does not stop them from talking about and promoting democracy, sometimes with some small effect.

Similarly, socialism as a form of society in which people are rewarded in accordance with their labor time is still a fantasy in China. Many Chinese would say that China is a form of socialist society, but there are also Chinese Marxists who say that it is not at all socialist. For them, this is all the more reason to talk and write about socialism and Marxism. We have already seen some of the strengths that Marxism and socialism have in China today.

First, there is the obvious strength in numbers. Any country with tens of millions of socialists and at least, I estimate, hundreds of thousands of Marxist scholars and intellectuals, will certainly have important and influential debates about policy. These debates are carried on from classrooms to popular media and from informal conversations to public assemblies and government meetings. The debates reach to the country's political leaders, who organize regular seminars on social issues led by prominent university professors, which surely include a lot of socialist content.

Second, there are institutional structures that secure a place for socialist ideas, with Marxist (and Leninist and Maoist) underpinnings. The Constitution of China proclaims in Article 1 that "the People's Republic of China is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship" and later that "socialist public ownership is the basis." And the Constitution of the Communist Party of China declares that it "upholds the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism" and "promotes socialism with Chinese characteristics." As Fewsmith says, those who promote Marxism "still have an impact because the Party cannot abandon Marxism without giving up all claims to legitimacy."³³ There is also the large Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) composed of parallel democratic parties, in turn made up of interest groups with expertise, that initiate and promote policies for the National People's Congress to finalize.³⁴ In addition, there are

33. Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 182.

34. I discuss their role in developing a law of cooperatives in Ware, "Gung Ho and Cooperatives in China."

many local, and some national, social organizations that play a role in pressuring state organizations and influencing social policy. Many of these have socialist perspectives and values.³⁵

A third role and strength of socialism is found in the culture of consultation and serving the people. The socialist perspectives and values have, of course, a long history, especially solidified since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The importance of socialist and populist ideas goes back to the May 4th Movement of 1919. This was an occasion for advocating the independence and modernization of China under the banners of science and democracy. Confucian tradition, as well, has always encouraged leaders to promote the well-being of people through understanding their needs and finding ways to satisfy them. It was natural to set up the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and on many occasions to call for consultations with the public. The boundaries in which consultations are carried out are limited and changing, but they still cover an area where a kind of "democracy" operates. My students expressed strong support for the government, and there are other indications of such support. A Pew survey in 2008 found that "over 80 percent of Chinese respondents believed that the country was on the right track...compared with only 20 percent in the United States."³⁶

A fourth role and strength of socialism and Marxism is in connection with the long-held interest, among Chinese, in identifying objective needs scientifically. Science is still regarded as important in leading society. This in itself has an interesting synergy with Marxism as it is advocated in China. Marx is almost universally thought in China to have developed dialectical materialism as a *scientific* socialism. Marxism is widely propagated and strongly promoted as a science, and as such can be influential.

One can see an appeal to a kind of social science in the experimental nature of many aspects of Chinese policy. Special economic zones have been an experiment to access foreign technology without distorting the whole economy, and policies of market socialism have been tried in isolated regions and compared to practices elsewhere. China has always had a large amount of decentralization, which allows

35. For a good discussion of these, see Tony Saich, "Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China" in Lowell Dittmer and Guoli Liu, eds., *China's Deep Reform: Domestic Politics in Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 285–301. According to Saich, in 2002 there were 133,357 registered social organizations in China. These negotiate with the state in "a complex interaction of institutional, economic, and individual factors" (297).

36. Chen and Dickson, *Allies of the State*, 160.

experimental policies to be accepted, sometimes copied, but sometimes limited. As I write, the rather different policies of Bo Xilai in Chongqing have been challenged and the directions there and elsewhere in China are in question.³⁷

The irony is that Marxism as it is usually taught and promoted in China is not the kind of science that most people, even Marxists, accept these days. Much of the teaching about dialectical materialism is still too limited, too restricted, and too tainted with old Soviet catechisms. There are plenty of questions anyway about what kind of science Marxism was, could be, and should be. Many think, however, that Marxism, especially in China, can be developed as a more reasonable and acceptable science.

There is another irony in thinking of Marxism as a science in the traditional and classical way. When historical materialism becomes not only the core but the whole of Marxism, the science becomes independent of social values and social policies. Science and values are separated, draining much of the politics and motivation out of the social science while leaving values to manipulation and political choice. These complex issues are as interesting as they are important among Marxists everywhere, but especially in China today where they are beginning to be contested.

In my view, Marx's scientific socialism was the grounding for his socialist values. Socialist values cannot be picked out of another context to tack on to his historical materialism. This can be seen, I think, in the way his discussion of a possible socialist China flowed directly into the idea of a Chinese banner with the values of equality, liberty, and solidarity. Marx was an enlightenment thinker who saw science as a way of liberating people from economic and political oppression. His moral concerns and search to improve human social relations were strongly connected with his investigations of alienation. As noted above, Chinese studies of alienation were blocked until the late 1980s. Now it is no longer a forbidden subject, but although it is recognized it seems to be neglected, by students and scholars alike. This neglect does seem to me to constrict discussion of socialist values.

37. In late 2011, informants told me that the future of China was often regarded as a choice between the (left?) policies of Bo Xilai in Chongqing and the (entrepreneurial, market) policies of Wang Yang of Guangdong Province. No doubt the two paths will continue to contend, but in a more subterranean fashion now that Bo has been removed from the Party and brought to trial and Wang has not been promoted. For a good discussion of the strange continuing case of Bo Xilai, see Yuezhi Zhao, "The Struggle for Socialism in China: The Bo Xilai Saga and Beyond", *Monthly Review*, vol. 64, no. 5, October 2012.

Nevertheless, there is great interest in values, both among intellectuals and in the populace at large. Here again, G.A. Cohen's work is especially important in trying to rescue justice and equality from what he saw as long-standing Marxist misconceptions. Cohen's investigations give substance to Marx's socialist values. Chinese Marxologists are receptive to such investigations, but Marx's values are also important since they resonate with the concerns of the poor and the oppressed. There is a natural support for such values by those stuck in poverty or facing layoffs, and more recently workers who seek more workplace control. As Fewsmith writes, the left, with Marxist ideas, have a mass base and "can extend that mass base to certain sectors of the population."³⁸ The synchrony of socialist values and worker interests is no doubt partly responsible for the recent increased strike activity. In turn, these values pressure the All China Federation of Trade Unions to better support workers in their local organizing. Marxism is thus relevant to recent waves of protests and struggles for democratic participation.

Concluding remarks

There was a time when China was a revolutionary socialist model for many throughout the world. Now, after both China and the world socialist movements have changed dramatically, China certainly can no longer be seen as a socialist model of any kind. These days, the leaders even caution against taking China as an economic model, despite its economic successes. Notwithstanding all of that, there is no doubt that China is a site for socialist challenges and struggles. This is the way that I think China should now be important to socialists, Marxists, and Marxologists throughout the world. I do not want to claim that socialism is dominant in China. It is enough that it plays some important roles.

This is not to deny that there are global forces that press for what in the West are considered neoliberal economic policies. The Chinese Party and government are still charting a course of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the leaders see themselves as pragmatists. Neoliberal ideas are certainly promoted by outside and sometimes by inside forces, but neoliberalism is neither ideologically established nor broadly accepted as a theory in China. Because of the development and influx of new ideas, and the return to interest in history and traditions, there is now a more serious ideological struggle than when socialism

38. Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 183.

was pre-eminent and virtually uncontested. Some of this struggle will turn on the associated values.

The developments in Marxology are surely important. It is an affirmation of independence, but also a sign of seriousness, that many, especially young people, see themselves as doing Marxology. The texts are now available and the commitment to detail is there to allow a rich development of this field. Also noteworthy is the lively interest in other Marxists and socialists, both past and present. A climate open to socialism has now been developing for decades. As a young researcher in Chongqing told me, China is a socialist country and Marxism is the leading thought. Wang Chaohua could say already in 1999 what is even more the case now: "China today still contains fertile soil for the reception of socialist ideas."³⁹

The writings of Marx have important lessons for China, and can be influential in moving, changing, and guiding social policy. For a society that acknowledges the importance of Marxism, for example, the demand that people be paid according to their labor time is a powerful one. Such an idea is often enough resisted in contemporary China (with intellectual dissonance), but in Canada the idea would be a complete mystery (a case of intellectual dissociation).

But would even Marx know what to do in China in the twenty-first century? What would he say if he landed in Soho in Beijing (an enormous luxury shopping area) today? In developing a socialist society – especially with Chinese characteristics – China has gone far beyond anything Marx would speculate about, and in a global environment and a cultural context unknown to him. Chinese Marxists are charting new territory, to the dissatisfaction of some of them who might want to invoke, in this context, Marx's celebrated statement, "I am not a Marxist."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there is opportunity for growing global cross-fertilization, especially with analytical Marxists and others who seek to be faithful to Marx without being dogmatic, doctrinaire, or sectarian. Chinese Marxists are looking for international cooperation in Marxist and socialist thought so that ideas can mature and be shown to be practical. A good example of this cooperation is the journal *International Critical Thought*.⁴¹

39. Chaohua Wang, ed. *One China, Many Paths* (London: Verso, 2003), 323.

40. For a good discussion of this famously misused claim by Marx about some exasperating French Marxists, see Hal Draper, "'I am not a Marxist,' Said He," *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. II, The Politics of Social Classes* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 5–11.

41. Published by Routledge under the editorship of Cheng Enfu (of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), David Schweickart and Tony Andreani.

It is time for the Chinese, and their friends, to go beyond applying borrowed ideas to China. Just as Marx said you cannot understand a “people’s state” merely by combining those two words, we cannot understand a “free society” by combining the latter two. In my graduate seminar at Peking University, we critically assessed Isaiah Berlin’s two concepts of liberty and looked at new ideas about freedom. I saw young philosophers going forward with fresh conceptual investigations of the nature of freedom for China. They are preparing the way for a deeper understanding of freedom and giving it a socialist foundation.

Intellectual communities can never be equal to the challenges they face, but Chinese Marxists are working hard to make China live up to its self-description as a socialist society. Chinese Marxists will continue to look at developments elsewhere, but they have their own strong core of Marxist thought on which to draw.