

## Preface

This collection of essays provides an excellent introduction to important aspects of contemporary Chinese social and political thought. Xu Changfu ranges widely – from interpretations of Marx by Chinese scholars to issues of global ecology. In so doing, he shows himself to be one of the foremost members of that body of Chinese thinkers who, while critical in many respects of the current regime, wish to remain true to the main thrust of the thought of Marx himself.

Xu Changfu begins, appropriately, with Marx. He outlines clearly the Party's official version of Marx, other interpretations approved by the Party, and, most interestingly, current Marxological work on Marx which, while tolerated by the Party, is implicitly critical of many aspects of Chinese governance.

The second essay is a modified version of a paper that Xu Changfu was prevented from giving at a recent conference in China. And one can quite see why, in that he deals with the “de-theorization” and the “de-liberalisation” of Marxism by the Chinese government. The former involves putting practice before theory and thus enables “Marxism” to mean whatever the government wishes while the latter involves an emasculation of what Marx himself meant by liberty.

The parallels between Marx and the under-estimated Chinese scholar Kang Youwei, who was roughly a contemporary of Lenin, are the subject of the third essay. Kang analysed the potential of revolution in China from a global perspective. Although inherently conservative – or at least anti-revolutionary – Kang was remarkably prescient on China's future. And Xu Changfu brings out well how both Kang and Marx would have viewed the catastrophes of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. He stresses finally how both would have seen the potential for freedom and democracy opened up by the reforms of Deng Xiaoping and the extent to which these have, as yet, been far from realised.

The essay on practical wisdom strikes a slightly different note. It gives a most interesting account of the reception of Aristotle in China (a parallel, here, with that of Marx in the first chapter), concentrating on his concept of *phronesis*. Xu Changfu takes this “practical wisdom” as pointing to a middle way between dogmatic Marxism and dogmatic neo-liberalism. He concludes by outlining how his new thinking on “practical wisdom” could be beneficial to Chinese governance.

In the fifth essay, Xu Changfu poses the question: if capitalism is globalised, why cannot labour follow suit? This is a most pertinent topic, given current debates about immigration. Xu Changfu invokes Kant on the matter and points out that labour is now less globalised than it was in the nineteenth century. He then shows that Marx had a lot to contribute to this topic and concludes with an appeal, with special reference to China, for increased globalisation of labour today.

The final essay is even more pertinent, given the increasing problems of climate change and global warming faced by our planet. This essay is timely and suitably broad in scope. It sketches out the stark alternatives facing policy makers and looks, from a Chinese perspective, at the policy options of those trying to combat ecological disaster. His conclusions are bleak.

As can be seen from the account above, this collection of essays is wide-ranging. I recommend it highly. Always thought-provoking, it gives a splendid introduction to the nature of progressive social and political thought in contemporary China by one of its leading exponents.

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## Foreword

This, my first book to be published in the West, is a collection of six papers which have been published previously in Western journals. It is undoubtedly a sign of globalization for a Chinese scholar to publish in Germany a book in English concerning Marxism. However, that is not why this book is entitled "Marxism, China and Globalization." As a matter of fact, the papers have been selected because they all involve Marxism to varying degrees; they focus on problems in China, and take globalization as their context or even topic.

Though the papers are formally separate they share a theoretical theme, namely, to seek a solution to a historic puzzle: why have Marxism and China been tied together? This puzzle has three dimensions. In the historical dimension Marxism was produced in and for the West, but hitherto no Western country has taken it as its state ideology. However, China became a Marxist state more than 60 years ago, and still claims adherence to Marxism though Marx himself never expected such a development. In the theoretical dimension, Marxism is ultimately an ideological theory rather than a subject matter for free study in China, thus even though Marxist practice takes place in China, the discourse power of Marxist theory has for a long time been dominated by the West. Except for Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), it seems that no other Chinese Marxist thinker is known by Western people. By contrast, many Western Marxist thinkers have become popular in China even though most of them have no experience of Marxist practice. The third dimension is that in reality. On the one hand the Chinese government is strengthening Marxist ideology; on the other hand, its economic policy is condemned as capitalist by both domestic and international left-wingers, while its politics is still defined as totalitarian or authoritarian by liberals. This confusing situation in particular needs attention. In order to solve the puzzle, the present book examines the three dimensions.

Across the decades since China implemented the Reform and Opening up policies, and while globalization evolved, it has been possible to try to independently understand what my Chinese contemporaries and I have been experiencing, and to exchange my views with scholars abroad who may likewise be interested in what Chinese academics and intellectuals themselves have been thinking about these philosophical and political matters. Though not every opinion in this book is ideologically acceptable

in my homeland, or, perhaps, intellectually valuable with reference to the Western academic tradition, it is, clearly meaningful to take the first step in the internationalization of independent Chinese Marxist studies. For this reason, I have to thank a lot of people and organizations.

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Ulf Heuner whose *Parodos* press in Berlin has done such a good job publishing this book to a high quality. My thanks also go to Dr. Jiang Lu, my colleague at Sun Yat-sen University, who kindly recommended the work to the *Parodos* press.

Secondly, I am grateful to all the journals and editors who first published the original papers and permitted me to reprint them.

“On the Reception of Marx in China Today” was published in *Marx-Engels Jahrbuch* 2014, Germany, edited by Dr. Gerald Hubmann and Dr. Timm Graßmann.

“The Incomplete Transformation of Sinicized Marxism” was published in *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 26, No. 1, March 2012 (DOI: 10.1080/08854300.2011.620412), Routledge, the USA, recommended by Dr. Marcello Musto and edited by Dr. Wallis Victor.

“The Revelations in Marx’s and Kang Youwei’s Predictions on the Social Progress in China” was published in *Studies in Marxism*, vol. 12, 2011, the UK, edited by Prof. Mark Cowling.

“Why Do We Need Practical Wisdom? A Chinese Lesson in the Process of Globalization” was published in *Global Discourse*, 2014, 13 October 2014, online (DOI: 10.1080/23269995.2014.968361), Routledge, the UK, edited by Dr. Matthew Johnson and Dr. William Padgett.

“On the Globalization of Labor: An Argument from a Marxist and a Chinese Perspective” was published in *Studies in Marxism*, vol. 11, 2007, the UK, recommended by Prof. Sean Sayers and edited by Prof. Mark Cowling.

“Ecological Tension: Between Minimum and Maximum Changes” was published in *Comparative Philosophy*, vol. 5, No. 2, 2014, online, the USA, recommended by Dr. Mario Wenning and edited by Prof. Bo Mo.

Gratefully remembered are all translators and proofreaders of those papers whose names are noted at the end of each piece. The original papers have been revised and edited further for this collection.

I am, thirdly, especially grateful to Prof. David McLellan for writing the preface to this book. As he is a well-known international figure in Marxist studies, I take his comments, evaluation and recommendations as not only an appreciated moral support but also an initial scholarly recognition.

Furthermore, since 2002, I have been working in the Department of Philosophy and the Institute of Marxist Philosophy and Chinese Modernization at Sun Yat-sen University, where all these papers were written. I would therefore like to thank those colleagues who inspired and helped me as well as to all those students who attended my courses on relevant topics. My particular gratitude goes to Prof. Li Ping, the director of the Institute, whose support has been really important in my research.

Finally, my family's love is beyond words of thanks. My wife Jiao Jian has witnessed all the hardship of my independent research and shared all the pressure with me. My daughter Weihang, a doctoral student at Boston College, assisted me on the compilation of the papers for the book project and edited it according to the publisher's format. Thus this book is dedicated to her.

*January 24, 2016*



# I. On the Reception of Marx in China Today

This article outlines the reception of Marx in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. Because the Communist Party of China is the only ruling party and Marxism is its official ideology, the Party's interpretations of Marx are suitable to be taken as a basis point to position the reception. Largely, the reception can be divided into three categories: (1) the Party's interpretations, (2) interpretations approved by the Party, and (3) interpretations tolerated by the Party. Marx's original doctrine has some implicit tension between his ideal ends such as the free development of every person and a concrete means such as public ownership and planned economy. In Mao's times, the Party adopted Marx's concrete means but ignored his ideal ends, while, since Deng's times, especially in this century, it has gradually abandoned Marx's means but approached his ends. Under the rule of the Party, most studies in Marx and Marxism are organized and controlled by the Party, so any opinion on Marx held by individuals is either approved or at least tolerated by the Party if only it is to be published within the mainland of China. Though a number of scholars have achieved some intellectual understanding of Marx, those achievements seldom exceed the limits of the Party's toleration. Besides those categories, there are a few marginalized scholars who try to interpret Marx independently, but because their interpretations are unacceptable to the Party, they can exist only outside the Party's system, or even outside the country. As regards the masses of workers, their independent arrival at reception of Marx is a blank. Therefore a pluralized reception of Marx in China is still an ideal to be realized.

## 1. Introduction

The object of this article is to outline the reception of Marx in China, i.e. the mainland of China, in the twenty-first century. That is to say, in this article, "Marx" is distinguished from "Marxism," though of course the former is related to the latter.

From 2000 to 2013, in Chinese academic literature published in the mainland, there were at least 942 books, 3,846 PhD and Masters dissertations, and 24,814 journal articles with "Marx" only in their titles.<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition, in the same period, there was a much bigger volume of political propaganda literature involving Marxism. These numbers shed light on the reception of Marx in China today, but no single short article can cover all such literature.

Today, there are still a few so-called socialist countries among which China is the largest. Since 1949, China has been ruled by a communist party which regards Marxism as the official state ideology. The Party plans and regulates discourses on Marxism by means of its official institutions. At present, China has a population of 1.3 billion, and the Communist Party of China (CPC) has more than 80 million members. The Marxism currently expounded by the Party is universally the only politically acceptable Marxism; it is propagandized, justified and applied by official media, as well as educational, scientific and cultural systems, thus becoming very well known to the masses. The Party can tolerate different interpretations of Marxism only if they do not conflict with the Party's interpretation. Therefore, if one would like to know what the present Chinese people think of Marx, one cannot ignore the Party's interpretations; on the contrary, one should take the Party's interpretations as a frame of reference for locating and observing other opinions.

Therefore, this article divides the reception of Marx in the twenty-first century China into three main categories according to social influence or the magnitude of their impact on society: first the Party's interpretations, second the interpretations approved by the Party, and, third the personal interpretations of scholars tolerated by the Party. The distinctions between them, however, are not clear-cut, not only because those categories have a common ideological foundation, but also because scholars in China usually have to pretend conformity with the Party's ideological discourse when they articulate their personal interpretations. Beside those categories, this article also discusses some independent scholars' interpretations of Marx and the workers' attitude to Marx.

## 2. The Party's Projected Interpretation of Marx

As for the first category, namely the Party's interpretations, the General Secretary of the CPC has the authority to announce the Party's opinions. In the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Hu Jintao said in his political report: "The most important achievement in our endeavors in the past ten years is that we have formed the Scientific Outlook on Development and put it into practice by following the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung) Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thought of Three Represents and by making courageous theoretical innovations on the basis of practices and



developing closely interconnected new ideas and viewpoints on upholding and building socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Scientific Outlook on Development was created by integrating Marxism with the reality of contemporary China and with the underlying features of our times, and it fully embodies the Marxist worldview on and methodology for development. This theory provides new scientific answers to the major questions of what kind of development China should achieve in a new environment and how the country should achieve it. It represents a new level of our understanding of the laws of socialism with Chinese characteristics and reaches a new realm in the development of Marxism in contemporary China” (Hu 2012: 7-8).

The main elements of the Scientific Outlook on Development include: (1) taking economic development as the central task; (2) making China strong by developing science and education, training competent personnel and pursuing sustainable development; (3) insisting on taking people first and promoting well-rounded development of the person; (4) promoting economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress, ensuring coordinated progress in all areas, and balancing the relations of production with the productive forces as well as the superstructure with the economic base; (5) taking a holistic approach to our work relating to reform, development and stability; (6) upholding the leadership of the Party and socialism with Chinese characteristics in order to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects (Hu 2012: 7-8). Accordingly, in the economic sphere, the main tasks are, domestically, to improve the socialist market economy, change the growth model, and develop both the public and the non-public economy; and internationally, to promote free trade and investment, and oppose protectionism (Hu 2012: 17, 18, 40, 42).

It is particularly noticeable that although the political report mentions the financial crisis of 2008, it neither defines it as a crisis of the capitalist system, nor takes the opportunity to argue for the contemporary significance of Marx’s critique of capitalism.

If we ignore some labels such as “Marx” or “socialism” in the report, and just make a textual comparison between the Party’s opinions and Marx’s opinions, it is not easy to find any distinctive connection between them. Moreover, some objectives, such as “improvement of market economy,” “development of the non-public economy” and “promotion of free trade and investment” clearly go against what Marx advocates. However, nor is it easy to absolutely deny any connection between them, because not only does the Scientific Outlook on Development announce its own Marxist genealogical system, but it also uses certain idioms such as “taking people first,” “promoting well-rounded development of the

person” and “developing the public economy” that are very similar to Marx’s terms and intentions.

The problem is that, before the Reform and Opening up in 1978, the CPC believed in another sort of Marxism; this is comprised of elements including uniform public ownership, class struggle, cultural revolution and so on. In those days, especially in the early 1960s, it was condemned as capitalist policy to fix farm output quotas for each household, let alone to approve of a market economy. Until the 1990s, claims such as the “taking people first” (of which a literal translation is “taking the human being as a foundation”) could not avoid being construed as a form of capitalist liberalization. It is thus clear that the Scientific Outlook on Development, like Deng Xiaoping Theory and Jiang Zemin’s thinking on Three Represents, has distanced itself from Mao Zedong’s Marxism, although it inherits many beliefs from Mao.

How does one understand and evaluate such a historic shift in the CPC’s conception of Marxism?

One scholar remarks: “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” (Ware 2013: 136-160). This remark perhaps conforms to many people’s imagination about socialism, but that depends on what “socialism” is. If it means the ideal state in Marx’s writings, China not only is not socialist now, but also has never been socialist. If “socialism” is taken to designate the real state of China in Mao’s times, the claim both misunderstands and simplifies both Marx’s ideal socialism and Chinese reality. In any case, the use of the term does not indicate “République Chinoise.”<sup>[2]</sup> The more important thing, however, is that, regarding socialism, both Marx’s theory and Chinese practice are too complicated to be judged simply.

In essence, my understanding is that Marx’s original doctrine has some implicit tension between his ideal ends and the concrete means to attain them. For instance, in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels, on the one hand, set up ideal ends such as “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” On the other hand, they designed a radical policy with 10 measures “to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state” (see Marx and Engels 1959: 28-29). They did not realize any contradiction between the ends and the means, while claiming the necessary connection between them. Unfortunately, however, over nearly a hundred years the CPC’s socialist practice has shown that the centralization of instruments of production in the hands of the state, and the free development of every person, are incompatible. Mao did his utmost to centralize instruments of production,

but sacrificed people's free development. In other words, Mao embraced Marx's means, but deviated from Marx's ends. This situation can be called "de-liberalization of Marxism in China," which means that Marx's own idea of liberty was negated in Chinese Marxism. In contrast, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao paid more and more attention to people's free development, and thus no longer pursued centralization. In other words, they gradually recovered Marx's ends, but had to abandon his means little by little. This situation can be called the "re-liberalization of Marxism in China," which means that Marx's own idea of liberty has been recovered to some extent in Chinese Marxism (see Xu 2012: 1-17). Because the centralization of productive instruments is a tenet peculiar to Marxism, while the free development of every person is a proposition close to liberalism, the reception of Marx's means seems more like Marxism than the reception of Marx's ends. Perhaps because of this, the CPC's Reform and Opening up has been questioned by ultra-left Marxists in China and abroad.

At any rate, since the reform of the rigid structures of centralization, China has achieved remarkably fast development and has become the second economy in the world. An overwhelming majority of Chinese people have extricated themselves from hunger and poverty and attained the conditions where they can pursue their own better lives. In the sense that the Party has finally recovered Marx's ideal ends and abandoned part of his concrete means, the Party has succeeded in representing the "fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of people," just as it claims (see Jiang 2003). Clearly, because the CPC's Reform and Opening up has significantly raised the level of the whole national economy, it can be asserted, at least, that the overwhelming majority of people are objectively closer to Marx's ideal end than they used to be. Although the new direction has brought about new problems, especially increased social inequality, those problems should not be taken as an argument in defense of the old direction, much less as a reason to defend Mao's China as a model for socialism. In other words, the success of the CPC's Reform and Opening up has made people closer to Marx's ideal ends but only, arguably, through some non-Marxian means.

As a matter of fact, there are many serious problems in today's China, among which the most fateful ones are not in economics but in politics. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels point out that the first step in the revolution by the working class is "to win the battle of democracy" (see Marx and Engels 1959: 27-28). In *Civil War in France*, Marx clarifies "universal suffrage" as the fundamental form of proletarian democracy (see Marx 1959: 365-366). However, in today's China, the voting franchise every citizen actually possesses is limited to the town and

county levels. Even there, citizens are not able to vote directly for executive positions such as mayors but only to confirm the candidates the Party has chosen as deputies to the congresses where the executive members, already chosen by the Party, will be confirmed by deputies. Thus, while there is a facade of franchise, in reality public power and resources monopolized by the Party have generated broad political privileges for a bureaucratic class, instruments for protecting and increasing vested interests, and breeding rampant political corruption. This is the primary cause of the wide gap between the rich and the poor; and the main root of class conflict and social turbulence. Overall, the political continuity between the CPC in Mao's time and today is clearly stronger than its economic continuity: for the CPC, political de-liberalization has been greater than economic de-liberalization, while political re-liberalization has been less than economic re-liberalization.

### 3. The Interpretations of Marx Approved by the Party

In such a political system in China, most of the study of Marx and Marxism is organized and controlled by the Party. Since the beginning of this century, such organization and control have been given increasing importance. That is to say, in China, the study of Marx and Marxism is planned just as parenthood is planned, even though the economy is no longer planned.

In 2004, the Central Committee of the CPC launched a national project to study and develop Marxist theory. Its major objective was to re-write basic textbooks on Marxism and on major subjects in the humanities and social sciences, so as to incorporate the Party's updated thoughts into the curriculum, thus remolding students' conception of Marxism and political identity. For this, the Party chose scholars who were politically reliable and professionally outstanding to constitute different research groups, and invested heavily in their exploration and deliberation. The result was textbooks satisfying the Party, some of which were even required to meet the approval of all the members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC. Currently the most prominent textbooks are *Fundamental principles of Marxism* (see The Writing Group 2010) and *Marxist Philosophy* (see The Writing Group 2009). The former expounds generally Marxist theoretical systems and the latter expounds particularly Marxist theoretical foundations. These textbooks are patchworks of traditional dogmas, updated formulations of the Party's ideology, and scattered personal opinions of the research group members. While such textbooks met the Party's political demands, they have no intellectual value.

Each year since 2004, the National Fund for Social Sciences has held an open competition that seeks to heavily fund research projects focusing particularly on the Party's ideology and policy. In 2013, for example, the first round of the competition approved projects on 60 prescribed topics. These topics are essentially an elaboration of Hu's political report to the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress. Each topic may accommodate up to two projects, and each project can be granted 600-800 thousand Yuan. Besides this, there are thousands of projects similar at national and local levels, and at governmental and academic institutional levels. All these projects absorb multiple research groups; success or failure in obtaining such grants has become a very important index for assessing academic achievements. Of recent Chinese literature on Marxism, the most significant part consists of the output of such projects. Clearly such projects are intended to construct a large scale ideological camp, and, accordingly, their outcomes resemble each other very closely.

At the same time, it should be noted that most funds also support non-ideological sorts of research. Essentially, for a scholar in a Chinese academic institution, without a project funded by the government there is no opportunity for promotion. Even this article can count as an outcome of such projects.

#### 4. Scholars' Personal Interpretations of Marx Tolerated by the Party

In spite of the above-mentioned situation, since the implementation of the Reform and Opening up, especially since 2000, the Party has gradually shown the capacity to tolerate interpretations of Marx or Marxism irrelevant to the Party's interests. This treatment contrasts sharply with that before the Reform and Opening up, when any word and deed deviating from the Party's will was punished ruthlessly. The treatment before the Reform and Opening up can be called "de-theorization of Marxism in China," which means that Marx's own theoretical spirit was negated in Chinese Marxism; while the treatment since the Reform and Opening up can be called "re-theorization of Marxism in China," which means that Marx's own theoretical spirit has been recovered to some extent in Chinese Marxism (see Xu 2012: 1-17). Under this condition of limited toleration, in addition to the promotion of scholarship among the younger generation and the direct influence of Western colleagues, the study of Marxism in China has generated some interpretations deviating from the Party's ideology. Due to this sort of study, Marx has been rescued from official Marxist ideology, and a number of scholars who want "to approach Marx" or "to return to Marx"<sup>[3]</sup> have distinguished themselves from the Party's massive Marxist troops. Though scholars normally have

to live within the confines of the institutional system, and perform their respective duties including participation in various projects and the production of official propaganda, some forerunners have risen above this system after all.

As regards theoretical braveness and achievements, Gao Qinghai (1930-2004, from Jilin University) is the most distinguished Marxist philosopher in China. He had been defending his own independent understanding of Marx against dogmatic Marxism until this century, and was continually concerned with the fate of China and the future of humankind. For this reason, during his career as a scholar of Marxism beginning in the 1950s, he was persecuted in political movements nearly every decade. In his old age he published his *Collected Philosophic Works* in 9 volumes (see Gao 1997, 2004) which contributed two elements to the study of Marx in China. On the one hand, he critiqued the Stalinist system of Marxist philosophy, and, secondly, he spared no effort in elucidating Marx's thoughts on practice. He published an article, "Re-evaluating the Antagonism between Materialism and Idealism" (see Gao 1988: 4-9) in 1988, in which he advocated that Marx's practical philosophy transcends the antagonism between materialism and idealism. The paper was the first challenge from a Chinese scholar to the orthodox system of Marxist philosophy, namely, "Dialectic Materialism and Historical Materialism." Gao contested its sacred status, earning him political persecution. On the other hand, based on Marx's theory of human development, he developed an innovative theory: Philosophy of Species<sup>[4]</sup>. In *Grundrisse*, Marx divides social forms into three categories from the angle of human development: the first is "relations of personal dependence," the second "personal independence founded on objective dependence," and the third "free individuality" (see Marx 1973: 158). According to this framework, Gao dialectically critiques both community-subjectivity in pre-capitalist society and individual-subjectivity in capitalist society, while he advocates species-subjectivity in post-capitalist society and takes it as the essence of Marx's "an association of free men" (see Marx 1990: 171). This is the most innovative philosophical idea of humanity among those contributed by Chinese Marxist scholars. After Gao passed away, his students at Jilin University, including Sun Zhengyu (see Sun 2002), Sun Litian (see Sun 2006) and He Lai (see He 2011), have been promoting his cause, particularly in the area of Marx's dialectics.

In respect of the depth of scholarly research and examination of Marx's philosophy, Yu Wujin (1948-2014, from Fudan University) is the most outstanding specialist among Chinese Marxist scholars. His *On Ideology* (see Yu 2009) is a pioneering monograph on Marx's thought about ideology as well as on the history of ideology (before and after Marx) in