



THE SUBJECTIVITY IN DILEMMA: RECEPTIONS OF MARXIST HUMAN- ISM IN 1980s CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the transnational entanglements of Marxist humanism that originated from the Khrushchev Thaw and developed into various forms in different Soviet-type contexts.

On the historiographical dimension, the thesis employs an “entangled” historiographical approach to situate the long 1980s (1978-1992) Chinese Marxist humanism within a transnational framework, in order to reveal the ideological connotations of Marxist humanism. On the theoretical dimension, the thesis applies a pragmatics paradigm of “trichotomy of Marxism” (revolutionary, liberal, and conservative) to the Marxist discourses, and demonstrates the liberal nature of Marxist humanism and the two illiberal frontiers facing it.

The thesis first illustrates the broader intellectual and political context of long 1980s China, i.e., New Enlightenment, within which positioning Chinese Marxist humanism and its related debates on Humanism and Alienation during the early 1980s and on Praxis Materialism during the late 1980s.

Then, the thesis examines the Chinese receptions of Soviet and East-Central European Marxist humanist texts and contexts in which Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism evolved, whereby drawing a comparison between Chinese Marxist humanism and Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism, China’s long 1980s conditions and Soviet-type practices during the Cold War.

The thesis concludes that Marxist humanism as an intellectual phenomenon in Soviet-type societies reflects a theoretical and practical dilemma of subjectivity, which lies at the heart of the Marxist theory of human nature and historical materialism. In the dual senses of theory and practice, the dilemma of subjectivity constitutes an almost insurmountable obstacle for Marxism to sublate or aufheben liberalism.

Keywords: Marxist Humanism; 1980s; China; Intellectual History; Subjectivity.

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I. Introduction¹

¹ This chapter is based on the author's works submitted to Trencsényi Balázs, Michael Ignatieff, Tolga Esmer, and Perczel István for thesis-related courses at CEU.

“What’s past is prologue.”

W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

Preface

I would like to unfold the thesis with a 2002 obituary in *The New York Times*, titled “Wang Ruoshui, 75, Liberal Who Was Shunned in China”.² According to the obituary, Wang was “one of China’s most important *liberal* intellectuals”.³ The label of liberal/liberalism appeared five times, alongside a note that “he remained a devoted *Marxist* to his death”.⁴ Assume that one cannot be a liberal and Marxist at the same time, was Wang a liberal or Marxist?

In fact, I agree with the correspondent’s views that, first, liberalism and Marxism are not compatible, and second, Wang ultimately belongs to the intellectual tradition of liberalism, instead of Marxism, in China. In this way, Wang stands out as an unusual figure, who, while belonging to liberalism, had complicated interactions with Marxism. That is to say, in the name of Marxism, Wang embraced “liberal principles like free speech, human rights and the rule of law.”⁵

The thesis refers to what Wang stands for as the Chinese variant of a transnational intellectual phenomenon, i.e., “Marxist humanism”.⁶ I acknowledge that the term “Marxist humanism” has been used by non-Soviet thinkers such as the ones from the Anglo-American world as well.⁷ I am also sceptical of the *prima facie* impression that Marxist humanism is a phenomenon only existing in the “Eastern” contexts and, especially, the East-West dichotomy that follows. The long debated relationship between Marxism and humanism/liberalism, before it becomes a practical question of political contexts, is, first of all, a philosophical conundrum of theoretical texts, both in classical Marxism and in neo-Marxism.⁸ I could name numerous entanglements showing the dichotomy between “Western Marxism” and (Eastern) “Marxist humanism” is a fragile construction: *History and Class Consciousness* was written in German and profoundly influenced the Frankfurt School, Karl Kautsky was half-Czech, Rosa Luxemburg was born in Zamość (now in Lublin, Poland), Ernst Bloch lived in both Germanies, Julia Kristeva became Bulgarian-French in the mid-1960s, Stanisław L. Brzozowski is considered the “Polish” beginning of “Western” Marxism,⁹ not to mention the extraordinary case of Francophone Vietnamese Marxist phenomenologist Trần Đức Thảo.¹⁰ In France, Louis Althusser wrote intensively on the relationship between Marxism and humanism, for which he is known as a Marxist philosopher who is critical of humanism and the

² Elisabeth Rosenthal, “Wang Ruoshui, 75, Liberal Who Was Shunned in China,” *The New York Times*, 14th January 2002.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sometimes, it is also referred to as “humanist Marxism”, but to maintain the terminology consistency and to highlight its humanist instead of Marxist nature, the thesis always uses “Marxist humanism”.

⁷ Notable figures include Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Marshall Berman, John Berger, David McReynolds, et al.

⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Main Trends in Philosophy* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), pp. 341-351.

⁹ Walicki, Andrzej. *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of “Western Marxism”*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

¹⁰ The Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm affair in which Trần Đức Thảo was involved started with intellectual journals Humanities [Nhân Văn] and *Works of Spring* [Giai phẩm Mùa xuân]. Some other contributors may also be recognized as Marxist humanists.

French adherents of Marxist humanism, e.g., Roger Garaudy.¹¹ In a broad sense, existentialist Marxism, Frankfurt school, and Freudo-Marxism are all of the humanist (in a methodological, not necessarily ideological sense) interpretation of Marxism.

Nevertheless, here I have to make a fundamental distinction between the Marxist humanism that evolved in what the thesis refers to as the “Soviet-type context” in which Marxist humanism is ideologically excluded by the officially-interpreted Marxism, and the Marxist humanism that evolved in other contexts. Speaking of Marxist humanism in a context in which there is no exclusive official ideology and its interpretation as such, is remarkably different from intellectuals such as Leszek Kołakowski and Wang Ruoshui speaking of Marxist humanism under the oppressive conditions they were located in. Therefore, while acknowledging the contextually-diverse usage of the term “Marxist humanism”, the Marxist humanism that this thesis deals with is limited to the “Soviet-type context”, predominantly the Eastern Bloc and China.

As the opposite of the official interpretation of Marxism by the Soviet-type regimes, Marxist humanism is best-known as a non-orthodox, humanist interpretation of Marxism that is associated with certain philosophers and philosophical circles in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and East Germany during the Cold War.¹² In this sense, Marxist humanism involves but is not limited to the Budapest school and/or the Lukács School¹³ including Lukács György, Heller Ágnes, Fehér Ferenc, Márkus György, Vajda Mihály, Márkus Mária, Mészáros István, Hegedüs András, Eörsi István, Kis János, Bence György, Almási Miklós, Hermann István, Kovács András, Kovács M. Mária, Zoltai Dénes, Mészáros Vilma, Radnóti Sándor, Ludassy Mária, Erdélyi Ágnes,¹⁴ the Praxis school as the opposite of the “dialectics school”, including Danko Grlić, Predrag Vranicki, Gajo Petrović, Rudi Supek, Branko Bošnjak, Milan Kangrga, Danilo Pejović, Ivan Kuvačić in Zagreb, Mihailo Marković, Zagorka Golubović, Svetozar Stojanović, Nebojša Popov, Trivo Inđić, Ljubomir Tadić, Dragoljub Mićunović, Miladin Životić in Belgrade, Karel Kosík, Ivan Sviták, Egon Bondy, Radovan Richta, Miloš Hájek, Eugen Šimunek, Zdeněk Mlynář, Vítězslav Gar-davský, Milan Machovec, Milan Průcha, Lubomír Sochor, Robert Kalivoda in Prague, Andrej

¹¹ Geerlandt, Robert. *Garaudy et Althusser: le débat sur l'humanisme dans le Parti communiste français et son enjeu*. Paris: PUF, 1978.

¹² Marxist humanism seems to have not been an appreciable theme in Romania and Bulgaria, but it still could be observed. In Romania, possibly during the early years of the Ceaușescu regime, philosophers published on epistemology, value theory, cultural philosophy, Hegel, neo-Kantianism, existentialism, phenomenology, personalism, neo-rationalism, world philosophy, alongside humanism (Li Shubai and Ma Longshan, 1978; Di Shan, 1979). One representative of Romanian Marxist humanist is francophone Jewish philosopher Constantin Ionescu Gulian. Another Bucharest-born Romanian-French neo-Marxist was the émigré philosopher Lucien Goldmann. Bulgarian philosophers also discussed the “human question” and the comprehensive development of humans (Ma Jihua, 1987).

¹³ According to Kis János (correspondence to me on 17th February 2023), “the Budapest School is often confounded with a loose network of people that was called the Lukács School... The Budapest School emerged as a much smaller and more closely organized group within the wider Lukács School, and it comprised just four philosophers: Fehér, Heller, Márkus and Vajda.”

¹⁴ The contributors to *Marx in the Fourth Decade*, edited by Kovács András, include philosophers György Bence, János Kis, Zoltan Endreffy, Ágnes Erdélyi, Marta Feher, Géza Fodor, Zolt Krokavay, Mária Ludassy, Katalin Vidrányi, and István Mikó, historians Gyula Benda and Mihály Hamburger, economists and sociologists Tamás Bauer and Mihály Laki, literary historian Péter Pór, linguist Mária Pap, art historian László Beke, writer Miklós Haraszti, critic János Kenedi, and painter Peter Donáth, cf. Balazs Rab, “Marx in the Fourth Decade,” *Index on Censorship* 7, no. 6 (1978): p. 21.

Kopčok, Július Strinka, Miroslav Kusý in Bratislava,¹⁵ Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko,¹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, Adam Schaff, Karol Modzelewski, Jacek Kuroń in Warsaw, Jerzy Topolski, Leszek Nowak, Jerzy Kmita, Jan Such, Seweryn Działowski, Krystyna Zamiara, Izabella Nowak, Tadeusz Zgółka, Andrzej Malewski, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska in Poznań,¹⁷ Ernst Bloch in Leipzig, Rudolf Bahro¹⁸ in East Berlin, et al.¹⁹

What is less known is that Marxist humanism was also of great intellectual significance in the history of Soviet philosophy. The Soviet Marxist humanists include Evald V. Ilyenkov, Ivan T. Frolov, Pavel V. Kopnin, Vladislav A. Lektorsky, Genrikh S. Batishchev, Vadim S. Semyonov, Nikolai I. Lapin, Moses S. Kagan, Alexander L. Nikiforov, Boris A. Grushin, Georgy P. Shchedrovitsky, Merab K. Mamardashvili, Alexander A. Zinoviev, Vadim M. Mezhuyev, Bonifaty M. Kedrov, Teodor I. Oizerman, et al.²⁰

What is even less known is that China also witnessed a climax of literature focusing on or inspired by Marxist humanism, being translational or original, during its intellectually-explosive long 1980s (1978-1992). Alongside the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the People's Republic of China turned to acknowledge the "revisionist" literature of Marxism. Meanwhile, Marxist humanism was introduced into Chinese intelligentsia, primarily in the name of "Eastern European New Marxism". Particularly, the unorthodox works of the Budapest school, Praxis school, and Leszek Kołakowski, amongst others, attracted numerous Chinese scholars and students.

Wang Ruoshui, then an editor of *People's Daily*, who held a degree in philosophy from Peking University, published an essay titled "A Defense of Humanism" in 1983. The Party's conservative theorists such as Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun then organized a conference on "Alienation and Humanism" to rebuke Wang et al.'s tendency of so-called "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization". However, the Party's reformists, such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, considered Wang Ruoshui's essay to be in line with the direction of China's ongoing course of reform. This event marked the beginning of a decade-long struggle within the Party and in intelligentsia on whether or not should Marxist humanism be accepted in China, and if so, in what way.

¹⁵ Jan Mervart, "Czechoslovak Marxist Humanism and the Revolution," *Studies in East European Thought* 69, no. 1 (2017): p. 114.

¹⁶ See also the "Warsaw school of history of ideas [Warszawska szkoła historii idei]".

¹⁷ Chinese scholars have referred to the so-called Czechoslovak "existential anthropology school" and Polish "Poznań school". Regarding the accused "anthropological-existentialist revisionist line in philosophy in the 1960s in Czechoslovakia", cf. Morozov, S. M., and Z. Iavurek. "The Social Philosophy of the Frankfurt School and Contemporary Philosophical Revisionism." *Soviet Studies in Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (1985): pp. 22-74 and the chapter "Existential-anthropological revision of Marxism-Leninism" (pp. 149-207) in Hrzal, Ladislav, and Jakub Netopilík. *Ideologický boj ve vývoji české filozofie*. Prague: Svoboda, 1975. Cited in Růžička, Jiří, and Jan Mervart. "Marxism and existentialism in state socialist Czechoslovakia." *Studies in East European Thought* (2022): footnote 16. For the "Poznań school of methodology" or "Poznań methodological school" (poznánska škola metodologiczna, szkoła poznańska, or szkoła Kmity), cf. Swiderski, Edward M. "Humanistic Interpretation and Historical Materialism: The Methodology of the Poznań School." In *Contemporary Marxism*, pp. 97-108. Springer, Dordrecht, 1984; Swiderski, Edward M. "The Explanation of Actions and Marxism: From the Point of View of the Poznań School." *Studies in Soviet Thought* (1985): pp. 255-268.

¹⁸ James H. Satterwhite, "East-European Marxist Humanism," *Praxis International* 3, no. 3 (1983): p. 246.

¹⁹ The *Textbook of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (1967) edited by the Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR suggested a human-centred Marxism; although due to Moscow's interference, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany banned it in 1970, Marxist humanism continued to develop within the academic establishment, especially during the 1980s (Ma Jihua, 1987).

²⁰ An Qinian, 2020: pp. 135-144.

Chinese Marxist humanism could be traced back to the 1950s and it has continued its evolution since the 1990s. Its representatives include²¹ Wang Ruoshui, Zhou Yang, Hu Feng, Zhu Guangqian, Ru Xin, Feng Ding, Wang Yuanhua, Gu Xiang, Gao Qinghai, Gao Ertai, Li Guiren, Yu Guangyuan, Liu Zaifu, Wang Renshu (Baren), Feng Xuefeng, Xue Dezhen, Guo Luoji, Lin Li, Mao Chongjie, Ma Jihua, Xing Benshi, Sun Bokui, Qian Gurong, Feng Qi,²² Huang Nansen, Yan Hongyuan, Chen Zhishang, Wang Ruisheng, Dai Houying, Hu Jiwei, Su Shaozhi, Zhang Yibing, Yu Wujin, Zhou Yicheng, An Yanming, Wu Xiaoming, Xie Xialing, Chen Kuide, Zhou Xuliang, Xie Tao, An Qinian, Yi Junqing, Guo Guanyi, Jia Zelin, Ding Xueliang, et al.²³

The abovementioned figures are in a broad sense listed as Marxist humanists, ranging from a wide generational, disciplinary, and political spectrum. Some are professional philosophers, while some are known as literary critics or political theorists; some went into exile, while some cooperated with the regimes; some contributed to intercultural exchanges, while some produced their own thoughts; some held lifelong beliefs in Marxism, while some moved beyond Marx; some were consistent on their views, while some changed their minds...

Yet, it might be argued that it is an oversimplified generalization to put different Soviet-type contexts into a singular account of Marxist humanism as the thesis' research subject, overlooking the differences amongst them. The thesis carefully examines these differences, both textual and contextual, but I do believe it is legitimate to put them into a singular account given their comparability. The following reflections by Cui Weiping shed a light on the reception of Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism in the 1980s China:

“[A.] Michnik used the metaphor of the *Bible* and Church to describe the humanist Marxism in the 1950s Eastern Europe: [A.] Schaff et al. still believed in the *Bible* (Marxism itself) while against the Church (the institution and senior officials in charge of ideology). This metaphor can be applied to Wang Ruoshui and his colleagues. In this sense, we could regard the movement that took place in the early 1980s China as an attempt akin to the Reformation...It was the transition from the old era to the new one, quietly preparing the ideological and theoretical delivery bed for the birth of a new era while retaining the authority and form of the old ones.”²⁴

Democratization does not necessarily take a republican form, nor does secularization necessarily take an atheistic form. The fact that the Soviet system did not have religious freedom, does not mean it did not have religion. To observe the theological characteristics of Soviet system, being ideational or institutional, it is redundant to quote from Erich H. W. Vögelin's insights on political religion and Gnosticism.²⁵ The Soviet discourse is full of denominational pragmatics – “(non-)orthodox”, “heterodox”, “dissident”, “doctrine”, “indoctrination”, etc.²⁶ According to Abdusalam A.

²¹ Cf. Appendix II. Biographies of Chinese Marxist Humanists.

²² Rosker, Jana S. “Transforming Knowledge to Wisdom: Feng Qi and the New Neo-Marxist Humanism.” *Asian Philosophy* (2022): pp. 1-21.

²³ If the terms “existential anthropology school” and “Poznań school” are tenable, then it could be claimed that there have been two schools of Marxist humanism in China: “Beijing school” during the 1980s and “Harbin (Heilongjiang) school” since the 1990s. The listed figures and the theme of the thesis are of the “Beijing school”.

²⁴ Cui Weiping, 2008.

²⁵ Cf. Vögelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Stockholm: Bermann Fischer, 1939) and *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis* (München: Kösel, 1959).

²⁶ Thomist theologian and philosophical Sovietologist J. M. Bocheński made similar observations, referring to “a striking similarity between Communism and highly-organized religions”. Cf. Bocheński, Józef Maria. “Toward a Systematic Logic of Communist Ideology.” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 4, no. 3 (1964): 192. See also theologian Gustav A.

Guseynov, the Soviet philosophy retained partially independent during the 1920s but turned to be “Soviet religion”²⁷ during the 1930s and 1940s. If this view holds true, the de-dogmatization and humanization of Soviet philosophy from the 1950s onwards to its end, “a philosophical movement of the Enlightenment nature”²⁸, shall be considered a gradual deconstruction of “Soviet religion”, a process of societal secularization, which is by definition a Reformation. Only from the secularization perspective, could we understand the significance of “humanism” advocacy in Marxist humanism movements under Soviet-type regimes.

For sure, no serious philosopher would consider Marxism as the “ism of Marx” to be a premodern religion. The communist revolutionaries and their like-minded, from Alexandra Kollontai to Pablo Neruda, were amongst the most lèse-majesté and blasphemous of their contemporaries. Apparently, the “Soviet religion” refers to the “Marxism” enforced top down, instead of the Marxism believed bottom up. When pro-democracy youth in the 1980s Taiwan started to read the works by Sun Yat-sen themselves, they were overwhelmed by the contrast between the Tridemism in Sun’s works in defense of liberal democracy, what they were for, and the vulgar “Tridemism” as the official ideology in defense of the existing party-state dictatorship, what they were against. The condition for sola fide is the individual reading of the *Bible*, which explains the crucial role of the *Bible* being translated into national languages during the Reformation. Likewise, the professionalization of philosophy enables a small group of philosophers to reflect on the texts of Marx themselves in their parallel universe, and to come up with their own understandings of both texts and contexts, ideal and reality.²⁹

Therefore, the metaphor of Marxism and the *Bible* shall be understood as an inversion. I argue that the post-1978 resurgence of humanism amongst Chinese intelligentsia was in accordance with the philosophical and practical logos of Deng Xiaoping’s market-oriented economic reforms that required individual subjectivity, responsibility, and self-discipline. However, Deng did not intend to encourage civic engagement in the public sphere such as democracy, which was also demanded by the 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism. Therefore, the Party’s criticisms against Marxist humanism, no matter how rhetorically radical they appeared to be, objectively served a conservative goal to preserve the established order.

Likewise, in the context of “Soviet religion”, every step seemingly “backward” to humanism is no longer reactionary, but a step forward from religion to humanism and thus closer to Marxism, as only through humanism could true Marxism be actualized. When Marxist humanists were questioning “Marxism”, their target was the *Bible*, instead of Marxism that which been replaced by the *Bible* or “Soviet religion”.

In this sense, Marxism is not responsible for the subsequent autocracy, superstition, oppression, and so on and so forth, followed by reactions to the revolution. These pre-revolutionary conditions, which the revolution failed to change and thus became post-revolutionary, could not be attributed to Marxism. Instead, Marxism is responsible for its expectations of revolution, which have been proven to be untenable. For example, the formation of “Soviet religion” declared the futility of

Wetter’s works on this topic, e.g., Wetter, Gustav A. *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union*. Translated by Peter Heath. New York: FA Praeger. 1959.

²⁷ A. A. Guseinov, 2015: p. 100.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

²⁹ Still, the texts of Marx may be regarded as dangerous. In 1967 and 1982, North Korea and Romania banned most works by Marx, Engels, and Lenin from the public. The Workers’ Party of Korea eventually abandoned Marxism in 1980, while Ceaușescu did not have the opportunity.

revolution and the persistence of theocratic tradition. This is the revelation of Marxist humanism as an intellectual phenomenon that emerged in Soviet-type contexts.

Overall, the thesis provides an entangled and transnational intellectual historiography that aims to provide an explanation of the intellectual phenomenon of Marxist humanism. First, although oral sources are highly appreciated, they are of limited accessibility, and most of the sources are of the deceased. Oral sources, if available, are cited in the footnote. Thus, the thesis falls into the genre of intellectual history instead of oral history.

Second, due to my linguistic competency limitations of different Marxist humanist texts and contexts, as well as the suitability of the subject being examined not through the prism of international comparisons but transnational entanglements, the thesis is designed as an entangled historiography, instead of a comparative study of Marxist humanism of different regions.

Third, the thesis is not limited to a historiographical presentation of these transnational entanglements, but also aims to provide and employ a theoretical framework (Ch. II) to the subject, and in this way, it aims to be explanatory instead of merely interpretative.

The thesis contributes to the existing knowledge of the subject in three ways. First, the thesis stands as an English-language historiography of the 1980s Marxist humanism – which has not yet been systematically established not even in Chinese, so that it reaches a wider audience and enriches the research literature on Marxist humanism.

Second, the thesis draws the attention of readers to the transnationalism and compatibility of Chinese Marxist humanism with Soviet, Eastern European, and Western references to Marxist humanism. Although there have been comparisons of Marxist humanisms in different Eastern European capitals, the transnationalism of Marxist humanism has been largely overlooked.

Third, and most importantly, the existing scholarship on Marxist humanism either ignores the existence of Chinese Marxist humanism or lacks a transnational perspective on Marxist humanism, thereby is unable to establish a general theory of Marxist humanism. The thesis provides and employs a theoretical framework (Ch. II) to the subject, which explains the intellectual phenomenon of Marxist humanism, its texts and contexts, and related topics.

Composition

Besides the 1st chapter Introduction and the 6th chapter Conclusions, the thesis' body consists of four chapters.

The 2nd chapter Theoretical Framework is supposed to be part of the Introduction according to academic conventions, but it is so important in serving as the cornerstone of the thesis that I decided to dedicate a separate chapter to it. In Theoretical Framework, I investigate Marxist (especially of Young Marx, in e.g., *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*) and Hegelian (Junghegelianer, Althegegelianer, Neo-) understandings on humanism, subjectivity, civil society, liberalism, amongst others, and propose a “trichotomy of Marxism” as an effort to comprehend the hermeneutical dynamics of the term “Marxism” in various contexts.³⁰ Based on methodological nominalism, I suggest that the term “Marxism” since its invention has been

³⁰ The “trichotomy of Marxism” was first presented during my “final state examination” (Státní závěrečná zkouška) at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University Prague on 9th June 2022.

used in “revolutionary”, “liberal”, or “conservative” ways, and the thesis that “Marxism is humanism” in Soviet-type contexts is essentially part of the liberal interpretation of Marxism. To illustrate the “trichotomy of Marxism”, the chapter first reviews the pragmatics of “revisionism” in the evolutionary history of Marxism, then showcases the distinct features of the three interpretations of Marxism in different aspects – autarky, autocracy, and tradition, and finally conclude with what I consider to be the insurmountability of subjectivity in the Marxist attempt of transcending liberalism.

The 3rd chapter chronologically outlines the 1980s context of China in which the Chinese (receptions of) Marxist humanism evolved, especially the intertwined relationships between the political and the intellectual, power and truth in China, the factionalist dynamics between reformism and conservatism within the Party, and their evolutions from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. In the light of Eric Hobsbawm’s term “long 19th century” (1798-1914), I refer to the “1980s” as a “long 1980s” (1978-1992) in the modern history of China. Politically, the period is marked by the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (hereinafter the “Party”) in December 1978 and the 14th National Congress of the Party in October 1992. The period is featured by ideological pluralism and partisan factionalism due to the lack of consensus on whither China. Contradictory legacy, tense reality and uncertain future were intertwined, and foreign ideas and cultures flooded in, creating an outstanding intellectual boom in the modern history of China. To use the term “Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns and of the Chinese and the Western”³¹ in describing China’s “long 1980s”, (Marxist) humanism was a trend amongst “the Western”; the intellectual reach of the “long 1980s” went far beyond Marxism of any kind or any other Western ideology, ultimately concerning a grand debate – China’s destiny in the modern world. In the scope of intellectual history, China today is still lying in its aftermath. The “long 1980s” witnessed not only the maturity of China’s mainstream ideology afterwards – e.g., the Party’s chief ideologue, neoconservative Wang Huning’s academic career and the gestation of Li Zehou’s thesis “Farewell to Revolution”, but also the contemporary revivals of Chinese liberalism.

The 4th and 5th chapters are respectively dedicated to the Chinese receptions of Soviet and East-Central European Marxist humanism. The 4th chapter reviews the formation of Soviet orthodox Marxism and its humanist opponent and explores the translational entanglements between Moscow and Beijing, including the Chinese translations and perceptions of Soviet Marxist humanism represented by Evald Ilyenkov and Ivan Frolov as well as the parallel dynamics in 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism that is comparable to Soviet Marxist humanism. It analyses not only the receptions of texts but also the receptions of the contexts in which Soviet Marxist humanism evolved such as the Party’s official accounts³² of (de)Stalinization and Khrushchev Thaw and Gorbachev’s reforms. The contexts in which Marxist humanism evolved and the texts of Marxist humanism are interwind in the Eastern Bloc, and so are them in China.

The 5th chapter reviews the core components of East-Central European Marxist humanism and their resonances in 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism and explores the translational entanglements between Soviet-type capitals such as Budapest, Belgrade, Prague and Beijing. It analyses not only the receptions of texts but also the receptions of the contexts, in which East-Central European Marxist humanism evolved. It covers from the Chinese receptions of left-wing romanticism in the early 20th century origins of Chinese Marxism, the Party’s official accounts of the 1956 Revolution

³¹ Tang Yijie, 2001; Gan Yang, 2006.

³² The Party itself, in different periods, and of conflicting factions, has had different, sometimes opposite receptions of these events for various ideological reasons.

of Hungary, Prague Spring, and Revolutions of 1989. Given the connections between Western Marxism and East-Central European Marxist humanism, it also discusses the debate on Marxist humanism in post-World War II Franco-German philosophy, especially within the context of structuralism vs. anti-structuralism.

The 3rd, 4th and 5th chapters as the thesis' main body and research chapters aim to demonstrate how the 1980s Chinese receptions of Marxist humanism was shaped by China's "long 1980s" contexts (Ch. III), the Chinese receptions of Soviet and East-Central European Marxist humanism and the contexts in which they evolved (Ch. IV and Ch. V) through the prism of "trichotomy of Marxism" proposed in Theoretical Framework (Ch. II).

The 6th chapter Conclusions, apart from a concise conclusion of the thesis' discoveries related to Marxist humanism, explores the true meanings of humanism and its associates, e.g., human nature, humanity, and human rights, in the historical context of modern China, and its significance in contemporary Chinese liberalism, as well as general issues regarding the relationship between Marxism and liberalism within and beyond Soviet-type contexts.

The four appendices are (1) the author's English translation of the Chinese-language Marxist humanist document at the 1983 Guilin Conference, titled *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, (2) biographies of a more than 50, yet still incomplete list of Chinese Marxist humanists, (3) a small gallery of Chinese Marxist humanism, and (4) the edited version of the author's interviews and correspondence with Kovács András (1947-), Feng Yuan (1962-), Kis János (1943-), An Yanming (1955-), and Zhou Yicheng (1946-).

Literature Review

The research literature on the 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism is rather limited, partially due to the political sensibility of the topic, and outside the Sinosphere, even the existence of Chinese Marxist humanism is largely unknown. Most of them are historiographical fragments of the early 1980s debate on "Humanism and Alienation", which ended by the mid-1980s.

One case was "The Debate on Humanism and Alienation in the 1980s",³³ a Chinese-language review article on the early 1980s debate on "Marxist humanism" and "socialist alienation" by Chinese liberal intellectual Cui Weiping, published in *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, a journal with reformist backgrounds. Cui points out that the debate "dominated by intellectuals within the Communist Party, was very much in line with the efforts to Marxist 'with a human face' that began in the mid-1950s Eastern Europe". Cui distinguishes three generations of Chinese Marxist humanists during the debate, amongst the oldest were Zhu Guangqian (1897-1986), Qian Gurong (1919-2017), and Gao Ertai (1935-), who were criticized for their humanist aesthetic views previously; amongst the younger were Wang Ruoshui (1926-2002), Xue Dezhen (1932-2023), and Gu Xiang (1930-2015), who were party theoreticians at that time; and amongst the youngest was Ding Xueliang (1953-), who was then a graduate student.³⁴ The review contributes to the study of Chinese Marxist humanism during the 1980s in two ways: the comparative perspective in connection to the East European variant (however, the Soviet variant is not mentioned) of Marxist humanism, and a historiographical outline of the debate.

³³ Cui Weiping, 2008.

³⁴ Ibid.

In his memorial article to Wang Ruoshui, titled “Out of the ‘Newton Era’ of Marxism: In Memory of Wang Ruoshui”,³⁵ Chinese Marxist humanist Guo Luoji (1932-) concluded similar to Cui’s. Both Wang and Guo went exile to in the United States in the early 1990s. Guo laid out that “Marx and Engels criticized the bourgeoisie, for they thought their principles of freedom, democracy, and human rights were not thorough, and demanded the further development of the principles; while China’s official Marxism criticized the bourgeoisie, for it opposed these principles per se... Therefore, the primary work done by Chinese [humanist] Marxists was to reconnect Marxism with liberalism, democracy, and humanism.”³⁶ This is the very reformist and/or liberal nature of Marxist humanism in “postrevolutionary” societies where the “official Marxism” serves as a conservative ideology.

The general scholarship of the 1980s Chinese intellectual history focuses on the New Enlightenment movement, which derived from Marxist humanism to a certain extent but gained much more attention than Marxist humanism. In this regard, this thesis, especially its Theoretical Framework chapter, is indebted to Chinese philosopher Li Zehou’s 1986 paper, titled “Double Variations of Enlightenment and Salvation”.³⁷ Li’s paper provides not only arguably the most accepted interpretation of 20th century Chinese thoughts, but also a view through which the 1980s Chinese ideologies in the context of “New Enlightenment” could be properly understood. My thesis follows Li’s insights, suggests that Marxist humanism and its opponents in 1980s China shall be comprehended in the dynamics of “Enlightenment” v. “anti-capitalist feudalism”.³⁸

Alongside Li’s intellectual account of the 1980s China, retired senior journalist of Xinhua News Agency Yang Jisheng’s political account of the 1980s China, titled *The Political Struggles in China’s Reform Era*,³⁹ is a political historiography covering China’s “long 1980s” (1978-1992), which is amongst the most authoritative ones of its kind. Apart from the historiographical details the book provides, my thesis, especially the chapter on the 1980s Chinese context (Ch. III), is benefited from Yang’s classification of four political forces after Mao: (1) Fanshi faction and other supporters of Mao’s utopianism, (2) conservative faction in favour of the Soviet-type planned economy in 1950s China (e.g., Chen Yun), (3) “marketist” reformists in favour of market economy but not liberal democracy (e.g., Deng Xiaoping), and (4) reformists in favour of both market and democracy (e.g., Zhao Ziyang). The first faction died out following the trail of the Gang of Four and Hua Guofeng’s 1978 step-down, the last faction saw its climax in 1989 and then quickly faded out. Throughout the period, most struggles occurred between the second and third factions, which were at the power centre, and ended with Deng’s triumph after 1992.

Equally important pieces in understanding the Soviet-type contexts in which Marxist humanism evolved, especially the ideological dynamics and political factionalism, are former Yugoslav communist leader Milovan Đilas’ 1957 book *The New Class*⁴⁰ and American Sovietologist Stephen F. Cohen’s 1979 article “The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union”.⁴¹ *The New Class* is the best-known work by Đilas. Its main argument that a “new class”

³⁵ Guo Luoji, 2002.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Li Zehou, 2008 [1986].

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Yang Jisheng, 2004.

⁴⁰ Đilas, Milovan. *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957.

⁴¹ Cohen, Stephen F. “The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union.” *Slavic Review* 38, No. 2 (1979): 187-202.

emerged in the supposedly “classless” Yugoslavia is not particularly original; Leon Trotsky’s 1937 book *The Revolution Betrayed* already made such an argument, and similar arguments could be founded in the literature of non-Leninist “left communism” and of anarchism, as well as *Dictatorship over Needs* (1983). The particular relevance of *The New Class* to my thesis is its receptions before and after the Cultural Revolution in China. The book was first translated into Chinese and published in Taiwan, and then published in 1963 in mainland China; it subsequently inspired the “rebel” or “revolutionary” movement during the Cultural Revolution, and during the 1980s, the book was received again, but in a liberal, reformist stance, which was the original stance of Đilas.

“The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union” is an early masterpiece on the ideological dynamics and partisan factionalism within Soviet-type societies (especially after Stalin), which provides a reference to the similar context of 1980s China. Cohen observed that “Soviet conservatives today [c. 1979] often speak, for example, using a neo-Stalinist or nineteenth-century Slavophile idiom”.⁴² “Neo-Stalinism” after the Thaw in this sense, is nothing but a reprint of 19th century Russian conservatism. Similar dynamics between reformism and conservatism could be observed not only in Moscow (Khrushchev and/or Gorbachev v. Stalin and/or Brezhnev), but also in other Soviet-type capitals (A. Dubček v. G. Husák, M. Đilas v. J. Tito, I. Nagy v. J. Kádár, W. Ulbricht v. E. Honecker, etc.). Such dynamics correspond to different attitudes towards Marxist humanism, as “Soviet conservatives and reformers must have a Soviet face; they must find inspiration and legitimacy somewhere within historical Marxism-Leninism”.⁴³ This also applies to the dynamics of reformists (Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang, et al.) vs. conservatives (Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, et al.) and their attitudes towards Marxist humanism in 1980s China.

I now move from the research literature to the formative pieces of Marxist humanism. The first and foremost text would be Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.⁴⁴ This is the text written by the so-called “Young Marx”, to which most humanist Marxists trace back. It contains certain concepts, such as alienation, that greatly influenced both “Western Marxists” in their critique of consumerism and modern industrial civilization as well as the “Marxist humanists” in their critique of Soviet-type societies and the canonization of “Marxism” in official ideology. What is of the same importance is the authorship of Marx being in his ideological transition from (left-Hegelian) liberalism to “Marxism”, which is the true source of Marxist humanism that interprets Marxism as a transcendence of humanism, instead of “pre-humanism”.

The most important piece of early-stage (Thaw) Soviet Marxist humanism (“epistemological school”) is “Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of their Historical Development” (1954)⁴⁵ by E. V. Ilyenkov and V. I. Korovikov. The theses’ main argument is that Marxism or “philosophy” is epistemological instead of metaphysical; it cannot replace the concrete knowledge and disciplines of nature and society. They wrote that “philosophy is the science of scientific thinking, its laws and forms”, not the sciences themselves; therefore, the philosophical inquiries are not inquires to knowledge, but

⁴² Ibid., p. 189.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁴ Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by Martin Milligan. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959.

⁴⁵ Ilyenkov, E. V. and V. I. Korovikov. “Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of their Historical Development (1954).” Translated by Bakhurst, David. *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the 20th Century, a contemporary view from Russia and abroad*. Edited by Bykova, Marin and Vladimir Lektorsky, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

the scientific mythologies of “how to know”. In this way, they were opposing the Stalinist philosophical establishment of the Soviet Union (“metaphysical school”) that claimed the truth of Marxism or “philosophy” is absolute and holistic, not just instrumental. The theses paved the way for subjectivity, anthropological turn, and humanization of Soviet philosophy from the Thaw to Gorbachev.

The representative works of Chinese Marxist humanism were two articles in the *People's Daily*, Zhou Yang (ghostwritten by Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, and Wang Yuanhua)'s “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism”⁴⁶ on 16th March 1983 and Hu Qiaomu's “On Humanism and Alienation”⁴⁷ on 27th January 1984. Zhou Yang's article is the most authoritative essay or political manifesto in defense of Chinese Marxist humanism in the early 1980s. The essay was published as a book by the People's Publishing House in 1988. The essay was written by Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, and Wang Yuanhua, and delivered by Zhou Yang at the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China. The 4th part of the essay, titled “the relationship between Marxism and Humanism”, arguing that Marxism is humanist, and that “alienation” exists in socialist society and needs to be overcome, triggered a propaganda campaign against it afterwards.

Hu Qiaomu's article is the most authoritative essay or political manifesto against Chinese Marxist humanism in the early 1980s. It was first delivered by Hu Qiaomu at the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China. The essay was in response to Zhou Yang's “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism”, especially its 4th part concerning humanism and alienation. Hu Qiaomu argues that Marxism is not humanism and humanism cannot be the guiding ideology for China. He suggests “socialist humanism”, which is in line with and in defense of the status quo of China, unlike the Chinese Marxist humanists' advocacy that challenges the status quo of China. Perhaps Hu's most insightful part in the essay is pointing out that the Chinese Marxist humanists' usages of “alienation” (in socialist China) were in line with the theoretical foundation of the Cultural Revolution. Since the Cultural Revolution was a “revolution” against the status quo, the 1980s reformism aimed to “reform” the system, then Hu and other conservatives were opposing changes, being radical or gradual, to the reality.

As far as East-Central European Marxist humanism is concerned, I would like to name four works: Karel Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete* (1963),⁴⁸ Leszek Kołakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism* (1978), Mihailo Marković's editorial “Why Praxis International?” (1981),⁴⁹ and *Dictatorship over Needs* (1983)⁵⁰ co-authored by the Budapest School intellectuals Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, and György Márkus.

Dialectics of the Concrete is arguably the most important work of Czechoslovak Marxist humanism. The book cited Marx, Hegel, Heidegger, and Kant, amongst others, outlining a philosophical mixed vision of “neo-Marxism” that combines Marxism with Kantian, phenomenological, existentialist, philosophical-anthropological ideas. Kosík argues for a dialectic of “the concrete”, opposing the “false” dialectic of the totality, which is non-authentic in the sense that it does touch the very concrete aspects of everyday life. In light of Heideggerian analyses of the existentialist Being, Kosík suggests that the Kantian “thing-in-itself” is human self, thus in this way,

⁴⁶ Zhou Yang (Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, Wang Yuanhua), 16th March 1983.

⁴⁷ Hu Qiaomu, 27th January 1984.

⁴⁸ Kosík, Karel. *Dialektika konkrétního*. Praha: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1963.

⁴⁹ Marković, Mihailo. “Why Praxis International? (Editorial)” *Praxis International*, 1 (1981), 1, pp. 1-5.

⁵⁰ Fehér, Ferenc, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus. *Dictatorship over Needs*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

contributing to a humanist comprehension of Marxism, which aims to change the Czechoslovak status quo. After the Prague Spring, the very abstractive and equivocal book was indeed deemed as “revisionist” by the Husák regime.

“Why Praxis International?” is the editorial of the first edition of *Praxis International*, the successor of *Praxis* (1964-1975). Marković wrote that the Praxis school “drew inspiration from the works of Gramsci, Korsch, Lukacs, Bloch, Marcuse, Fromm and [Lucien] Goldmann”.⁵¹ Marković argues that the Praxis school and its Western counterparts share a mission; the 1960s witness democratic movements in both “capitalism” and “socialism”, during the 1970s, “throughout much of the world, conservative and reactionary forces have been able to gain the upper hand”, and in the beginning of the 1980s, progressive intellectuals should unite under the banner of “Praxis International”. The problem of the view is that the writings of Marcuse, Fromm and [Lucien] Goldmann et al. were born obviously not in the same context, under which the Praxis intellectuals produced their writings; to what extent, could the two groups be considered homogeneous? I argue that the immediately urgent task for Marxist humanists should be against economic autarky and political autocracy, and thereby not essentially different from the liberal platform, unlike the “Western Marxists” under democracy demanding something more than liberalism.

Main Currents of Marxism is an intellectual historiography of Marxisms and arguably the best-known work of Polish Marxist humanism. Kołakowski’s another work, *Toward a Marxist Humanism* (1967), is also relevant, but *Main Currents of Marxism* provides an outline of the regional variants of Marxism from a Polish Marxist humanist perspective. The book could be considered a dialogue between “Eastern European” and “Western European” Marxisms and neo-Marxisms, but it is so Eurocentric that it has only spared a subchapter for one variant of non-European Marxism at the very end of the book, discussing Mao’s “peasant Marxism”.⁵² This is no fault of Kołakowski, given the fact that non-European theme was as marginal as in the writings of Marx himself as well, but to understand not the “main European currents of Marxism”, but the “main currents Marxism”, especially Marxisms after Marx, a global horizon is necessary.

Cambridge sociologist Christel Lane provided a concise summary with the reviewer’s own insights on the magnum opus of Hungarian Marxist humanism *Dictatorship over Needs* (1983) upon its publication.⁵³ The three Hungarian Marxist humanists argue that the Soviet-type states impose their control over individual economic, social, cultural, and political needs, constituting a “dictatorship over needs”. They point out the distinction between the “privileged bureaucratic stratum” or “corporate ruling group” and the “rest of the population”.⁵⁴ They suggest abolition of the command economy, marketization and decentralization.⁵⁵ In my view, the shortcomings of *Dictatorship over Needs* are two. First, whether their advocacy of liberalism or “democratic socialism” as they claim (does this label have any substantial meaning in terms of distinction from liberalism, not in terms of distinction from “autocratic” socialism) is disputable. Second, the authors’ analyses are too sociological and, in that way, almost ahistorical.

⁵¹ Kołakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

⁵² Ibid., Ch. 13: § 6.

⁵³ Lane, Christel. “Dictatorship over Needs (Book Review).” *Sociology* (1983): 584-587.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 585.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 586.

Last but not least, Louis Althusser's *Pour Marx* (1965),⁵⁶ especially its Part Seven, titled "Marxism and Humanism", is Althusser's antihumanist defense of Marxism and arguably the most important piece of antihumanism within "Western Marxism". The texts of Althusser are relevant to my thesis because Althusser provided an antihumanist Marxism that was different from the official antihumanist Marxism of the Soviet-type capitals against the "revisionist" Marxist humanisms, and Althusser's antihumanist Marxism was according to his understanding inspired by Maoist "revolutionary" antihumanism. I argue that the point is to distinguish two kinds of antihumanisms – utopianism and conservatism, which are both opponents of Marxist humanism as a liberal interpretation of Marxism. This distinction is often ignored in certain analyses.

Sources

As a study of the Chinese reception of Marxist humanism, not one of Marxist humanism, the thesis' main sources are in Chinese. The Chinese-language texts concerning Marxist humanism are in two categories: translational and original.

Most translational texts were translated from English, Russian, German, and occasionally French, and published in academic journals, especially *Philosophy Translation Series* or today's *World Philosophy, Social Sciences Abroad, Soviet and Eastern European Issues* or today's *Russian, East European & Central Asian Studies* edited by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), *Digest of Foreign Modern Philosophy and Social Sciences* or today's *Digest of Foreign Social Sciences* edited by Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). The Chinese translations of Czechoslovak, Polish, Hungarian, and Yugoslav Marxist humanism were rarely translated directly from respective national languages.

The lack of Chinese speakers of these languages was conceivably one of the reasons, but it is untrue that by the 1980s, China had no academic establishment of these languages and corresponding teachers and students. For example, the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) established Czech and Polish subjects as early as 1954, only after Russian, English, French, German, and Spanish, even ahead of Japanese (1956). The more important reason was perhaps that none of these languages was considered "philosophical", and those trained in philosophy had education in only those "philosophical languages". In fact, many Eastern European Marxist humanist works were either written in German, Russian, English, or even French, or had been translated into these languages before their receptions in China.

Amongst the original texts of Marxist humanism in 1980s China, the most prominent two were published in *People's Daily*: Zhou Yang's "Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism"⁵⁷ on 16th March 1983 and Hu Qiaomu's "On Humanism and Alienation"⁵⁸ on 27th January 1984. Zhou's essay, written by Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, and Wang Yuanhua, was in defense of humanism and acted as the manifesto of Chinese Marxist humanism, while Hu's essay was against it. The former was not the first notable text on Marxist humanism in post-Mao China, nor was the latter the capital penalty of Marxist humanism in China: on 15th August 1980, Ru Xin's essay "Is Humanism Necessarily Revisionism? A Revaluation of Humanism"⁵⁹ was published in *People's*

⁵⁶ Althusser, Louis. *Pour Marx*. Paris: François Maspero, 1965.

⁵⁷ Zhou Yang, 1983.

⁵⁸ Hu Qiaomu, 1984.

⁵⁹ Ru Xin, 1980.

Daily; Wang Ruoshui published his anthology *A Defense of Humanism* in 1986.⁶⁰ But no text was comparable with those of Zhou as the president (1979-1988) of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and Hu as a Politburo member of the Party's 12th Central Committee and the first president (1977-1982) of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Other original texts of Chinese Marxist humanism were published mostly in academic journals: *Domestic Philosophical Trends* or today's *Philosophical Trends* edited by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *Journal of Social Sciences* edited by Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* edited by Chinese Association of Literary and Art Theory (not to be confused with *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art* established in 1986 for "criticizing" the liberalization trend in Chinese literature and art during the 1980s), *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy & Social Sciences)*, amongst others.

There are also primary and secondary Chinese-language sources, which are not directly related to Marxist humanism, especially in the 3rd chapter on China's long 1980s context of China and parts of 4th and 5th chapters on Chinese receptions of the contexts in which Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism evolved. The primary sources are mainly from the Party's mouthpieces: *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *People's Liberation Army Daily*, *Red Flag* or today's *Qinshi*, amongst others. *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, a historiographical journal edited by the Party's remnant liberal factionalists after 1989 also published plenty of valuable essays written by the ones who were involved in the 1980s events. Other primary sources include the memoirs of Wang Ruoshui, Deng Liqun, Zhao Ziyang, et al. The secondary sources on 1980s China follow two narratives, one is "historical orthodoxy" associated with the Institute of Contemporary China Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Association of National History of the People's Republic of China, and another is the sometimes accused "historical nihilism", most works of which have been published outside mainland China, especially in Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁶¹ The two narratives are to a large extent the continuation of the 1980s factionalist struggles.

The thesis' Bibliography contains only Chinese-language sources cited and is divided into "translational" and "original" parts. The thesis conforms to the mainstream citation style in history, but the Chinese-language sources cited in the footnotes are simply in author-date style, in order to avoid citing one source in both footnotes and Bibliography.

Sources in languages other than Chinese are cited in Theoretical Framework and the part regarding humanism and Western Marxism in the 5th chapter. They are cited in standard Chicago style and thereby excluded from the Bibliography. They include the works of Marx, Engels, and authors of "Western Marxism" (Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard, Alain Badiou, et al.). Their Chinese translations exist but are not preferred to be cited compared with their originals or English translations.

⁶⁰ Wang Ruoshui, 1986.

⁶¹ Ironically, as an important party involved in the 1980s Chinese politics and later the first president of the Association of National History of the People's Republic of China, Deng Liqun had to publish his personal memoir (1975-1987) in Hong Kong (Deng Liqun, 2006).

II. Theoretical Framework⁶²

⁶² Part of this chapter was based on the author's coursework submitted to Trencsényi Balázs in the 2022-2023 fall term at CEU.

“All political action aims at either preservation or change. When desiring to preserve, we wish to prevent a change to the worse; when desiring to change, we wish to bring about something better.”

Leo Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” *The Journal of Politics* 19, no. 3 (1957): p. 343.

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to an outlook of what I refer to as a “trichotomy of Marxism”, which will be applied to the explorations of Chinese receptions of Marxist humanism in the following chapters.

First, the chapter proposes a trichotomy of Marxism, which is based on not the content of Marxism (economics, socialism, and philosophy) but on ideological connotations of various discourses in the name of Marxism: (1) revolutionary, (2) liberal, and (3) conservative. Second, it demonstrates how this trichotomy of Marxism could be used in explaining and classifying the conflictive usages of “revisionism” in Marxist discourses. Next, it showcases where these three ideological positions are situated in a wide range of platforms such as economy, politics, and socioculture, focusing on the exemplary comparison and distinction between precapitalist and/or feudal autarky and socialist command economy. Last but not least, it highlights the concept of subjectivity in distinguishing the misleadingly similar revolutionary and conservative positions and explains why the concept is crucial in the theorization of Marxism.

A Trichotomy of Marxism

A notable trichotomy of Marxism, famously proposed by Lenin, is based on the three intellectual origins and disciplinary contents of Marxism: (1) Smithian economics or “Klassische Nationalökonomie”, (2) French, especially Saint-Simonian and Fourierist, socialism, and (3) Hegelian philosophy.⁶³

In Lenin’s trichotomy, “Marxism” is defined as the “ism” embodied in the texts by Marx and Engels. However, even when Marx was alive, he had to claim that “I am not a Marxist”.⁶⁴ An objective fact is that “Marxism” after Marx has been subject to unfixed interpretations contradictory to each other. For example, “Marxism” has been the official ideology of the Communist Party of China since its inception, and according to the Party’s different interpretations of Marxism from time to time: Cultural Revolution should and should not have been launched, market economy is and is not socialism, Shanghai Stock Exchange should and should not have been closed.

To categorize various “Marxisms”, I believe it is needed to formulate another trichotomy, based on ideological orientations instead of disciplinary contents. Here I do not suggest the disciplinary trichotomy be substituted; on the contrary, it is conducive to our understanding of the formation of Marxism as the “ism” of its founders from the prism of the trichotomy that I propose: where is Marx positioned vis-à-vis Smith, Saint-Simon/Fourier, and Hegel?

⁶³ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism,” *Prosveshcheniye*, no 3, March 1913. See also Friedrich Engels’ *Anti-Dühring* (1878), which is divided into three parts: philosophy, political economy, and socialism.

⁶⁴ Georges Haupt, *Aspects of International Socialism, 1871-1914: Essays by Georges Haupt*, ed. Peter Fawcett and Eric Hobsbawm, Eric (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 12.

Minor Post-Ricardian. Marx acknowledged that when he was an editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* (1842-1843), “the debates on free trade and protective tariffs caused me in the first instance to turn my attention to economic questions” and he began his study of political economy in Paris and Brussels, resulting in the *Notes on James Mill* and later *1844 Manuscripts*.⁶⁵ Only after Marx moved to London, had he restarted systematically reading Smithian economics, resulting in *Grundrisse* (1858) and later the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867). From the present-day perspective of the history of economic thought, Marx as an economist is “a minor post-Ricardian”.⁶⁶ The core of Marxian economics, the theory of capitalist exploitation, was a shared view by post-Ricardian economists or “Ricardian socialists”, who argued that labour has the right to everything it produces, and rent, profit, and interest are distortions of market.⁶⁷ David Ricardo, alongside Thomas R. Malthus and James S. Mill, should be viewed as a “major Smithian”, thereby Marxian economics could also be considered to be a “post-Smithian”. Marxian economics can be by no means understood as “pre-Smithian”, or pre-capitalist,⁶⁸ i.e., a defense of premodern, or in the framework of historical materialism, “feudalist” and typically autarkic economy, even though Marxian economics may be impractical in essence, and the experiment of Marxian economics, as seen in Soviet-type societies, may well resemble the traditional pattern of autarkic economy or, in Marxist term, modes of production of slavery and feudalism.

Socialism. Marx and Engels avoided using “socialism” in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), as the term in their context had been widely used in a sense contradictory to their belief. They first criticized the British, French, and German variants of “reactionary socialism”⁶⁹ for being essentially paternalistic conservatism in defense of feudalism, then distinguished themselves from the “bourgeois socialism” in defense of humanitarianism and/or humanism.⁷⁰ The “socialism” they defended, in the term “communism” as they preferred, was inherited from the revolutionary avant-garde of the French Revolution, F.-N. Babeuf et al.⁷¹ Their acceptance of this type of French socialism happened in ca. 1842-1843.⁷² However, as “socialism” could be “misinterpreted”, so are “communism” and “Marxism”, thereby using an alternative term cannot prevent the alternative term per se from being (mis)interpreted by others. The usages of communism by Marx and Engels were no doubt revolutionary; however, whether the term of socialism/communism is being used in a reactionary, bourgeois, or revolutionary way depends on its context.

Hegelian Dialectics. Unlike British economics and French socialism, German idealism was native to Marx. Hegelianism, especially its dialectics and historicism, was the original inspiration of Marxism. As Marx recalled, “although I studied jurisprudence, I pursued it as a subject subordinated to

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 20.

⁶⁶ Paul A. Samuelson, “Economists and the History of Ideas,” *The American Economic Review* 52, no. 1 (1962): p. 12; Anthony Brewer, “A Minor Post-Ricardian? Marx as an Economist,” *History of Political Economy* 27, no. 1 (1995): p. 111.

⁶⁷ Regarding the close relationship between Ricardian economics and Marxian economics, cf. Hunt, E. K. “The Relation of the Ricardian Socialists to Ricardo and Marx.” *Science & Society* 44, no. 2 (1980): 170-198; King, J.E. “Utopian or Scientific? A Reconsideration of the Ricardian Socialists.” *History of Political Economy* 15, no. 3 (1983): 345-373.

⁶⁸ *The Wealth of Nations* is known as the “Bible of capitalism”.

⁶⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, III., 1., A-C.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, III., 2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, III., 3.

⁷² David Gregory, “Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ Knowledge of French Socialism in 1842-43,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 10, no. 1 (1983): p. 143.

philosophy and history”⁷³ at Bonn, Berlin, and Jena. Marx’s early publications including his *Dissertation* (1841), *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843), *The Holy Family* (1844), *The German Ideology* (1845), *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), and *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), were all in a neo-Hegelian tone. Although Marx later broke with his Young Hegelian comrades Ludwig A. von Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Karl Schmidt, David F. Strauss, Arnold Ruge, August Cieszkowski, Edgar Bauer, et al., his starting point was a republican, secular interpretation of Hegelianism. The Old Hegelians including Johann P. Gabler, Hermann F. W. Hinrichs, Carl Daub, Leopold von Henning, Heinrich G. Hotho, et al., were not even in Marx’s eyesight of serious “critique”. The ideologically contradictory interpretations by left-wing Young Hegelians and right-wing Old Hegelians show the ambivalence within Hegelianism. Fascist theorist Giovanni Gentile was a neo-Hegelian, and so were liberal theorist Benedetto Croce and revolutionary theorist Lukács György. There is no doubt that Marx went further in the left-wing direction of his critique of Hegelianism, but the dialectical and historicist framework and terminologies that Marx inherited from Hegel cannot escape the same interpretational fate of ideological pluralism.

In summary, for each component in Lenin’s disciplinary trichotomy of Marxism, an ideological trichotomy could be identified. That is, “Marxism” may be revolutionary, liberal, or conservative. In fact, it has been so throughout the history of Marxisms after Marx, especially in the paradoxical pragmatics of “revisionism” in Marxist discourses.

The Pragmatics of Revisionism

The label of “revisionism” in Marxist discourses first appeared during the 1890s and later reached a peak on the eve of World War I. At that time, the “revisionist” Marxism was associated with Second International, Berne International, Vienna International, Austromarxism, Mensheviks, and figures such as Eduard Bernstein, Karl J. Kautsky, Victor Adler, Otto Bauer, Rudolf Hilferding, Julius Martov, Peter Struve, Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, et al., while the “orthodox” and/or revolutionary Marxists were Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, et al.

In this dichotomy, revisionist Marxism was a liberal interpretation of Marxism, associated with parliamentarianism, peaceful exercises of civil freedoms, demands for universal suffrage, implementation of constitutional democracy, etc. In contrast, orthodox Marxism was in line with Marx’s revolutionary spirit that does not exclude violence in achieving political goals, in defense of a radical form of democracy beyond parliamentarianism and constitutionalism, and so on and so forth.

The distinction above between *liberal* and *revolutionary* is clear-cut, but it would be misleading to believe that the dichotomy summarizes the whole picture. Literally, the Mensheviks were “minority”, while the Bolsheviks were “majority”, but within the Tsar’s realm in which apolitical law-abiding subjects were the real majority, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were both of a very tiny illegal minority of dissidents-in-exile. Therefore, a third position of the massive *conservative* base for the Tsar shall be taken into consideration.

After the October Revolution when the new, Soviet authority replaced the Tsar, two types of Marxist “revisionism” emerged in a newly established Soviet order. The first type of revisionist discourses appeared in Leon Trotsky and later in Mao, who were in one way or another anti-Soviet

⁷³ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 19.

regime, claiming that the revisionists-in-power betrayed the Revolution, and the revisionist regime could now only be overcome by a new communist revolution against it.

The second type of revisionist discourses was used by the Soviet regime against the dissidents who typically favoured the liberal interpretation of Marxism (e.g., Marxist humanists in Soviet-type societies), and to a much lesser extent, also revolutionary interpretation of Marxism (e.g., anti-regime, revolutionary Maoists Haraszti Miklós, Yang Xiaokai). Of course, the opponents of the Soviet regime may not be in the name of Marxism, but explicitly identified with anti-Marxist liberalism and anarchism as such; but in this case, the label of revisionism becomes inapplicable.

Both types of usage were nominally “anti-revisionism”, but they were against each other. The first type was used by revolutionary opposition against the Soviet regime, and the second type was used by the Soviet regime against the liberal opposition.

The Soviet regime’s accusation of Marxist humanism as revisionism consists of two dimensions: positive and normative. On the positive dimension, I believe it is legitimate to claim, as the Soviet-type regimes did, that Eastern Bloc and Chinese Marxist humanism was revisionist in a liberal sense, just like the 2nd International “revisionism” was of a liberal interpretation and/or revision of Marxism, considering the climax of Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism merged with “democratic socialism” under Gorbachev’s leadership, and/or the scene on the evening of 24th November 1989 in which Alexander Dubček and Václav Havel appeared together on a balcony overlooking Wenceslas Square, and the audience applauded enthusiastically.

For liberals, the positive description that Marxist humanism is essentially liberalism does not contain any pejorative connotations. Such an accusation was pejorative only if the accuser is against liberalism on the normative dimension, which has two possible positions: revolutionary or conservative. Here, the Soviet regime alludes to a dichotomy between the revolutionary Marxism it allegedly represents and the revisionist Marxism of Marxist humanism, suggesting that its relationship with Marxist humanism was the same as the one between Lenin and Bernstein.

However, the prerequisite for the Soviet regime, in the name of Leninism, to accuse Marxist humanists of being successors of the 1890s “old” revisionism, should be that the Soviet regime perse was in line with the revolutionary spirit of Lenin. The Soviet regime’s discourses of anti-revisionism were indeed against liberalism, but in this way, it was not necessarily from a revolutionary position. Here, the first type of revisionist discourses comes into the picture, which demonstrates why this dichotomy between the “revolutionary” Soviet regime and the “revisionist” liberal interpretation of Marxism was a false dichotomy: it omits the conservative position that the Soviet-type regime was actually in.

If the October Revolution had been betrayed already, as Trotsky’s 1937 book indicated, then the Soviet regime’s position against liberals would not be based on a revolutionary interpretation of Marxism anymore, but either (1) a step back to the liberalism of the February Revolution, or (2) further to the conservatism of the Tsar. Logically, if the “degenerated” Soviet regime were a “bourgeois republic” – which is not the regime’s self-claim and looks unlikely, the regime’s “anti-revisionism” campaign would have been “Soviet against itself”. The only option left for it is Tsar. As the editorial of *People’s Daily* on 4th March 1969, titled “Down with the New Tsar!”, concluded:

“The Soviet revisionist renegade clique...is out-and-out new Tsar. They cruelly plundered and brutally oppressed the Eastern European peoples, and even dispatched hundreds of thousands of troops to occupy Czechoslovakia, taking large tracts of Eastern Europe as

their sphere of influence, in an attempt to establish a Tsarist-style colonial empire. At the same time, they moved this set to Asia. Not only did they turn the Mongolian People's Republic into their colony, but they also now want to further invade China. Where the Tsar had occupied, they consider it theirs; where the Tsar had not occupied, they now stretch out their hands. Their appetite is greater than that of the Tsar.”⁷⁴

Therefore, the proper typology classifying the various Marxist “revisionist” discourse would be a trichotomy: revolutionary, liberal, and conservative. The following chapters will illustrate why the Soviet regime's rhetoric against Marxist humanism, while appearing to be revolutionary, was in fact a conservative interpretation of Marxism, and when against the conservative instead of revolutionary interpretation of Marxism, humanism/liberalism in the guise of “Marxism” would become not “conservative” but progressive. Only in this logic, could the post-1968 Husákest narrative of the situation after the January Conference in which A. Dubček replaced A. Novotný be properly understood:

“Since the majority of those who attacked socialism were party members, it seemed to the public that this was a split between Januaryists [mužů Ledna] and anti-Januaryists, between progressivists [progressivními] and conservatives, between those who wanted to improve the status quo and those defenders of an outdated system... attracting a considerable number of intellectuals, especially humanist [humanitní] intellectuals.”⁷⁵

According to the abovementioned trichotomy of Marxism, the pre-1917 “revisionism”, e.g., Austromarxism, was a liberal interpretation of Marxism, so was the post-1917 liberal critique of the Soviet regime, e.g., Marxist humanism; the Soviet “Marxism” or Soviet philosophy or “Soviet religion” was a conservative interpretation of Marxism; and the revolutionary “Marxism” was an ideal on paper, and all its attempts by far have failed due to the “self-degeneration” of established Soviet regimes from the Marxist ideal to pre-revolutionary conditions.

The problem is that the Marxist ideals and the pre-revolutionary conditions are somewhat misleadingly similar. It is not a new discovery that, as the horseshoe theory suggests, far-left and far-right are more similar to each other than they are to the liberal centre in terms of formality, i.e., “extremes meet”. On the one hand, the similarity in formality leads to confusion or what I refer to as metaphors; on the other hand, the similarity in formality does not replace their substantial differences, amongst which, the most fundamental one, I believe, could be summarized as such: the Marxist ideals are of maximum desirability but minimum feasibility, while the pre-revolutionary conditions are of minimum desirability but maximum feasibility.

The distinction between Marxist ideals and pre-revolutionary conditions is also embodied in the uneven distribution of the trichotomy of Marxism, especially the asymmetry between revolutionary and conservative interpretations. Synchronically, in pre-1917 Russian society, the Tsarists were the real “Bolsheviks [majority]”, the Februaryists and Mensheviks were minority, and the Bolsheviks were minority-in-minority. Diachronically, in pre-1917 Russian history, Tsarist autocracy dominated, “bourgeois” democracy was short-lived, and “proletarian” democracy was purely in theory. Likewise, in 1848, “Pope and Tsar, Metternich and...German police-spies”⁷⁶ were the

⁷⁴ Editorial, 4th March 1969.

⁷⁵ ÚV KSČ, *Poučení z krizového vývoje ve straně a společnosti po XIII. sjezdu KSČ: rezoluce o aktuálních otázkách jednoty strany schválená na plenárním zasedání ÚV KSČ v prosinci 1970* (Praha: Odd. propagandy a agitace ÚV KSČ, 1971), pp. 7-8.

⁷⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Preamble.

majority, “Guizot, French Radicals...Chartists and the Réformistes”⁷⁷ were the minority, and Marx and Engels were amongst the minority-in-minority.

The belief underneath the revolutionary type of anti-revisionism and/or Marxism is that it is practical to avoid the “degeneration” of the revolutionary regime and to turn the theory of a never-existed polity into reality. This belief was to a large extent empirically ungrounded: the “bourgeois”, Schumpeterian, proceduralist democracy had never existed in a large part of the world including Russia, China, or Albania, while the “proletarian” democracy had never existed anywhere around the world.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that if there were no October, the Russian Februaryists would have necessarily been able to sustain themselves in the reactionary wave following the Revolutions of 1917-1923. According to what happened afterwards from the Balkan to the Baltics (J. K. Piłsudski, Horthy M., A. Smetona, Zog I of Albania, Carol II of Romania, Alexander I of Yugoslavia, Boris III of Bulgaria, B. Mussolini, A. Hitler, et al.), the most probable scenario for Russia would be either restoration of the monarchy or a strongman dictatorship – in Trotsky’s term, “Bonapartisme”. Its counterargument could only be a vulgar Russian exceptionalism. If the failure of “bourgeois” democracy was probable, then any more advanced form of democracy in theory would be almost determined to fail.

From the “trichotomy of Marxism”, an also unevenly distributed “dichotomy of conservatism” could be inferred: liberalism is “conservative” vis-à-vis Marxism, while “conservatism” is conservative as itself; conservatism always contains elements against at least certain trends with liberalism. For example, Chinese neoconservative ideologue Wang Huning wrote in his diary that he discussed Karl Popper’s *The Poverty of Historicism* in class and expressed consent to Popper’s critique of “utopian engineering”.⁷⁸ Apparently, this consent does not lead to a conclusion that Wang is a liberal as Popper but show that Popper as a liberal is “conservative” vis-à-vis utopianism and that both, Wang as a conservative and Popper as a liberal, were both against leftism.

Metaphors: Autarky, Autocracy, Tradition

In this section, I would like to elaborate on the distinction between Marxist ideals and pre-revolutionary conditions on three metaphors concerning the Soviet-type society’s economy, politics, socioculture, and nation-state: autarky, autocracy, and tradition, with a focus on the economic metaphor of autarky. It is widely observed that the Soviet-type autarkic, anticommercial, statist economy looks strikingly similar to the economic shape before the rise of capitalism, compared with the capitalist system in which private ownership is universally recognized.

Amongst the reformist demands during China’s long 1980s, the only one that significantly materialized later was the capitalist transformation of China’s economic system. This economic liberalization program has been labelled as the Chinese variant of “neoliberalism”.⁷⁹ A common counterargument is that China retains a high level of state control and is often considered a mixed

⁷⁷ Ibid., Preamble; III., 3.

⁷⁸ Wang Huning, 1994: “12th April”.

⁷⁹ David Harvey, “Neoliberalism ‘with Chinese Characteristics’,” *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 120-152.

economy, therefore it is far away from the minimal state image of neoliberalism.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, according to this logic, the reformists, e.g., former premier Zhu Rongji architecting Chinese economic liberalization could still be labelled as “neoliberals”, who have been steadily pushing China towards a “smaller state” in spite of pressures from the old bureaucrats’ and/or conservative interest groups within the Party.

The term “neoliberalism” is the historical result of the intellectual evolution of liberalism: from classical liberalism through new/social liberalism to neoliberalism. In this genealogy and from a liberal point of view, neoliberalism is often regarded as regressive vis-à-vis new/social liberalism. However, in the genealogy of conservatism and from a conservative point of view, e.g., Roger Scruton’s anti-neoliberal/libertarian stance of traditionalist conservatism, neoliberalism or the libertarian turn against High Toryism associated with feudalist High Tory and Cornerstone Group (Faith, Flag and Family) as such, was actually progressive. In fact, back in the Victorian era, Thatcherism would be seen as Gladstonian liberalism.⁸¹

Likewise, the “metaphor of autarky”, which Dengist maxims “Poverty Is not Socialism” and “To Get Rich Is Glorious”⁸² as expressions of economic liberalism opposed, was in a dual sense. In its first sense was Maonomics – the *revolutionary* economic line of Mao, or utopian economic ideals that failed to change the premodern conditions, which were abandoned around 1978. The second sense was Chenomics – the *conservative* economic line of Chen, or autarkic economics in defense of the premodern conditions by opposing capitalist economic reforms, which was outmanoeuvred by Dengomics – the economic *liberalism* of Deng in 1992. Though both economics were against economic liberalism, and in this way mixed in a metaphor of autarky, they came from opposite directions.

In the “long 1980s” Chinese context, the pro-plan conservatives, e.g., Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, and Deng Liqun, were never supporters of Mao’s egalitarian experiment. Chen Yun was against the Great Leap Forward from the beginning, Li Xiannian was amongst the 1967 “reactionary Februaryists (eryue niliu)” against the Cultural Revolution, Deng Liqun drafted what the Gang of Four called “three poisonous weeds”, the principal policies during Deng’s short-lived resurgence in 1975, i.e., the target of the “Criticize Deng, Counterattack the Right-Deviationist Reversal-of-Verdicts Trend” campaign later. Most importantly, the pro-plan conservatives, alongside pro-market conservatives and pro-market liberals, were in the political consensus of the Party’s 1981 *Historical Resolution* that denied the logic of Mao’s egalitarian experiment. In fact, the pro-plan conservatives were amongst the most active in liquidating the Rebels who fought against the pre-1966, Soviet-type system, which they aimed to restore and preserve.

The divergence between Maonomics and Chenomics traces back to Chen’s 1956 call for “against premature advance”. He stated: “the fundamental question is how large the construction scale of our country should be...I prefer to go slower, i.e., leaning right, leaning right is better than leaning left.”⁸³ In late 1957, Mao wrote an editorial for the *People’s Daily* to the effect: “some even claim that it is better to make mistakes of conservatism than those of premature advance and whatnot. Consequently, things that should and could have been done more and more quickly were done less,

⁸⁰ Isabella M. Weber, “China and Neoliberalism: Moving beyond the China is/is not Neoliberal Dichotomy,” *The SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism* (London: SAGE, 2018): p. 229.

⁸¹ See social conservative, “real” right-winger Simon Heffer’s commentary, “Margaret Thatcher Was not Right-Wing,” *New Statesman*, 10th May 2013.

⁸² Schell, Orville. *To Get Rich Is Glorious: China in the Eighties*. Pantheon Books, 1984.

⁸³ Cited in Chen Lixu, 2013: pp. 3-4.

slower or even not done.”⁸⁴ Since then, Chen was marginalized, while Mao further launched the Great Leap Forward, which not only failed to meet its goals but also caused widespread famine. Yu Ying-shih pointed out that Mao was “unable to identify with any status quo and had been in the constant process of radicalization throughout his life”⁸⁵:

“During the Anti-Japanese War, he put forward the idea of ‘new democratism [xin min-zhuzhuyi]’, but when the time came to realize this idea, he had abandoned it. In 1955, he decided that ‘socialism’ would come. Since then, private ownership was abolished, the urban industrial and commercial class was eliminated, and rural land allocated to peasants in the land reform was taken back for agricultural collectivization. In another three years, he...started to set up ‘commune populaire’ and wanted to immediately enter ‘communism’...the ‘Great Leap Forward’ caused unprecedented disasters and he had to retreat temporarily. However, when the economy barely recovered, he launched the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’.”⁸⁶

Only after 1978, had Chen returned to the place he was before 1957. Therefore, Chen had no reason to overthrow the proper conclusion in the *1981 Historical Resolution* that the two decades of Maoist experiment went wrong. In a 1980 speech delivered at the Party Central Party School, Chen’s protégé Deng Liqun frankly spoke about the contradiction: “Chen masters *Das Kapital*, Mao had never read it...Mao discovered the laws of China’s democratic revolution, Chen discovered the laws of China’s socialist development.”⁸⁷ Deng Liqun even attempted to publicize the term “Chen Yun Thought”,⁸⁸ leveraging Chen’s status as high as Mao’s (cf. “Mao Zedong Thought”). Here is no ambiguity that it was Chenomics in which the 1980s Chinese anti-market conservatives believe.

For both Deng and Chen, ending Mao’s illusory “radicalization” was consensual. Therefore, during the “long 1980s”, the objective, i.e., ancien régime, which Deng and reformists desired to change, and Chen and conservatives desired to preserve, was not “Mao’s illusory radicalization”, but the status quo of economic premodernity in China. In order to change the undesirable status quo, reformism and conservatism diverged. Deng criticized the conservative tendency of Chenomics:

“I’m worried about the economic downturn. An annual growth rate of 4% or 5% is fine for a year or two. If it goes like this for a long time, especially when compared with East Asian and Southeast Asian countries and regions, this is a downturn...I mean, the stable political environment that we’ve reached is insufficient...The most fundamental factor is the speed of economic growth...”⁸⁹

Therefore, in the sense of striving for greater progress, Deng and Mao were on the same page. However, Mao’s unrealistic goal ended up with its opposite, and thus, in this way, resembling the ancien régime. In contrast, the Deng’s approach of economic liberalism irreversibly changed the status quo. Consequently, the actual struggle between Deng and Chen in the “long 1980s” has been misperceived as a non-existent one between Deng and Mao.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁵ Yu Ying-shih, 1991 [1988].

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Wu Jiang, 2006 [2005].

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Deng Xiaoping, 1993 [3rd March 1990].

This binary misperception could be easily deconstructed through the “trichotomy of Marxism”. In line with the liberal interpretation of Marxian economics, Dengists referred to what Marx and Engels acknowledged: “the bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part...during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.”⁹⁰ This interpretation could be accused of being “revisionist” for its alignment with capitalism, but it must be asked where the accusation comes from: conservative or revolutionary interpretation of “Marxism”.

Let me take a concrete example to illustrate the rhetorical ambiguity here. The Shanghai Stock Exchange was established in 1891, closed in 1949, and reopened in 1990. On the one hand, its 1949 closure due to a revolutionary interpretation of Marxian economics could by no means identical with the pre-1891 conservative refusal of introducing it into China; on the other hand, both revolutionary closure and conservative refusal objectively lead to the same condition of its non-existence. Its 1990 reopening by a liberal interpretation of Marxian economics was changing the objective status quo of its non-existence, but which one of the two possible counterforces was it opposing, Maonomics or Chenomics?

During his 1992 Southern Tour, Deng Xiaoping stated: “China has been poor for thousands of years, it’s time to get developed, we can’t wait anymore.”⁹¹ Apparently, what he was criticizing was Chen’s pro-plan conservative prospect preserving China’s thousands-year-old, underdeveloped economic structure and condition. This form of economic premodernity has nothing “radical”; it appears to be an ultraconservative advocacy that is too conservative to go any further, as there is nothing more archaic to preserve.

Therefore, the primary opposition to the Chinese marketists during the “long 1980s” and beyond, was not an extreme form of “radical left”, but what exactly the classical liberals were fighting against, i.e., the shackles of pre-capitalist economic structures from the “ultraconservative right”.⁹² As Li Zehou pointed out in 1986: “at present, the main object we struggle against should be feudalism. Feudalist ideas often appear under the guise of anti-capitalism...”⁹³ In other words, the hindrance of reforms was premodern anti-capitalism, not postmodern anti-capitalism.

Deng’s words were alluding to not any type of “utopian engineering” but the Chinese autarky before the 1840s featuring the true origins of Sinocentric and antibusiness sentiments in China: Sea Ban (Haijin) policy that limits foreign trade and “Stressing Agriculture and Restraining Commerce (zhongnong yishang)” policy.

⁹⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, I.

⁹¹ Cited in Xuan Yan, 28th September 2021.

⁹² Adam Smith’s intellectual target in *The Wealth of Nations* was Sir James Steuart Denham, a Scottish proponent of mercantilism. Contrasting the theories and practices of classical liberals and mercantilists (cf. Jean-Baptiste Say [École libérale française] vs. Jean-Baptiste Colbert [Colbertisme]), the mercantilists were for nationalism, state interventionism, protectionism, autarky, etc. However, the mercantilists were pre-Smithian, representing the Ancien Régime, not post-Smithian, being Keynesian or Marxian. The efforts of retaining statism in Chinese economy have been viewed as neomercantilism (Yu, Fu-Lai Tony. “Neo-mercantilist Policy and China’s Rise as a Global Power.” *Contemporary Issues in International Political Economy*, pp. 175-196. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) or the cronyism part of its “crony capitalism” (Pei, Minxin. “China’s Crony Capitalism.” *China’s Crony Capitalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁹³ Li Zehou, 2008 [1986]: p. 102.

In the “Jacobin”⁹⁴ historiography of modern Chinese history, the Chinese Revolution started with attacking the ancien régime, from stagnated economy and outdated technology to autocratic politics and traditional culture. In this historical progressivist narrative, the royalist modernizers were “better” than the royalist antimodernists, the constitutional monarchists were “better” than the modernizers, the republican revolutionaries were “better” than the monarchists, the Marxists (of revolutionary interpretation) were “better” than the republicans...in a word, more left is better. Therefore, the contention between Deng and Chen corresponds to that between royalist modernizers and royalist antimodernists.

The historical irony is, thus, the 1980s Chinese had to “start all over again” from what according to the “Jacobin” historiography had long been in the rubbish dump of history. As Li Zehou sighed: “isn’t this a melancholy and clownish historical prank? Going through a circle of 70 years, we now raise the same topics” of the discovery, awakening, and philosophy of humans, individualism, etc.⁹⁵

In conclusion, the “economic conservatism” (vis-à-vis Deng’s economic liberalism), rhetorically disguised as postmodern critique (Marxian and Maoist) of modern economics (Smithian), intellectually drawing from the Soviet economic conservative theory that mixed premodern remnants with post-modern fantasy, is essentially an undeclared reprint of agrarianism and anti-commercialism in the feudalist Chinese economic thoughts.⁹⁶

From a comparative perspective, the Chinese struggle between “conservatives” and “ultraconservatives” was no isolated case. It happens often that the major political divergence is in between not “left and right” but “right and more so”. Under the 1955 System and beyond, Japanese politics was de facto a coalition between the economical “Conservative Mainstream (Hoshu honryū)” and nationalist “Conservative Sidestream (Hoshu bōryū)” within the conservative Liberal Democratic Party vis-à-vis the “Reformist (Kakushin)” parties. The anti-reformist Husák regime was known as amongst the least free within the Easter Bloc, especially compared with Tito and Kádár regimes; however, Husák as the core of the conservative faction was still more liberal than the ultraconservative faction represented by Vasil’ Biľak,⁹⁷ willing to take more measures of economic reforms. The same dynamic existed also in the Soviet Union.⁹⁸

Of course, the meanings of “reformism”, “conservatism”, and “ultraconservatism” differ from case to case. The Chinese reformists during the “long 1980s” demanded no Keynesian distribution and had nothing like Article 9 of Japan’s 1947 *Constitution* to defend, while both Japanese conservative streams had no dispute over liberal democracy. The 1965, 1973, and 1979 Soviet economic reforms were considered “reformist”, but even the Yugoslav reformists failed to adopt the key components of Smithian economics, which Deng as a Chinese “conservative” implemented in the name of “socialist market economy” under China’s 1992 System of authoritarian capitalism.

⁹⁴ See the Marxist”, “classic”, or “history from below” historiography of the French Revolution by Albert Mathiez, Georges Lefebvre, Albert Soboul, et al.

⁹⁵ Li Zehou, 2008 [1986]: p. 96.

⁹⁶ He Aiguo and Xia Xue, 2006: p. 158.

⁹⁷ Vlad Sobell, “Czechoslovakia: The Legacy of Normalization,” *East European Politics and Societies* 2, no. 1 (1987): pp. 41-42. See also Bracke, Maud. “The 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis: Reconsidering Its History and Politics.” *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 3 (2003): p. 378; Taborsky, Edward. “Czechoslovakia After Helsinki.” *Current History* 74, no. 436 (1978): pp. 164-167.

⁹⁸ Cohen, Stephen F. “The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union.” *Slavic Review* 38, no. 2 (1979): 187-202.

Following the economic aspect of Soviet-type societies as a metaphor of autarky, now we could briefly go through the other aspects as metaphors of Soviet-type societies: autocracy in politics and tradition in socioculture. Like the abovementioned analogy between Soviet-type economy and premodern autarky, the comparability between Soviet-type societies and premodern states in politics and socioculture is also observable.

In their rhetoric against Marxist humanism for democracy, the orthodox Marxist theoreticians often referred to the demand as “bourgeois” (democracy), and in this way, alluding to a false dichotomy between the more-advanced “socialist” democracy and the bygone bourgeois democracy and/or liberalism. However, this dichotomy does not include the conservative position of autocracy, to which the “dictatorship of the proletariat” in its formality is strikingly similar.

I would like to outline two cases in the metaphor of autocracy, more to be followed in the following chapters. According to the abovementioned Jacobin historiography of modern China, the 1911 Revolution marked the end of monarchy and the beginning of republic, and the 1949 Revolution resumed the republican system, which was interrupted by the KMT’s one-party dictatorship. However, since 1957 at the latest when communists suppressed their democratic allies in the 1949 Revolution, people started questioning the alleged “democratic” nature of the communist regime. In the failed anti-Mao coup d’état named “Project 571” in 1971, which was dramatically launched by Mao’s appointed successor, Mao was denounced as “the biggest feudal tyrant in Chinese history” and “the contemporary Qin Shi Huang”, i.e., the first emperor of Imperial China.

The reception of Mao as an emperor, a symbol of political premodernity, or autocracy became mainstream in post-Mao China. Within this context, in the binary opposition between liberalism including the humanist interpretation of Marxism and conservatism including the orthodox interpretation of Marxism during China’s long 1980s, the opponent of liberal democrats was not “socialist democracy” but simply autocracy. Those who protested against the right-wing KMT dictatorship were fully aware of the fact that the communist Party was in the same position as the KMT was before 1949. Jiang Zemin, then the Mayor of Shanghai, had a dialogue with student protesters at his alma mater Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 1986:

“Before the liberation [1949], I was also a student protester. At that time, the Mayor of Shanghai, K. C. Wu, was in my current position, and I was in your current position. I understand your feelings... When I entered the campus, I saw student posters, which read ‘of the people, for the people, and by the people’...”

“Do you know who said this?”

“These are the words of Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, in his Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863. Who among you here can recite the full text of Lincoln’s speech?”

After silence from students, Jiang started reciting the speech in English.⁹⁹

Likewise, when it comes to socioculture, what I refer to as a “metaphor of tradition”, i.e., the analogy between the sociocultural conditions in Soviet-type and premodern societies, appears. The 18-year-old British youngster Alessandro Ford, who spent a year studying at Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang, recalled:

⁹⁹ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 294.

“From what I was told and from what I saw, North Koreans are more puritan. It’s a ‘no sex before marriage’ culture and sneaking around is not really done...The students I hung out with, aged between 20 and 25, were virgins...[I] never saw any kissing take place, even amongst those who had girlfriends and boyfriends...They’d tell me they showed affection in other ways”.¹⁰⁰

Ford eventually came to the reflection that “people say North Korea is very left-wing and obviously it is – it is a communist/socialist state, but in terms of morality, I would say they are very much right-wing.”¹⁰¹

Ford’s intuition of the conservative nature of North Korea was accurate, but here he made a logical mistake of tautology, i.e., assuming that the label of communism/socialism is necessarily left-wing. If we understand communism/socialism as related to Alexandra Kollontai’s “glass of water theory” of sex, then it becomes clear that North Korea is not communist/socialist; if we understand communism/socialism as related to Aron Zalkind’s *The Twelve Sexual Commandments of the Revolutionary Proletariat*¹⁰² that replaced Kollontai’s theory, then North Korea is indeed communist/socialist. Again, this interpretative ambiguity should be understood in the framework of trichotomy: Kollontai represented the revolutionary interpretation of communism/socialism, and Zalkind represented the conservative interpretation of communism/socialism.

In the case of China’s long 1980s, humanism was denounced as “bourgeois” and incompatible with the “socialist” line of literature and arts, but the “socialist” culture was received as traditionalist culture by humanists. Yu Ying-shih observed in 1988 that the new generation of [Chinese] critics “tended to regard the centralized system as a modern copy of Chinese [traditional] culture. In this mindset, anti-status quo and anti-Chinese [traditional] culture have become the same.”¹⁰³ That is to say, what the orthodox line at that time was in defense of was not sociocultural radicalism as part of the revolutionary interpretation of Marxism, but sociocultural conservatism of the ancien régime, which was ironically what the Chinese communist movement fought against but failed to change. For example, literary theorist Li Shulei reviewed his orientation of literary critique during the 1980s:

“One was to renew the antitraditional position of the May Fourth New Cultural Movement through critique, which seemed to be simply repeating the May Fourth, but ‘tradition’ in that context was an empty basket containing things non-traditional; ‘antitradition’ actually contained a metaphor for the renewal of real life.”¹⁰⁴

For example, Marxism Maoism, socialism, communism, etc. were literarily “non-traditional”, but they were also added to the basket of “tradition”, which 1980s Chinese reformists and liberals opposed. This can be explained through the trichotomy, that is, Marxism Maoism, socialism, communism, etc. were in their conservative interpretations in defense of the “real life”, which the reformists and liberals intended to “critique” and “renew”. In this way, “antitraditional discourses

¹⁰⁰ Maeve Shearlaw, “No Sex, Drugs or Rock’n’roll – A North Korean Gap Year,” *The Guardian*, 30th July 2015.

¹⁰¹ BBC, “My University Semester in North Korea,” *BBC News*, 31st July 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvC0hzvx_L0.

¹⁰² Main principles include no premature sexual life or sexual perversion, sexual abstinence before marriage, infrequency of sexual intercourse, consistency of sexual object, reproductive purpose of sexual intercourse, amongst others.

¹⁰³ Yu Ying-shih, 1991 [1988].

¹⁰⁴ Wen Lin and Hai Tao, 1998: p. 52.

incorporated into the critique of reality...market economy and democracy became our natural choices.”¹⁰⁵

The Dilemma of Subjectivity

The real locus classicus in Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* reads: “the first who, having enclosed a piece of land, took it into his head to say, ‘this is mine’, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.”¹⁰⁶ The origin of human inequality is thus a natural distinction between the people “simple” and those sophisticated. Rousseau’s heart was with those simple, noble savages, unattached with immoral sophistication. In his *First Discourse*, Rousseau illustrated how knowledge had corrupted human morality. According to Francis Bacon, “scientia potentia est.” But for Rousseau, modern natural science was another step further away from the original goodness of humankind; knowledge makes people, who were originally simple, hypocritical, evil, arrogant, and greedy.

Rousseau’s critique of human sophistication brings out a normative position that requires a Prometheus complex. In the Forward of Marx’s *Dissertation*, he quoted Aeschylus’ tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, and ended with his normative account and self-analogy that “Prometheus is the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar.”¹⁰⁷

Moreover, given the fact that most people are simple-minded, and thus deceived by the sophisticated, ruling class and not in opposition to the status quo, a revolution against the unequal structure must involve Prometheus’ violation of the wills of the people to be liberated. In this way, Rousseau defended the concept of “forced to be free”, arguing that the collective “general will” of the people should be above individual subjectivity.

Here, when it comes to phrases such as “forced to be free” and “has/have/had been liberated/freed”, a fundamental syntactic paradox emerges: where and what is the subject in this pattern of passive sentence? The grammatical subject is missing in these words and philosophical subjectivity is missing in these ideas. Instead, these revolutionary blueprints reply to an undeclared external force, which is superior to the subjects to be free/liberated. In this way, a new hierarchy is constructed.

According to the historical experiences of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions inspired by the Rousseau-Marx ideal, it turned out that the violation of individual wills at a revolutionary moment cannot guarantee the revolutionary conditions afterwards and only leads to the revolution’s futility to substantially transform the society towards better.

This disappointing reality, I believe, had its theoretical origin in the intellectual tradition from Rousseau’s counter-Enlightenment through Marx to postmodernism, which considers subjectivity to be surmountable. In the syllogism of the concept of subjectivity in (1) medieval and/or premodern philosophy, (2) modern philosophy, and (3) postmodern philosophy, subjectivity is in a dilemma faced with both conservative, premodern and revolutionary, postmodern tendencies of counteractions.

¹⁰⁵ Li Shulei, 1998: p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes – Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, éd. Flammarion, coll. « Garnier Flammarion / Philosophie », 1995, partie II, p. 222.

¹⁰⁷ Karl Marx, “The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature,” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers).

In old-style Chinese propaganda, Lei Feng (1940-1962) was an exemplar of communist/socialist morality, who never cared about his personal interests, honour, dignity or gains, and helped others wholeheartedly at the expense of himself. In a word, he was a man who had abandoned bourgeois subjectivity. The Rousseau-Marx ideal believes Lei Feng is possible in reality. It is possible, but not in the way that Rousseau-Marx envisioned. How could the Kim dynasty not welcome and promote Lei Feng as an exemplary slave, who never cares about his personal interests, honour, dignity or gains, and helps the Kim dynasty wholeheartedly at the expense of himself, who never demands his human rights as a legal expression of bourgeois subjectivity? This is exactly the dilemma of human subjectivity of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies as well as the Achilles' heel in the Marxist theory of human nature as an attempt to sublimate bourgeois humanism for a better humanity.

III. Ideology and Factionalism during China's Long 1980s¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Part of this chapter was based on the author's coursework, "The Prelude for the Debate on Humanism and Alienation, 1979-1983," submitted to Jan Kiely in the 2023-2024 autumn semester at IHEID.

Introduction

This chapter explores Chinese Marxist humanism in relation to the ideological factionalism within the Communist Party of China during the “reform era” or what I refer to as the “long 1980s” from 1978 to 1992. There has been plenty of literature on factionalism within the Party during the 1980s but there is not much existing literature on the 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism referring to its connections with the ideological factionalism within the Party. Hence, this chapter focuses on and highlights the ideological aspect – concerning different interpretations of Marxism – of the factionalism between reformists and conservatives within the Party.

The first part introduces the historiographical concept of China's “long 1980s” and its formation. The following parts chronologically deal with four distinct periods during China's long 1980s. The first period ranges from the 3rd plenary session of the 11th Party Congress in 1978 to the Debate on Humanism and Alienation and subsequent Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983. The second period ranges from 1983 to the 1986 Student Protests and subsequent Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign in 1987. The third period ranges from 1987 to the 1989 Tiananmen Protests and subsequent Crackdown. The fourth period ranges from 1989 to Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in 1992. The last part elaborates on the beginning and end, main axes and tributaries, and political and intellectual significance of Marxist humanism within the context of China's long 1980s.

Generally speaking, the humanist interpretation of Marxism by liberal intellectuals and the reformist platform by the reformist Party officials formed an alliance vis-à-vis the orthodox interpretation of Marxism and the conservative platform by the conservative Party theoreticians and officials. Nevertheless, the situation was much more intricate than such a simplistic dichotomy. Amongst the reformists, some went far beyond the official ideology, while others remained loyal to the Party's privileged ruling status. Amongst the conservatives, some accepted the economic component of the reformist platform – marketization, while others remained against it even after 1992 when it was adopted as an official course of the Party. Having said that, the division between reformism and conservatism retains its validity in explaining the ideological landscape during China's long 1980s and beyond.

The Formation of China's Long 1980s

Though decades have passed, the enthusiasm and fascination with China's long 1980s has not diminished at all. In “The 1980s and Me”, not without nostalgia, philosopher Li Zehou recalled:

“Everything was reminiscent of the May Fourth era. Enlightenment of human, awakening of human, humanism, revival of human nature...revolving around the theme of individual liberation with perceptual flesh and blood from the trampling and ravages of the rational alienation of God.”¹⁰⁹

The 1980s is destined to be historic, the question is in what way. In the Hegelian-style intellectual historicism as Li outlined, the 1980s is depicted as a historic moment when China as a people and a nation once again “enlightened” and “awakened” to embrace the value and dignity of worldly humans.

¹⁰⁹ Li Zehou, 9th June 2008.

While for political historiography, the 1980s is much less Geist-driven but more of Realpolitik. Borrowing Eric Hobsbawm's phrase "long 19th century" (1789-1914) of European history,¹¹⁰ I refer to the period from 1978 to 1992 as China's "long 1980s". In this timeframe, both the beginning and the end of the long 1980s were marked by concrete political events, instead of mystic intellectual awakenings or disillusionings.

1978 was the year when Hua Guofeng, the last successor appointed by Mao, was forced to step down and replaced by Deng Xiaoping. The removal of Hua signified the reconstruction of the existed Party hierarchy that could be traced back to the 1940s.

Table 1: Party Leadership Successions, 1945-1992

Period	System	Figure(s)
1945-1956	Five Secretaries	Mao – Liu – Zhou – Zhu – Ren (Chen)
1956-1966	Septemvirate	Mao – Liu – Zhou – Zhu – Chen – Lin – Deng
1966-1976	Old Mao	Mao (successor: Lin → Wang → Hua)
1976-1978	Fanshi Faction	Hua
1978-1992	Duumvirate	Deng – Chen

Tabulation: author.

The 7th Party Congress in 1945 officially declared Mao's supreme status – which was de facto established during the political struggles within the Party as early as the late 1930s and early 1940s, as well as the Five-Secretaries system consisting of (1) Mao Zedong (Party chairman), (2) Liu Shaoqi, (3) Zhou Enlai, (4) Zhu De, and (5) Ren Bishi as secretaries of Party Secretariat as the top decision-making body. Ren Bishi died in 1950 and was succeeded by the first-ranked alternate secretary Chen Yun.

The 1st and 5th plenary sessions of the 8th Party Congress in 1956 and 1958 added Deng Xiaoping and Lin Biao to the top leadership and established a Septemvirate system – (1) Mao, (2) Liu, (3) Zhou, (4) Zhu, (5) Chen, (6) Lin, and (7) Deng, which lasted until the 1966 outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. In this period, Mao became increasingly sceptical towards Liu and Deng for their divergent different political views and increasingly trusted Lin, who appeared to be always on his side.

The official historiography in the post-Mao era depicts 1966 as the year when Mao wrongly abandoned the organizational principle of "collective leadership". Let the question of whether the ideal principle has ever been truly practiced in the communist system aside, the last decade of Mao's life from 1966 to 1976 was indeed full of dazzling political struggles, the most significant events of which are as follows.

The second-ranked Liu, widely regarded as Mao's first-in-line successor, was purged to death in 1969. Replaced Liu was the sixth-ranked Lin, who was announced as Mao's sole successor and made the second most powerful during the 9th Party Congress in 1969. However, underneath Lin's seeming loyalty towards Mao was a coup d'état attempt in 1971 that failed, and Lin subsequently died from a plane crash on his defection to the Soviet Union. Succeeded Lin was the poorly-educated Shanghaiese worker Wang Hongwen, who was 42 years younger than Mao. For reasons still in debate, Mao eventually gave up on Wang and chose Hua as his successor a few months

¹¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (Vintage Books, 1962); *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975); *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

before his death. The year of 1976 witnessed the deaths of Zhou in January, Zhu in July, and Mao in September, and made Chen and Deng the only living members of the Septemvirate thereafter.

Within this context, two parallel legitimacies emerged after 1976: one seeking to restore the pre-1966 Party hierarchy of Septemvirate, i.e., Chen and Deng as supreme leaders, and another aiming to inherit Mao's last wishes, i.e., Hua as the supreme leader. Nevertheless, at the moment right after Mao's September 1976 death, they had to collaborate against their common enemies, before starting to fight against each other. The October 1976 coup d'état arrested Mao's widow Jiang Qing, nephew Mao Yuanxin, once-upon-a-time appointed successor Wang Hongwen, closest allies Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, et al., who were presumably plotting to replace Hua. The move collectively done by Hua's faction and veterans in the pre-1966 Party hierarchy, on the one hand, consolidated Hua's power and began a short-lived Hua era in China from 1976 to 1978, but on the other hand, also laid the groundwork for Hua's downfall.

Compared with veterans in the pre-1966 Party hierarchy who were still alive, Hua was much younger and less experienced, and his legitimacy exclusively depended on Mao's last wish. An existential challenge to him was such a question: should the Party's successor follow Mao's personal will, which Mao expected, or based on seniority ranking within the Party, which Mao rejected?

In response, the Hua faction coined the "Two Whatever [Fanshi]" doctrine: "we will resolutely uphold *whatever* policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow *whatever* instructions Chairman Mao gave". Mao's political testament that made Hua his successor was surely amongst the "instructions Chairman Mao gave". In contrast, the anti-Hua forces proposed the "Seek Truth from Facts [Qiushi]" doctrine, arguing that truth comes from facts instead of any already made policy decisions and/or instructions. Subtly, both factions built their legitimacies from a gesture of adhering to Mao's legacies, the most important elements of which had been, ironically, eliminated by themselves in the October 1976 coup d'état. The Fanshi faction's adherence was explicit – in an Aristotelian sense – for its blind loyalty towards Mao's everything, while the Qiushi faction argued that the "true" – in a Platonic sense – adherence to Mao should be adherence to not every detail of Mao, but the "living soul" of it, namely, "Seek Truth from Facts", a Chinese idiom that first appeared in the *Book of Han* (111 CE) and was famously used by Mao in the late 1930s to justify his approach different from Moscow's.

The rhetorical divergence between Fanshi faction and Qiushi faction was an epistemological debate, in the heyday of which was the May 1978 philosophical essay, authored by philosophy professor Hu Fuming (1935-2023) at Nanjing University, titled "Practice Is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth" and published in *Guangming Daily*, and later *People's Daily* and *People's Liberation Army Daily*. The essay appeared to be another propagandist piece against the Gang of Four, arguing that they misinterpreted Maoism on the issue of truth criterion. However, the actual target was not what it appeared to be, i.e., Gang of Four, who were arrested as early as October 1976, but the Fanshi faction then in power. Although the essay did not criticize or even name any Fanshi faction member, the undeclared, real motivation between the lines was clear. As journalist Yang Jisheng noted: "a large number of politicians without knowledge or interest in philosophy suddenly came out to comment on philosophical questions. They understood that this was a political struggle"¹¹¹ and this new political struggle was about "whether Hua should continue to hold the supreme power or Deng should replace Hua instead."¹¹²

¹¹¹ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 91.

¹¹² Ibid.

During the month-long Working Conference from November to December 1978, the Fanshi faction lost its control over the preset working agendas. Senior leaders such as Chen Yun, Deng Xiaoping, Ye Jianying, Wang Zhen, Wan Li, et al. spoke out against Hua, who eventually admitted to conference participants that his “Two Whatevers” doctrine “should not have been proposed”.¹¹³ The subsequent 3rd plenary session of the 11th Party Congress marked Qiushi faction's formal victory. The Fanshi faction members such as Hua Guofeng, Wang Dongxing, Wu De, Ji Dengkui, and Chen Xilian became marginalized since then.

It was the Qiushi faction's consensus to cancel Mao's post-1966 program including his appointment of Hua as his and the party-state's successor and to restore the pre-1966 Party hierarchy, which by 1978 had effectively turned from a Septemvirate system to a Duumvirate system with Deng and Chen as the only alive members of the Septemvirate. However, there was no consensus on whether China should restore the Soviet-type command economy that Mao interrupted, which Chen favoured, or reform towards a market economy different from the Soviet-type one, which Deng preferred. Moreover, figures such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang within the Qiushi faction started pushing for not only market economy, but also democratic politics.

Hence, the Qiushi faction or the ad hoc anti-Hua alliance, which successfully pushed Hua out of the power centre at the end of 1978, started facing constant internal political struggles between what would be later known as “reformists” and “conservatives” during China's long 1980s.

These two factions seem to be black and white, but the protagonist of China's long 1980s, Deng, was somewhere in between. When meeting with U.S. State Secretary George Shultz in 1987, Deng explained his position on the factionalism between reformism and conservatism within the Party:

“Some people disapprove of certain aspects and methods of reform, but not entirely. There is no faction in China that is completely opposed to reform. Some people abroad used to regard me as a reformist and some others as conservatives. Yes, I am a reformist; but if we regard the adherence to the Four Cardinal Principles as conservative, then I am also a conservative.”¹¹⁴

The foremost implication of the Four Cardinal Principles in practice was maintaining the Party's rule. Therefore, in the complete picture were not only “two factions”, but what I term as “two factions, three lines”. Taking Dengism as the benchmark line that was in defense of economic liberalization but not political democratization: reformists Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang, et al. were in defense of both, while conservatives Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, et al. were in defense of neither.

The intellectual efforts to humanize Marxism as the party-state official guideline, i.e., Marxist humanism, came into the picture. Behind those obscure philosophical sophistications concerning Marxist humanism, alienation, praxis, etc., were competing political and economic platforms and agendas. Reformists advocated for humanism to proceed with their gradualist approach to marketization and democratization. Dengists were delicate with humanism as they were for the humanization of the economy on the one hand, but not of politics on the other. Conservatives comprehensively opposed humanism, which they regarded as, in Chinese idiom, “severe floods and fierce beasts”, running out of their autarkic, autocratic, and theocratic monopolies over China's economy, politics, and ideology. These overt or covert struggles began long before the 1983 Debate on Humanism and Alienation and the subsequent Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 98.

¹¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping, 2001: p. 209.

From 1978 to 1983

The eruption of the Debate on Humanism and Alienation in 1983 – an iconic episode in the 1980s Chinese intellectual history, seems to be abrupt. In fact, the post-Mao revival of humanism in China started as early as around 1978, which accumulated into an unneglectable trend of what would be later condemned as “spiritual pollution” by the conservatives within the Party.

In the following paragraphs, I would like to illustrate three types of parallel efforts that emerged in the pre-1983 revival of humanism in China: (1) philosophy of subjectivity, (2) aesthetic humanism, and (3) Marxist humanism. The first type of effort was centred on philosopher Li Zehou and his “philosophy of subjectivity” inspired by Kant, which set the liberal tone of the 1980s “New Enlightenment”. The second type of effort was put forward by writers such as Dai Houying, literary theorists such as Qian Gurong, and aestheticians such as Zhu Guangqian and Gao Ertai, many of them were criticized and even persecuted for their humanist views before 1979 and would now seize the Chinese Thaw to reiterate their advocacies. The third type of effort, also known as the direct fuse of the Debate on Humanism and Alienation in 1983, was the reinterpretation of “Marxism”, the party-state’s monist ideology, as something compatible with or even identical to humanism, by the professional philosophers and theoreticians such as Wang Ruoshui, Ru Xin, Xue De-zhen, and Xing Benshi.

The 1979 book of Li Zehou (1930-2021), titled *Critique of Critical Philosophy: A Commentary on Kant*,¹¹⁵ first appeared to be unobtrusive, while its influence would be greatly appreciated later. Largely a comprehensive introduction to Kant’s philosophy – epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, Li proposed his “philosophy of subjectivity” (also known as “practical philosophy of subjectivity” or “anthropological ontology”) in a subtle way. In his subsequent Four Theses on Subjectivity – “Kant’s Philosophy and the Thesis on the Establishment of Subjectivity” (1980),¹¹⁶ “Supplementary Notes on Subjectivity” (1985),¹¹⁷ “The Third Thesis on Subjectivity” (1987),¹¹⁸ and “The Fourth Thesis on Subjectivity” (1989),¹¹⁹ Li revealed his true intention underneath the book, at the core of which was the central role of the subjective agency of humankind in scientific exploration, moral reason, and artistic creation.

In “Kant’s Philosophy and the Thesis on the Establishment of Subjectivity”, Li distinguished two types of history of philosophy. The first type is historiographical, explanatory, and textual, and the second type is interpretative, elaborative, and argumentative. Essentially, the former is history, and the latter is philosophy. Philosopher Li followed the latter. His motivation to examine Kant’s philosophy was to “see what it could offer to contemporary Marxist philosophy.”¹²⁰ In other words, behind Li’s *Critique of Critical Philosophy* was Li’s latent ambition to Kantianize China’s state ideology “Marxism” by establishing a new philosophy centred on subjectivity.

¹¹⁵ Li Zehou, 1984.

¹¹⁶ Li Zehou, 1981.

¹¹⁷ Li Zehou, 1985.

¹¹⁸ Li Zehou, 2020a.

¹¹⁹ Li Zehou, 2020b.

¹²⁰ Li Zehou, 1985.

The Kantianization of Marxism was not Li's invention. The Second International witnessed a number of theoreticians, e.g., Eduard Bernstein,¹²¹ calling for "back to Kant", which led to its split into the social democratic movement and the communist movement later on. The Marxism that Second International "revisionists" aimed to revise was only an ideal on paper, while the Marxism that Li aimed to revise was the official ideology of a regime. Nevertheless, they shared the core values in Kant's philosophy, including pluralism of truth and freedom of thought that originated from Kantian thing-in-itself over ideological monism and determinism, due procedure and peaceful reform that originated from Kantian deontology over just end and violent revolution, rule of law and separation of powers that originated from Kantian Rechtsstaat over mobocracy and fusion of powers, so on and so forth.

In "Kant's Philosophy and the Thesis on the Establishment of Subjectivity", Li's account of "human subjectivity" was a synonym for humanity. He wrote: "it is exactly [Kant's] philosophical system that highlighted humanity (i.e., human subjectivity)."¹²² Whether the equation between human subjectivity and humanity is valid shall be a separate issue, Li hence engaged in the Chinese discussion of humanity and humanism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He acknowledged that "there has been a heated discussion in China recently about humanism and the theory of humanity, so let's start with this issue."¹²³

In this way, subjectivity became the keyword of Li's philosophical intervention in these discussions. Li's engagement in the post-Mao revival of humanism through the intermediary of subjectivity was inexplicit. The more obvious trend of humanism occurred in art and literature as well as literary theory and aesthetics.

Comparable to the Thaw Literature in the post-Stalin Soviet Union, which was named after Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Thaw* (1954), the Scar Literature in post-Mao China was named after Lu Xinhua (1954-, then a freshman of literature at Fudan)'s short story *Scar* (1978). The "scar" refers to the psychological trauma caused by previous political movements, especially the Cultural Revolution. The story of *Scar* was simple and even corny: a young girl believed the false accusation by the Gang of Four that her mother was a traitor and severed ties with her; nine years later, her mother was rehabilitated but seriously ill; when they reunited again, the mental scars had been caused and could never be erased.¹²⁴ Given the sensitive timing of its publication – August 1978, *Scar* could be considered part of the anti-Hua Guofeng trend, alongside the Debate on the "Criterion of Truth" at that time. To be precise, the story *Scar* was alluding to the Hua government's reluctance to rehabilitate certain people who were identified as problematic by the Gang of Four, e.g., Deng. Only a few months later, Hua was forced to step aside for Deng's return to the top during the 3rd plenary session of the 11th Party Congress.

From 1979 onwards, the Scar Literature movement produced more productions and their film adaptations. Zheng Yi (1947-)’s short story *Feng* (lit. Maple, 1979)¹²⁵ depicted a young couple who indirectly killed each other during the Cultural Revolution and was made into a film in 1980. Bai Hua (1930-2019)’s screenplay *Bitter Love* (1979)¹²⁶ was adapted into a film titled *The Sun and Men*

¹²¹ Manfred B. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism: Eduard Bernstein and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 115.

¹²² Li Zehou, 1985.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Lu Xinhua, 1978.

¹²⁵ Zheng Yi, 1979.

¹²⁶ Bai Hua, 1979.

(1980). Unlike *Scar*, *The Sun and Men* sparked a political struggle on whether it should be allowed to be screened. On the one hand, as the Hua faction was already marginalized, the darkness-exposing film could be perceived as attacking the current regime led by Deng and other party “elders”. On the other hand, *The Sun and Men* does not blame everything on the now “anti-Party” Gang of Four, but seemingly the regime established in 1949: talented painter Ling was persecuted for his activism against the Kuomintang dictatorship and went into exile abroad; after the founding of People's Republic, he returned to China with optimism, but was persecuted in successive political movements; his daughter wanted to leave China and ask him: you are in bitter love with this country...but does this country love you? The last scene of Ling hiding in the reeds as a wilderness savage living on raw fish and rats and eventually dying is reminiscent of Pascal's words: “man is only a reed, the weakest in nature; but it is a thinking reed.”¹²⁷

The film received mixed reviews from different sectors. Amongst artists, intellectuals, film directors and critics, the reception was overwhelmingly positive. At the Central Party School, the reception was divided. At the Military's general political department, the reception was overwhelmingly negative and subsequently, the *People's Liberation Army Daily* published an article criticizing the film and its creators in April 1981.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, the *Wenyi Bao* (lit. Literature and Art Newspaper), controlled by China Writers Association, refused to repost the article or criticize the film. Reformists Hu Yaobang, Hu Jiwei, Zhou Yang, et al. were critical of the article, while conservative theoretician Hu Qiaomu reported the case to Deng, hoping the most authoritative *People's Daily* could repost the article. Deng mediated the situation with a balanced solution: while confirming the necessity to criticize the film,¹²⁹ he considered the article to be an inappropriate military intervention. Deng instructed the *Wenyi Bao* to publish a moderate article taking into consideration the general opinions amongst artists and writers and the *People's Daily* to repost it later.¹³⁰

Other artistic works worth mentioning include Li Guyi (1944-)'s 1979 popular song *Xianglian* (lit. Hometown Love) and Dai Houying (1938-1996)'s full-length novel *Human, Ab, Human!* (1980). Li's *Xianglian* received unprecedented popularity for its delicate expression of romance and unconventional singing techniques, as well as criticism of imitating Taiwanese singer Teresa Teng's bourgeois “decadent music” (mimi zhiyin). For a while, Li was called “Teresa Li”, and the song was forbidden. *Human, Ab, Human!* was a story of literature professor Sun. To keep her pledge, Sun married her childhood sweetheart Zhao, rejecting her university schoolmate He, who attracted her more. He was identified as a “rightist” in 1957 by the university's party secretary Xi and went to the countryside. Sun and Zhao lived apart after marriage and eventually divorced. During his years in the countryside, He was secretly studying philosophy and writing *Marxism and Humanism*. Sun quickly fell in love with He when she met him again after the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, Xi refused to publish *Marxism and Humanism*. Sun would now follow where her heart goes.¹³¹

Human, Ab, Human! was a semiautobiographical work. Dai (cf. Sun) was a literature professor at Fudan, who had a short-lived marriage with her childhood sweetheart (cf. Zhao); Dai fell in love with a talented poet (cf. He) while they were in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. The novel character of university party secretary Xi was intriguing. The political backsliding against the novel was exactly launched by Xi-like people: oppressors in the Anti-Rightist

¹²⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Ch. M des Granges (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 162.

¹²⁸ Special Commentator, 1981.

¹²⁹ As a result, the film is not allowed to be screened in China even today.

¹³⁰ Hu Xinmin, 2018.

¹³¹ Dai Houying, 1980.

Campaign, deprived of power by the “rebels” during the Cultural Revolution and now restored of power against the liberal-minded (e.g., Dai [Sun], and He). Looking at it from the other side, many 1980s Chinese humanists were “rightists” in 1957, “rebels” in the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, and “reformists” after 1979.

In the fields of literary theory and aesthetics, humanism also became trendy. When Dai Houying was studying literature at East China Normal University in the 1950s, one of her professors was literary theorist Qian Gurong (1919-2017). Qian was criticized for his 1957 article “On Literature as the Study of Humanity”, for which he was almost identified as a “rightist”. In 1980, he published “A Self-Criticism Thesis of ‘On Literature as the Study of Humanity’”.¹³² The article was titled “self-criticism” but was rather a self-defence.¹³³

Aesthetician Zhu Guangqian (1897-1986), who was criticized for his “idealist aesthetics” in 1956, also sensed the thawing sociopolitical atmosphere in China. In 1979, he published “On Humanity, Humanism, Human Touch, and Common Beauty.”¹³⁴ He wrote: “the most pressing issue in Chinese literature and art today is to emancipate our minds and break through restricted areas”,¹³⁵ which included the acknowledgements of humanity, humanism, human touch, and common beauty. Another aesthetician, Gao Ertai (1935-), who was identified as a “rightist” in 1957 for his article “On Beauty”, republished the article in his 1982 collection of papers, titled *On Beauty*.¹³⁶

Together with writers and artists, these literary theorists and aestheticians contributed to what I describe as a wave of aesthetic humanism, which more concretely and vividly embodied humanism compared with Li's expression of Kantian subjectivity. Their challenges to the conventional literary and artistic forms and doctrines encountered resistance from conservatives.

In *Human, Ah, Human!*, philosopher He was blocked from publishing his new book *Marxism and Humanism*. Both this kind of publication and the blocking of it were new phenomena in post-Mao Chinese intelligentsia. Compared with Li Zehou's euphemistic intervention in the party-state ideology, the professional ideologues, or “theoretical works” posed a much more immediate challenge to the party-state ideology. The reform-minded ideologues, who held the discursive power within the party-state and were responsible for the official interpretation of Marxism, now found a new approach to it – Marxist humanism.

Ru Xin (1931-), a researcher at the philosophy institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published “Is Humanism Necessarily Revisionism? A Revaluation of Humanism” in the *People's Daily*. He wrote that the campaign against humanism in the past two decades had turned into be “affirmation of medieval inhumanity”, and the label of “revisionism” imposed on humanism should be thrown into the museum.¹³⁷ The deputy director of the philosophy institute, Xing Benshi (1930-), published *Humanism in the History of European Philosophy* (1979),¹³⁸ *Philosophy and Enlightenment* (1980),¹³⁹ and *The Humanism of Ludwig Feuerbach* (1981).¹⁴⁰ His 1979 article “Two Great Ideological Liberation

¹³² Qian Gurong, 1980.

¹³³ Cui Weiping, 2008.

¹³⁴ Zhu Guangqian, 1979.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

¹³⁶ Gao Ertai, 1982.

¹³⁷ Ru Xin, 1980.

¹³⁸ Xing Benshi, 1979a.

¹³⁹ Xing Benshi, 1980.

¹⁴⁰ Xing Benshi, 1981.

Movements in European History”¹⁴¹ suggested that China would now embark on a movement similar to the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

The editor-in-chief of the People's Publishing House, Xue Dezhen (1932-2023), and the deputy editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily*, Wang Ruoshui (1926-2002), coedited two collections of papers: *Human as the Starting Point of Marxism* (1981)¹⁴² and *The Philosophical Discussions on the Theory of Humanity* (1982),¹⁴³ both published by the Party-owned People's Publishing House.

For those worrying about the tidal wave of humanism, e.g., Hu Qiaomu, the ideologues' humanist reinterpretations of “Marxism” – like a Trojan horse breaching the castle from within, were particularly dangerous. A fortress is most easily breached from within. The conservatives could simply identify Li Zehou's Kantianism as non-Marxist, as well as “guide” and “discipline” the humanist artistic creations and theories with the “Marxism” they define. However, when it comes to Marxist humanists, the situation becomes a complicated political struggle over the interpretative power to define Marxism. On the one hand, humanists, reformists, liberals, etc., gathered under the banner of Marxist humanism, hoping to launch a secular emancipation similar to the Reformation, Renaissance, Enlightenment or the New Culture Movement in 1980s China; on the other hand, under the banner of (orthodox) “Marxism”, the apologists of the ancien régime resisted efforts humanism, reform and liberalization, in order to maintain the existing order.

The Debate on Humanism and Alienation in 1983 originated primarily from China's ideological establishment, focusing on the definition and interpretation of China's official ideology called “Marxism”. However, the substance of the debate could be traced from the humanist tendencies in Chinese philosophy, art and literature, and Marxism from 1978 to 1983. Li Zehou's Kantian “philosophy of subjectivity” laid out a liberal foundation for the 1980s Chinese New Enlightenment. The Scar Literature reflected the phenomena of “alienation” in the existing, “socialist” order, and the revived humanist trends in literary and art theories and aesthetics summarized the Zeitgeist in post-Mao China. Partially inspired by Young Marx's work and Marxist humanism in the Eastern Bloc, the revaluation of the traditional account of Marxism (or philosophical Stalinism) by Chinese Marxist theoreticians led to an attempt to humanize China's official ideology, and in this way, humanizing Chinese realities – politics, economy, society, culture, etc.

From 1983 to 1987

At the 150th anniversary of Marx's birth in March 1983, it was conventional for the Party to conduct a series of commemorative activities, including an academic conference at the Central Party School. Zhou Yang, then the president (1979-1988) of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, was scheduled to deliver a speech at the conference. In February 1983, Zhou Yang and the speech drafting group including Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, and Wang Yuanhua, gathered in Tianjin to prepare the speech.¹⁴⁴

The speech delivered on 7th March at the Central Party School and published on 16th March in *People's Daily* was given a dispensable title: “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of

¹⁴¹ Xing Benshi, 1979b.

¹⁴² Editorial Department, 1981.

¹⁴³ Editorial Department, 1982.

¹⁴⁴ Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui's Birth*, pp. 54-55.

Marxism”¹⁴⁵. It consisted of four parts, amongst which the last one, titled “The Relationship between Marxism and Humanism”, which dealt with both humanism and alienation, triggered most controversies, amongst which the most prominent one was conservative Party theoretician, Politburo member of the Party’s 12th Central Committee and the first president (1977-1982) of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Hu Qiaomu’s response, titled “On Humanism and Alienation”¹⁴⁶ and published in *People’s Daily* on 27th January 1984.

Zhou’s essay, written by Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, and Wang Yuanhua, was in defense of humanism and acted as the de facto manifesto of Chinese Marxist humanism, although it was not the first notable text on Marxist humanism in post-Mao China. Literary theorist and politician Zhou’s interest in humanism came from a long journey. Born in 1907, Zhou joined the Party at the age of 20 and since then undertook major positions in left-wing literature and arts. The official party line was against humanism under his leadership from 1949 to 1966, during which the case of literary theorist Hu Feng was particularly relevant. Hu Feng and his supporters, known as the “Hu Feng Clique”, were persecuted for their literary and artistic advocacies for humanism, humanity, personality, vitality, etc. During the Cultural Revolution, Zhou himself was persecuted as well. After being rehabilitated, Zhou apologized to Hu Feng and turned to support humanism.

Amongst Hu Feng’s supporters, one was the three-people drafting group for Zhou’s speech, i.e., literary theorist Wang Yuanhua. Another member, Wang Ruoshui, also had a working relationship with Zhou before the Cultural Revolution. In 1963, Zhou was instructed to form a writing group to produce a pamphlet criticizing Soviet revisionism. As a member of the writing group led by Zhou, Wang was responsible for two chapters respectively on humanity and alienation.¹⁴⁷ Wang’s paper “On the Concept of Alienation” was written in 1964 though it was published only until the late 1970s.¹⁴⁸

In this way, “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism” became an opportunity for Zhou et al. to reconsider concepts such as humanism and alienation in relation to Marxism and in combination with their own life experiences:

“The previous, incorrect criticisms of human nature and humanism have brought serious consequences both theoretically and practically....I do not agree with incorporating Marxism into humanism, nor do I agree with reducing Marxism to humanism; however, we should admit that Marxism includes humanism. For sure, this is Marxist humanism. Human being occupies an important position in Marxism...The later establishments of historical materialism and the theory of surplus value put Marx’s humanism on a more scientific basis instead of abandoning humanism.”¹⁴⁹

Underneath Zhou et al.’s emphases that (1) Marxism includes humanism and (2) the maturation of Marxism involves a stage of humanism, was their advocacy for promoting humanism in post-Mao China. However, this argument could be easily refuted by referring to the difference between matured Marxism and humanism, especially the former’s sublation of the latter. This was exactly the tactics that Hu Qiaomu utilized in his response:

¹⁴⁵ Zhou Yang, 1983.

¹⁴⁶ Hu Qiaomu, 1984.

¹⁴⁷ Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui’s Birth*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁴⁸ Author’s interview with Feng Yuan, 6th May 2024.

¹⁴⁹ Zhou Yang, 1983.

“The so-called ‘human is the starting point of Marxism’ thesis is a typical proposition that garbles the boundaries between Marxism and bourgeois humanism, historical materialism and historical idealism...They [Zhou et al.] either want to incorporate Marxism into humanism and make Marxism a type of the humanist worldview and historicism as the ‘real’, ‘highest’ and ‘most scientific’ type of humanism, or they want to incorporate the humanist worldview and historicism into the Marxist worldview and historicism, regarding the former as the core, essence, starting point, and destination of the latter. These two interpretations are actually the same, both of which aim to humanize Marxism.”¹⁵⁰

As Hu articulated, Marxism cannot be reduced to humanism, and Marxist China should stifle the “bourgeois” efforts of humanizing Marxism, or in essence, replacing Marxism with humanism. However, the Achilles heel of Hu’s discourses was his default account that there was no discrepancy between theoretical Marxism and Chinese reality. He lightly skipped the securitization on whether the Chinese reality was in line with Marxism, assuming that Marxism had been actualized in China. Such an assumption was groundless: a society that upholds and attempts to actualize an ideology, especially a utopian one, may not end up with success.

From Hu’s perspective, the lack of humanism in China was satisfactorily in line with Marxism and thus should be maintained in the face of the oncoming wave of humanization. For Zhou et al., the lack of humanism as part of the Chinese reality, was not a result of the actualization of Marxism, but on the contrary, an indication of the unfulfillment of not only Marxism, but also humanism as a primary stage of Marxism. In this context, humanization of the Chinese reality, should be considered not against Marxism, but a way of actualizing Marxism. That is to say, by actualizing the bourgeois, humanist demands, China would become closer to Marx’s ideal.

People’s Daily was the most prominent, but not the only arena for the Debate on Humanism and Alienation. Other platforms include academic journals such as *Domestic Philosophical Trends* or today’s *Philosophical Trends* edited by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *Journal of Social Sciences* edited by Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy & Social Sciences)*, amongst others. Most papers on humanism and alienation until 1984 could be classified as Marxist humanism, while the year of 1984 witnessed an overwhelming wave of literature against Marxist humanism pushed by the conservative backsliding.

The real political struggles went far beyond these ideological polemics on paper. The publication of Zhou’s speech in *People’s Daily*, which significantly enlarged its circulation and influence, was not without the approvals of *People’s Daily*’s deputy editor-in-chief Wang Ruoshui and President Hu Jiwei (1916-1912). Under the pressures of Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun, Wang Ruoshui was dismissed, and Hu Jiwei was forced to resign. After verbal conflicts with Zhou,¹⁵¹ Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun also reported the case to Deng Xiaoping and convinced him to launch a rectification campaign within the Party. The 2nd plenary session of the 12th Party Congress in October 1983 adopted the *Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Party Rectification*, which called for fighting against “spiritual pollution” and marked the beginning of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign.

The inexplicable term “spiritual pollution” was coined by the campaign’s initiator, conservative theoretician Deng Liqun in June 1983.¹⁵² Its direct target was apparently the philosophical

¹⁵⁰ Hu Qiaomu, 1984.

¹⁵¹ Yang Jisheng, 2004: pp. 234-236.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

discourse of humanism and alienation, but it soon became an all-encompassing basket as the campaign went down to earth. Yang Jisheng recalled how the campaign actually evolved:

“That day, I was carrying out Czech [reformist] economist Ota Šik’s *The Third Way*.¹⁵³ Unexpectedly, the municipal party committee secretary identified in his report a series of books as spiritual pollution, including *The Third Way*... In the factory, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign targeted the hairstyle and clothing of young workers. Some factory party committee secretaries stood in front of the factory gate with a pair of scissors, not allowing anyone who came to work wearing bell-bottom trousers in, or simply cutting the trouser legs open with their scissors.”¹⁵⁴

Included in spiritual pollution, which was variously defined from one to another, were also science fiction (for unregulated imagination or scientific spirit?), Jenny Marx’s picture (for alleged explicit content), and the Renaissance magnum opus of Florentine humanist literature *Decameron* (for sexual depictions), so on and so forth. Alongside the conservative backsliding in philosophy and socioculture were criticisms of the “commodity economy” advocated by reformist economists, which explains why Ota Šik’s *The Third Way* was censored. “Eliminating spiritual pollution...and safeguarding command economy...were two battles. They echoed and cooperated with each other. This was the struggle strategy of Chinese conservatives in 1983.”¹⁵⁵

Thanks to the resistance of reformists Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, this anti-humanist, return-to-the-medieval movement lasted for less than a month.¹⁵⁶ The end of the campaign signalled a larger shift in China’s political atmosphere: the balance of power once again tilts towards the reformists.

Deng’s 1984 Southern Tour showcased his resolution to continue his economic liberalization plan, in spite of the conservative opposition led by Chen Yun. During his unexpected trip in early 1984, 80-year-old Deng visited major cities such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, and Shanghai alongside China’s southeast coast, where a series of special economic zones (SEZs) had been set since 1979 and would eventually develop into the country’s most prosperous area and, in the American sense, “blue states”. Subsequently in March, 14 coastal cities opened up, an unprecedented expansion of SEZs, and in October, the 3rd plenary session of the 12th Party Congress adopted the idea of “commodity economy with plans” in its *Decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Economic System Reform*.¹⁵⁷

These moves seem to be normal without their context that ever since the initial few SEZs were set, Chen Yun, Deng Liqun, et al. had been critical of SEZs for what they represented: free trade, globalism, openness, so on and so forth.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, with the increasing Sino-foreign trade and information exchanges that come alongside SEZs, the political risks faced by the party-state regime also increased. The SEZs were designed for economic purposes, but objectively served as windows for the Chinese to reach the outside world’s ideas. It was no coincidence that in 1984, *Southern Weekly* was established in Guangzhou, which would later become a banner of post-Mao China’s press

¹⁵³ Ota Šik, *The Third Way: Marxist-Leninist Theory and Modern Industrial Society* (London: Wildwood House, 1976).

¹⁵⁴ Yang Jisheng, 2004: pp. 253.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 253-257.

¹⁵⁷ CPC, 1984.

¹⁵⁸ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 212.

freedom and the country's "most influential liberal newspaper" according to its American counterpart.¹⁵⁹

Apart from external economic relations, the internal aspect of Dengist economic reform was transforming China from a command economy to a market economy. The *Decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Economic System Reform* went through a turbulent process before it was adopted in 1984. Previously, Chen Yun publicly stated that China "is a planned economy, and its industry must be dominated by the planned economy; after the production responsibility system is implemented, the planned economy must still be dominant in agriculture" and criticized the "bad nature of intellectuals" of reformist economist Xue Muqiao (1904-2005).¹⁶⁰ During the drafting process, reformist economist Gao Shangquan (1929-2021), whose funeral was attended by one of the most renowned reformist politicians in post-1989 China, former premier Wen Jiabao (1942-), and conservative theoretician Wang Renzhi (1933-), who would later play a proactive role in reversing 1980s economic liberalization during the conservative backsliding from mid-1989 to early 1992, "argued against each other till their faces turned red".¹⁶¹ Eventually, with the supports from reformist General Secretary Hu Yaobang and premier Zhao Ziyang, the *Decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Economic System Reform* adopted the idea of "commodity economy with plans", which was a significant step forward in China's economic reforms.¹⁶²

Due to the time lag between academic writing and publication, 1984 witnessed a climax of criticism of Marxist humanist literature written during the 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, while 1985 witnessed a moderate recovery of Marxist humanist literature written during the 1984 return to reformism. The year of 1985 was transitional. The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign was over, and the political atmosphere turned to reformist in 1984, while the larger reformist wave in 1986, which would be later denounced as "bourgeois liberalization", was on its way.

As of June 1986, Deng Xiaoping started talking about "political reform" on various occasions. He said: "political system reform was proposed as early as 1980, but it has never been materialized; now it should be put on our agenda."¹⁶³ He felt the urgency of political reform because he realized that some people had become obstacles of his economic reforms:

"If we only carry out economic reform without reforming the political system, we will not be able to achieve economic reform because we first encounter man-made obstacles. Things need to be done by people. If you advocate decentralizing power to others, while they keep concentrating power from others, what can you do... Now every step forward in the economic system reform, we are deeply aware of the necessity of political system reform. If the political system is not reformed, the results of the economic system reform cannot be guaranteed. If the economic system reform cannot continue to advance, it will hinder the development of productivity and the realization of the four modernizations."¹⁶⁴

Deng made it clear that his motivation for "political reform" was not political reform per se as the end, but political reform as a necessary means to defend his economic reform platform opposed by

¹⁵⁹ Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Under Pressure, Chinese Newspaper Pulls Exposé on a Charity," *The New York Times*, 24th March 2002.

¹⁶⁰ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 159.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 163-165.

¹⁶³ Deng Xiaoping, 1993: p. 160.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 179.

conservatives, i.e., to remove the “man-made obstacles” and “people” who do the opposite of Deng’s intentions. In fact, Gorbachev’s reform faced a similar situation: when economic reform stalled, he turned to political reform. For Deng, the move towards political reform was a double-edged sword, which he must keep against only anti-market conservatives, not himself.

Inspired by Deng’s political reform discourses, a wave of liberalization emerged in China’s political atmosphere. This year, Wang Ruoshui published his anthology *A Defense of Humanism*.¹⁶⁵ In September 1986, Liu Zaifu (1941-) applied Li Zehou’s philosophy of subjectivity to literary theory and published an article in *People’s Daily*, calling for “socialist humanism”.¹⁶⁶ In the same month, conservative theoreticians established *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art* for “criticizing” the 1980s humanist-liberal trend in Chinese literature and arts, represented by *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* edited by Chinese Association of Literary and Art Theory and critics such as Liu Zaifu, Li Zehou, et al.

The situation soon moved from paper to the streets. According to the records afterwards, three Party members played an important role in “inciting” the student protests at the turn of 1986 to 1987: Vice President of University of Science and Technology of China Fang Lizhi (1936-2012), Vice Chairman and Councilman of Chinese Writers Association Liu Binyan (1925-2005) and Wang Ruowang (1918-2001). On 4th December 1986, Fang said during a rally: “we have been talking about political reform for a long time. A lot of people wonder where the breakthrough will be...Democracy is not given from top to bottom, it must be earned by oneself.”¹⁶⁷

Fang’s words encouraged students to start taking on the street as of the very next day – 5th December, which marked the beginning of the 1986 Chinese student demonstrations that ended on 2nd January 1987. The demonstrations started on the University of Science and Technology of China campus in Hefei, and quickly spread to as many as 28 cities including Shanghai (7th), Wuhan (9th), Shenzhen (14th), and Beijing (23rd).¹⁶⁸

Reformist General Secretary Hu Yaobang intended to dialogue with students. In contrast, conservative military leader Wang Zhen (1908-1993) furiously warned: “you have three million college students, I have three million People’s Liberation Army troops. I am going to chop off a bunch of f*cking heads!”¹⁶⁹ Similar divergence and rhetoric would be observed two years later, but unlike 1989, the 1986-1987 student protests ended peacefully, as Beijing authorities released all detained students on 2nd January 1987.

Not only did conservatives’ long-standing dissatisfaction with Hu Yaobang now reach its climax, but Deng Xiaoping, who appointed Hu as the General Secretary and first-in-line successor, also felt that Hu behaved too “weak” in the face of student protests. On 16th January 1987, Hu was forced to resign after two weeks of criticisms against him. On 13th, 17th, and 23rd January, Wang Ruowang, Fang Lizhi, and Liu Binyan were respectively expelled from the Party. On 28th January, the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign was launched by the *Notice on Several Issues Concerning Current Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign* issued by the Party Central Committee.

¹⁶⁵ Wang Ruoshui, 1986.

¹⁶⁶ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 276.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 292-297.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 299.

From 1987 to 1989

In many aspects, the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign in 1987 resembles the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983. According to Deng Liqun, “bourgeois liberalization” and “spiritual pollution” were synonymous: “spiritual pollution and bourgeois liberalization are two ways of saying the same thing.”¹⁷⁰ During the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign, Wang Ruoshui, the flag bearer of “spiritual pollution” or Marxist humanism, was expelled from the Party. Like-minded Marxist theoreticians, Su Shaozhi, then director of Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (now Academy of Marxism), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was dismissed from all posts inside and outside the Party, though remained as a Party member, and Zhang Xianyang, then a researcher at the same institute, was expelled from the Party.

Like the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign did not last long, either. In 1983, it was thanks to Hu Yaobang; in 1987, it was thanks to Zhao Ziyang. Zhao's resistance to the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign and the political struggle for the new General Secretary were intertwined.

On the date of Hu Yaobang's resignation, Zhao Ziyang succeeded Hu as the acting General Secretary. During his premiership since 1980, Zhao had demonstrated his allegiance to Deng's economic reforms. Instead, the conservatives such as Chen Yun, Wang Zhen, et al. supported Deng Liqun to become the next General Secretary at the upcoming 13th Party Congress. The reformists were very wary of Deng Liqun's political ambitions and reported his campaign activities to Deng Xiaoping. For example, Li Rui (1917-2019), in his letter to Deng Xiaoping, wrote:

“Recently I heard that there are some people campaigning for him [Deng Liqun] to become the General Secretary. This is even more worrying and even makes me restless. I always consider him to be an opponent of the policy of reform and opening up. He must not be allowed to remain in the central leadership team after the 13th Party Congress.”¹⁷¹

Chen Yun later blamed Deng Liqun's failed attempt to become General Secretary at the 13th Party Congress on the “intrigues” of Li Rui and Bao Tong (1932-2022) – Zhao's secretary.¹⁷² However, no matter what letter Deng Xiaoping received, the final decision was of his own. Ultimately, Deng Liqun's failure was Chen Yun's failure in his competition with Deng Xiaoping. For Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang was too reformist, while Deng Liqun was too conservative; Zhao Ziyang at that moment seemed to be the one best aligned with his line.

In Deng Liqun-drafted version of *Notice on Several Issues Concerning Current Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign*, the concept of “bourgeois liberalization” was much more broadly defined, “ranging from politics to economy, culture, technology, education, and all realms of urban and rural social life”.¹⁷³ While the version drafted by Zhao's secretary Bao Tong, which was eventually adopted on 28th January 1987, restricted the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign to “within the Party, especially the realm of political thought”.¹⁷⁴ Zhao also had a “thorough conversation” with Deng Xiaoping and convinced the latter that conservatives were utilizing the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 340.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 331-332.

Campaign to reverse achieved reforms. On 13th May 1987, with Deng Xiaoping's support, Zhao delivered a speech, which effectively ended the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign.¹⁷⁵

Followed the short-lived Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign was the climax of China's 1980s New Enlightenment both in theory – the explicit articulations and unequivocal advocacies of New Enlightenment as well as in practice – the 1989 Tiananmen protests, which lasted approximately two years from mid-1987 to mid-1989 under General Secretary Zhao's reformist leadership.

During the 13th Party Congress from 25th October to 1st November 1987, not only did Deng Liqun fail to become the General Secretary, but he also failed to be elected as a member of the Party's central committee, which in effect ended his political career earlier than he expected.¹⁷⁶ For himself and conservative veterans especially those who campaigned for him to become the General Secretary, the election result was conceivably shameful – according to the overwhelmingly reformist public opinion within the Party at that time, Deng Liqun was not even suitable for the central committee, not to mention central committee's politburo, politburo's standing committee, and on top of that, politburo standing committee's General Secretary.

The political report delivered by Zhao at the 13th Party Congress stated that the Party's top priority should be “economic construction”,¹⁷⁷ which marked another victory for reformists, because for conservatives, the Party's top priority should be defending the party-state regime and/or their own privileges, even if that comes with the expense of economic development. For example, the SEZs were conducive to economic development, but not without the price of weakening the regime's capability of controlling the Chinese population's economic and cultural mobility, thereby weakening the party-state's ruling status. Broadly speaking, all economic reforms were conducive to economic development as well as people's welfare and freedom, but at the cost of the Party's monopoly of the economy or the “material foundation” of the regime's security. This was why conservatives were reluctant and even opposed to economic reforms. In comparison, post-Cold War North Korean leaders “well” calculated the pros and cons of economic liberalization for their interests, and if Putin prioritized Russia's economic development, he would not have started the war in Ukraine.

On 11th June 1988, the six-episode documentary *River Elegy* premiered on China Central Television. Amongst the authors of *River Elegy*, Yuan Zhiming (1955-), together with Xue Dezhen, published intensively on Marxist humanism from 1983 to 1986.¹⁷⁸ The documentary revolved around an analogy between river-based yellow civilization and ocean-based blue civilization, premodernity and modernity, conservatism and reformism:

“Autocracy is characterized by mystery, dictatorship, and arbitrariness. Democracy should be characterized by transparency, public will and science. We are now moving from opacity to transparency. We have already moved from closeness to openness. The Yellow River is destined to pass through the Loess Plateau. The Yellow River will eventually merge into the blue ocean... The Yellow River has reached its great and painful estuary... The Yellow River must eliminate its fear of the ocean. The Yellow River must maintain its indomitable

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 334-336.

¹⁷⁶ Deng Liqun, 2006.

¹⁷⁷ Zhao Ziyang, 1988.

¹⁷⁸ E.g., Xue Dezhen and Yuan Zhiming, 1983.

will and impulse from the plateau. The water of life comes from and flows back to the ocean. After thousands of years of solitude, the Yellow River finally sees the blue ocean.”¹⁷⁹

The Yellow River was the second-longest river in China as well as a metaphor for the traditional, agrarian Chinese civilization. In *River Elegy*, the expressions of reformist platforms such as economic liberalization and political democratization broke through the shackles of “(anti-)Marxist” discourses and adopted the discourses of (anti-)modernity, revealing what reformism was really against – behind the orthodox interpretation of Marxism was the conservative defense of the traditional, agrarian Chinese civilization symbolized by “yellow river”.

In this way, the self-identified “socialists”, “anti-revisionists”, or “orthodox Marxists” in defense of the “yellow river” were standing on an extremely reactionary, instead of the seemingly revolutionary position. For example, the reformist-conservative struggles over SEZs during China's long 1980s seemed to be related to capitalism/socialism and Marxist political economy, but they were in fact reemerged debates on whether China should open its ports to foreign trade during China's early encounters with external modernity in the mid-19th century. In this context, East Asian rulers until the mid-19th century, Chinese conservatives during the 1980s, and North Korean rulers today all regard foreign trade as a danger to domestic order. Similarly, the conservatives seemed to be in defense of Mao as China's Maximilien Robespierre and Terreur, in fact, they were in defense of Mao as China's Louis XVI and the ancien régime.

Also in 1988, the four-volume *New Enlightenment* book series was launched, which was chiefly edited by Wang Yuanhua, one of the three drafters of Zhou Yang's 1983 speech “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism”. Another drafter of the manifesto of Chinese Marxist humanism, Wang Ruoshui, was also amongst the book series' initiators,¹⁸⁰ and another Marxist humanist theoretician Gao Ertai, served as one of the two deputy editors of the book series.¹⁸¹ The title “New Enlightenment” came from a comparison between the May Fourth movement in 1919, which, alongside the intellectual New Cultural Movement around that time, was known as the Enlightenment in modern China, and the long 1980s Chinese intellectualism. New Enlightenment represented a hope to revive the Chinese Enlightenment under the not-yet-enlightened Chinese conditions.

The four volumes of *New Enlightenment* were subtitled “Time and Choice” (October 1988), “Crisis and Reform” (December 1988), “On the Concept of Alienation” (February 1989), and “Lessons from the Lushan Conference” (April 1989). Wang Ruoshui contributed two articles, titled “On Human Nature and Social Relations” (vol. 2) and “Is There no Alienation in a Socialist Society?” (vol. 4), to *New Enlightenment* as responses to Hu Qiaomu's “On Humanism and Alienation”.¹⁸² Apart from Wang Yuanhua and Wang Ruoshui, amongst the contributors to *New Enlightenment* were no less associates of Marxist humanism, but their demands in *New Enlightenment* would now become much more explicit, without the meaningless guise of Marxism. From the Debate on Alienation and Humanism to *New Enlightenment*, the intellectual consciousness and subjectivity discourses remained consistent, as Wang Ruoshui recalled their motivation to launch the *New Enlightenment* book series:

¹⁷⁹ Episode 6, *River Elegy*, 1988.

¹⁸⁰ Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui's Birth*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸¹ Zhou Yicheng, 2005: p. 256 [*Beijing Spring*, July 1995].

¹⁸² Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui's Birth*, pp. 63-64.

“We deeply feel that democracy cannot be bestowed from above...For decades, powerful ideologies have blinded people's minds, and people have been accustomed to leaving their destinies to the control of an absolute authority that reigned above them. People have become alienated and lost their subjective consciousness... People should open their eyes, break the illusion, and take control of their own destiny.”¹⁸³

The most magnificent events during China's long 1980s occurred between the death of Hu Yaobang from a heart attack on 15th April 1989 to the military crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square on 4th June 1989. In less than two months, China witnessed both radical materialization and violent suppression of the ideals represented by *River Elegy* and *New Enlightenment*.

The initial mourning activities for Hu Yaobang showcased the popular affirmation of the role the reformist politician played from the Debate on Humanism and Alienation to 1986 student protests as well as popular dissatisfaction of conservatives who forced Hu to step down and hindered the reform. As time went by, slogans more clearly advocated for freedom and democracy, marches and demonstrations became more frequent and larger-scale, and hunger strikes also emerged.

General Secretary Zhao Ziyang faced a similar situation as his predecessor Hu Yaobang did in 1986. He would very much likely to be forced to step down like Hu, if he could not show his toughness. Nevertheless, he chose to dialogue with students. For reformists, the protests, which started with mourning the reformist leader Hu Yaobang, were nothing threatening but a precious opportunity to proceed with reform. That is to say, the protests could and should weaken and even remove the conservatives in power. In contrast, the second-ranked politburo standing committee member, then premier Li Peng (1928-2019), who was seen as a conservative, thereby a primary target by the protests and was demanded to step down by protesters, made a series of strongly worded statements, calling for force to quickly quell the protests. In the five-member politburo standing committee, the third-ranked Qiao Shi (1924-2015) abstained, the fourth-ranked Hu Qili (1929-) was with Zhao, and the fifth-ranked Yao Yilin (1917-1994) was with Li.¹⁸⁴

History repeated itself dramatically. Once again, Deng Xiaoping was disappointed by Zhao's approach, just like he was in 1986 with Hu, and tilted towards the conservatives who were in favour of a military crackdown. On 20th May, the central government officially announced the implementation of martial law. While tanks and soldiers entered Beijing, the protests did not subside, and the two sides were in a stalemate for half a month, until the mission of so-called “quelling counterrevolutionary riots” was conducted on 4th June 1989.¹⁸⁵

From 1989 to 1992

Followed the bloodshed on 4th June was the 4th session of 13th Party Congress from 23rd to 24th June, during which Zhao Ziyang was replaced by Jiang Zemin (1926-2022). Afterwards, Zhao was placed under house arrest until his death in 2005. Reformists on Zhao's side who rejected the military crackdown were also dismissed from their posts. A large number of liberal intellectuals and student movement leaders went into exile abroad. *River Elegy*, which was made to celebrate the Party's policy of reform and opening up, would now be criticized by the Party. With reformists taking a severe hit, the balance of power tilted significantly toward conservatives.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁸⁴ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 394.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 398-422.

After 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign and 1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign, the Anti-Peaceful Evolution Campaign was launched by conservatives led by Chen Yun in 1989.¹⁸⁶ This time, no reformist leader like Hu or Zhao was in power who would be able to minimize the campaign's impacts. The conservative agendas advanced unimpeded from 4th June 1989 to the point when Deng Xiaoping realized the need for him to recalibrate the Party's line. As *The New York Times* summarized in its obituary of Deng: "even after his formal retirement in 1989, Mr. Deng remained an all-powerful patriarch, ordering a purge of the military leadership in 1992 and rescuing his economic reform program from a conservative backlash."¹⁸⁷

For Deng, the economic reform should continue as order had been restored after 4th June, and Zhao's contributions to economic reform during the 1980s should also be acknowledged. For Chen et al., the 1989 protest was exactly the result of Deng's reforms consecutively implemented by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. The conservatives believed that to prevent another 1989 from happening again, for example, the prioritization of economic construction at the 13th Party Congress should be revised to prioritizing both economic construction and "anti-peaceful evolution".¹⁸⁸

The so-called "peaceful evolution" could be viewed as a pejorative term for "democratization through trade". According to modernization theory, as China grows economically, individuals become more independent, society becomes more diverse, culture becomes more secular, and international exchanges become more frequent...middle class, civil rights and civil society all come along the way, and democratization becomes inevitable. This scenario, which became a theoretical foundation for the West's rapprochement with post-1989 China, was exactly what conservatives worried about and called "peaceful evolution", to counter which, Chen et al. believed that it was necessary to reverse some of the achieved economic reforms.

The official historiography highlights the debate on "whether market economy is socialist or capitalist" from mid-1989 to early 1992 and concludes with "market economy is not necessarily capitalist". However, at the core of the debate was not about description or definition as it appeared to be, but policy, i.e., whether China should adopt market economy. The rhetoric usages of politically incorrect "capitalism" and politically correct "socialism" were to (de)legitimize the policy propositions. Over this issue, the divergence between Deng and Chen was substantial.

In early 1991, Deng visited Shanghai and delivered a series of remarks calling for further economic reform and opening up, which were later published as commentaries under a pseudonym in *Jiefang Daily*, the official daily newspaper of the Party's Shanghai committee, with the support of the reformist party secretary of Shanghai, Zhu Rongji (1928-). Not without knowledge that Deng was the author of these commentaries, the Party's mouthpieces in Beijing such as *Qinshi* magazine and *People's Daily* published a series of tit-for-tat commentaries rebuking *Jiefang Daily*.¹⁸⁹ Behind these commentaries were Chen Yun and conservative theoreticians such as Deng Liqun, Wang Renzhi, as well as Gao Di (1927-2019), who took the presidency of *People's Daily* after 4th June 1989. Under its previous reformist leadership, *People's Daily* published positive coverage of the 1989 student protests. Gao Di's appointment was part of the larger trend of conservative reaction.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 463-464.

¹⁸⁷ Tyler, Patrick E. "Deng Xiaoping: A Political Wizard Who Put China on the Capitalist Road." *The New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1997.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 458.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 454-456.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 456-458.

In this context, the 88-year-old Deng's took his 1992 Southern Tour. His route was similar to the one he took in 1984 following the 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign. He visited Wuhan, Changsha, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Nanjing, amongst others, during which he made reformist remarks, some of which are still not officially disclosed due to their explicitness. In the carefully-edited and officially-published version of his remarks, he called for mainland China to learn from the developmental experiences of Japan and the Four Asian Tigers – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.¹⁹¹

The most decisive event during Deng's Tour was a low-profile military conference held in Zhuhai, which was attended by him and two deputy chairmen of the Central Military Commission. Nominally, Deng at that moment was without any military capacity after handing over the chairman of the Central Military Commission to Jiang Zemin, but he was still the one to whom the military was allegiant. The military conference, which Jiang was not invited to and even informed about, was in its formality, a quasi-coup d'état threat. The military then made its political message to Beijing public and clear: "the Chinese People's Liberation Army must escort reform and opening up".¹⁹²

The implication from Deng's remarks during his Tour and military's statements was that they would replace the Jiang leadership with a reformist one if necessary. The 1989 appointment of Jiang was a compromise between Deng and Chen. Not only was Jiang more leaning to conservatives before 1989, but he also allowed the conservative attacks against Deng's economic reforms after 1989 during the debate on "whether market economy is socialist or capitalist". As Deng's dissatisfaction with Jiang became increasingly apparent during his Tour, people started speculating about who would replace Jiang and the second-ranked politburo standing committee member, conservative premier Li Peng at the upcoming 14th Party Congress. Popular candidates included the third-ranked politburo standing committee member Qiao Shi, who abstained from the vote on whether to use force to suppress the 1989 protests, as well as Zhu Rongji, who played a proactive role in promoting Deng's advocacies during the debate on "whether market economy is socialist or capitalist". Jiang himself was also aware of his ominous situation and turned to Deng.¹⁹³

During the 14th Party Congress in October 1992, while Jiang Zemin and Li Peng kept their posts, Deng also made important arrangements in his favour. First, Zhu Rongji was previously only an alternate member – not even a member – of the Party's central committee, during the Congress, he was promoted to the politburo standing committee, exceptionally skipping memberships in the central committee and politburo. In early 1993, he became the first-ranked deputy premier and effectively took over Li Peng's role in China's economic decision-making. He would later succeed Li in 1998 and launch the most challenging parts of Chinese economic liberalization for its long-awaited entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001.

Second, Hu Jintao (1942-), who was a political protégé of Hu Yaobang and 38 years younger than Deng, was added to the politburo standing committee. Considering the fact that the average age of the other six 14th politburo standing committee members was 66, Deng's appointment of 50-year-old Hu was widely regarded, though never officially declared, as his beforehand deployment of who would succeed Jiang after his two terms. Hu indeed succeeded Jiang in 2002 and served two terms until 2012. In this way, Deng ensured that his line could last as long as possible and would not be altered by Jiang even after his death in 1997.

¹⁹¹ Deng, 1993: p. 375.

¹⁹² Yang Jisheng, 2004: pp. 470-471.

¹⁹³ Ibid., pp. 471-472.

Third, based on their words and deeds during the debate on “whether market economy is socialist or capitalist”, the conservative theoreticians such as Deng Liqun, Wang Renzhi, and Gao Di were demoted and/or marginalized, while reformists such as Hu Qili and Wang Yang (1955-) were partially reinstated and/or promoted.

The 14th Party Congress in 1992 and its 3rd plenary session in 1993 also made Dengism in the name of “Deng Xiaoping Theory on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” (shortened as “Deng Xiaoping Theory” in 1997) including the so-called “socialist market economy” the official ideology of the Party, declaring Deng’s final victory over Chen.¹⁹⁴

Although the factional struggles from 1989 to 1992 did not involve political democratization, at the end of the day Deng unprecedently consolidated his economic liberalization platform. Hence, both components of what I refer to as the “1992 System” characterized by political dictatorship and market economy, which dominated China since then, were defended by force: the political dictatorship was defended by a military crackdown on 4th June 1989 and the market economy was defended by a quasi-coup d’état threat during Deng’s 1992 Southern Tour.

Conclusions

Marxist humanism during China’s long 1980s originated from reflections on the Mao era, which in post-1978 China has existed only in a symbolic way. On the outbreak of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, the story in *Der Spiegel* was titled “The Chinese Cannot Live without an Emperor”.¹⁹⁵ Thus, the Mao era symbolizes not revolution but an “emperor” whom the revolution is supposed to overthrow, not socialist but feudal past. As Wang Hui concluded:

“[Chinese Marxist humanism]’s critique of Maoist socialism was mainly on the latter’s absolutism as a legacy of feudalist traditions... Similar to Renaissance humanism’s critique of religion in the West, Chinese humanist Marxism’s critique of traditional socialism gave birth to the secularization movement of Chinese society, i.e., the development of capitalist marketization. In its specific context, Marx’s critique of Western capitalist modernity transformed into an ideology of modernization and became an important part of contemporary China’s New Enlightenment movement... Its abstract concept of human freedom and liberation eventually transformed into a series of values of modernity.”¹⁹⁶

On the one hand, Marxist humanism largely avoided Marx’s critique of modernity, which made it distant from Marx and aligned with “bourgeois” liberalism; on the other hand, the appropriation of Marx’s critique of modernity in orthodox interpretations of Marxism was a conservative utilization for their own purposes. As a result, both sides were non-Marxist – if Marxism is defined as the “ism” of Marx or Marx’s original intention. When they gradually gave up the discourses of Marxism of no real significance and turned to the discourses of modernity in the framework of New Enlightenment, their divergences became ever clearer.

To sum up, throughout China’s long 1980s, humanist and orthodox interpretations of Marxism corresponded to reformist and conservative factions within the Party. Different attitudes towards philosophical concepts such as subjectivity and humanism were manifested in different attitudes towards sociocultural trends, economic system transformation, and political reform. The humanist

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 477-479.

¹⁹⁵ Editors. „Die Chinesen können nicht ohne Kaiser leben.“ *Der Spiegel* 50/1983. 12th December 1983.

¹⁹⁶ Wang Hui, “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity.”

and reformists were for market economy, democratic politics, avant-garde culture, open society, and cosmopolitan nationalism. The orthodox and conservative were for autarkic economy, autocratic politics, traditional culture, closed society, and particularistic nationalism.

Although not all the objectives of 1980s Chinese reformism have been achieved, some especially democratization remain to be achieved, the greatest amongst the achieved was China's avoidance of becoming a giant version of North Korea, where the Soviet-type conservatives apparently prevailed. This was not only the most celebrated political legacy of Deng, which had its acknowledgment in Charter 08, but also, while I travel back from history to the present, what made the conditions of freedom and prosperity, under which I have been able to write the thesis.

IV. Receptions of Soviet Marxist Humanism¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Part of this chapter was based on the author's coursework, "E. Ilyenkov and I. Frolov: Marxist Humanism in Moscow and Beyond," submitted to Karl Hall in the 2022-2023 winter term at CEU.

Introduction

Marxist humanism, in its narrowly defined form, is often associated with a series of “Central European” intellectuals and intellectual schools or movements. However, Marxist humanism as an intellectual phenomenon is not limited to the imaginary space of “Central Europe”. More importantly, the very nature of the humanist interpretation of Marxism, i.e., humanism, is universally valued – by not only Central Europeans, but also Russians, Chinese, etc. In addition, the Soviet-type sociopolitical context in which this interpretation evolved once stretched across Eurasia, which also makes an isolated regional variant of Marxist humanism impossible.

In fact, not only had Marxist humanism existed in non-Central European capitals such as Moscow and Beijing, but it also originated, first and foremost, in the transnational aftermath of Stalin’s 1953 death, as an initiative to de-Stalinize and humanize the official ideology, i.e., the orthodox interpretation of Marxism, which was formed during the 1930s and then imposed to Soviet-type capitals during the late 1940s. The translational entanglements of Marxist humanism amongst these Soviet-type capitals could be easily observed, e.g., the 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism resembles its Eastern Bloc counterparts in many aspects.

The following two chapters are parts of one theme. This chapter explores the genealogy of Marxist humanism that was derived from Moscow in the Soviet Union and beyond. The next chapter focuses on the genealogy of Marxist humanism amongst “Eastern European” or East-Central European capitals. In both chapters, the common emphasis is laid on the intellectual history of long 1980s China in relation to the holistic landscape of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type contexts.

This chapter is titled “Receptions of Soviet Marxist Humanism”. The foremost question to be answered is what Soviet Marxist humanism was. First, it outlines the role of Moscow as the frame of reference in the transnational entanglements of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies. Then, it reviews the formation of the orthodox interpretation of Marxism, i.e., “Soviet religion”, in the Soviet Union, especially during the Stalin era, outlining the evolution of Soviet philosophy (religion) as the background of heterodox Soviet Marxist humanism. Next, it focuses on the life and contributions of two prominent figures, E. V. Ilyenkov (1924-1979) and I. T. Frolov (1929-1999), in humanizing the orthodox interpretation of Marxism.

The next question to be answered is what the not-yet-discovered Chinese receptions of Soviet Marxist humanism were. This chapter approaches the entangled histories “beyond” Moscow-based Marxist humanists, first from the prism of Chinese students who studied in the Soviet Union during the 1950s, and second based on the neglected events related to the 1983 Guilin Conference and Six Gentlemen at Fudan. Last but not least, it refers to the North Korean case of Hwang Jang-yop as a heuristic reference in the world map of Marxist humanism.

Moscow as a Frame of Reference

Due to the close-knit political, economic, and military alliance between the Soviet Union and its satellite states during the Cold War, the Marxist humanisms in Moscow and in other Soviet-type capitals shared a context and were highly intertwined. The formative Cold War political events that occurred in Moscow (Stalin’s death in 1953, beginning of Brezhnev era since 1964, Gorbachev’s reform since 1985), Belgrade (Soviet-Yugoslav split in 1948), East Berlin (East German uprising of 1953), Poznań and Budapest (1956), Prague (Prague Spring, 1968), Warsaw (March 1968), etc. influenced each other state’s domestic atmosphere that shaped the intellectual dynamics

and evolutions of Marxist humanisms in different linguistic contexts. The apparent linkage effect and chain reaction in the geopolitical relationship of controlling and being controlled between Moscow and satellite capitals was consequential. The most significant events and their Zeitgeists in the evolution of Eastern European Marxist humanism came alongside the Kremlin's ideological shifts.

It is sometimes forgotten that the 1968 Invasion of Czechoslovakia was by not just the USSR but the Warsaw Pact, which explains the widespread suppressions against Marxist humanisms all across the Warsaw Pact capitals, not just in Prague or Moscow. The same is true for the 1985 end of Stagnation; it did not start anywhere but Moscow and only after Moscow gave up the Brezhnev doctrine and adopted the Sinatra Doctrine in 1988, did the Revolutions of 1989 become possible. For example, the Normalization in Czechoslovakia ended a few years after Gorbachev came to power in 1985 rather than earlier. E. E. P. Honecker in the westmost even attempted to resist the reformist wave from the eastmost by claiming a distinct "Socialism in the Colors of the GDR [Sozialismus in den Farben der DDR]". The trajectory of Marxist humanism in China – a state that was too self-contained to be a satellite of any other, could also be comprehensively depicted in comparison with Marxist humanism in Moscow.

I could approximately identify at least four critical junctures of transnational political changes in the Cold War context: 1956, 1968, 1978, and 1989. Following the death of Stalin, the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, especially Khrushchev's Secret Speech, led to a series of events: in Eastern Europe, the 1956 Revolution of Hungary, 1956 Poznań June, and Polish October; in China, the 8th Party Congress in September 1956, the Spring of 1957, followed by the Anti-Rightist Campaign and Sino-Soviet Split; in Pyongyang, Kim Il Sung foiled a coup by pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing leaders and consolidated his power.

While the Soviet Union entered two decades of Stagnation from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the late 1960s witnessed a rebellious climax. The Cultural Revolution was launched in mid-1966, and evolved into a nationwide movement in urban China, until it ended before the orderist 9th Party Congress in 1969. Within these few years, political unrests emerged across Eastern Europe: Prague Spring, 1968 student demonstrations in Yugoslavia, Croatian Spring, March 1968 in Poland, followed by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, the Protests of 1968, from May 1968 in France, Civil Rights Movement in the United States, New Left in West Germany and Japan to Quiet Revolution in Québec, took place in capitalist democracies.

After a decade of stillness, a series of events erupted during the late 1970s: Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, Solidarity in Poland, followed by martial law; in Beijing, following the 1976 death of Mao, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Party at the end of 1978, accompanied by Beijing Spring. At the same time, Kaohsiung Incident and Seoul Spring and its peak, i.e., Gwangju Uprising, occurred in South Korea and Taiwan, as iconic democratic movements before these two capitalist autocracies became democratized.

Last but not least, the Revolutions of 1989 was the farthest-reaching wave of democratization in the second half of the 20th century. Following the deaths of Brezhnev and his short-lived successors, Gorbachev embarked a series of reforms, which accelerated after 1987. In the same year, the 13th Party Congress held in Beijing declared further reformist agendas including political system reform. These efforts eventually led to the Tiananmen protests as well as democratization and territorial changes from Central and Eastern Europe to Central Asia. After the June 1987 Democratic Struggle and Wild Lily student movement, South Korea and Taiwan transitioned to democracies.

The conventional stereotype suggests that Soviet orthodoxy of Marxism was full of “grim, boring, and intellectually mediocre corpus”¹⁹⁸ vis-à-vis Central European “revisionism” of Marxism.¹⁹⁹ However, Soviet Marxism was by no means a static, homogeneous entity. Marxist humanism was, in fact, not limited to the Eastern Bloc satellite states, but in a sense, even originated in the de-Stalinization process that first took place in Moscow.

The entanglements between Marxist humanism in the Soviet Union and that in Soviet satellite states include but are not limited to the Eastern European philosophers’ individual engagements with Soviet institutions: Adam Schaff (1913-2006) received his PhD from the Institute of Philosophy, USSR Academy of Sciences in 1945; Karel Kosík (1926-2003) attended courses at Leningrad University and Moscow State University from 1947 to 1949; Gajo Petrović (1927-1993) was an exchange student in Moscow and Leningrad from 1946 to 1948, during which he realized the problems of Stalinism.

The Construction of Soviet Religion

To understand Marxist humanism as an intellectual counterforce against the Marxist orthodoxy that monopolized the ideological domain in Soviet-type societies, it is imperative to understand how the Marxist orthodoxy was constructed in Moscow, before the Eastern (in Cold War context, or “East-Central” in present-day context) European satellite regimes were established, and the made-in-Moscow ideology was imposed on these states from above and outside. It is, thus, necessary to review the formation of “Soviet religion”²⁰⁰ after three philosophical struggles under Stalin’s reign and how Marxism turned to be a “religion” that Eastern Bloc and Chinese humanists disdained.

The evolution of Soviet philosophy before 1953 was marked by three struggles. The first struggle was between Lenin and “idealists” such as A. A. Bogdanov (1873-1928) during the early 1920s. Bogdanov was part of Russian Machism, but the “idealists” included much more than Machists. Consequently, non-Marxist philosophies almost disappeared in the Soviet Union, which created a condition in which philosophical debates afterwards could only occur within self-identified, nominally “Marxist” tradition and Marxism became a synonym of “philosophy”.²⁰¹

Both A. M. Deborin (1881-1963) and his opponents, “mechanists” such as L. I. Axelrod (1868-1946) and I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov (1870-1928) during the late 1920s identified themselves as Marxists. The mechanists followed a positivist interpretation of Marxism, while “dialecticians” such as Deborin argued for a “dialectical” interpretation of Marxism. According to mechanists, philosophy or Marxism should be replaced by materialistic sciences, reducing philosophy to materialistic changes in matter, while Deborinists insisted on the superiority of philosophy or

¹⁹⁸ Arto Artinian, “Radical Currents in Soviet Philosophy: Lev Vygotsky and Evald Ilyenkov.” *Socialism and Democracy* 31, no. 2 (2017): p. 95.

¹⁹⁹ For example, Karel Kosík’s *Čeští radikální demokraté* (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1958) argues for a distinct Czechoslovak tradition of Marxism that could be traced back to the 1930s and is different from the Soviet Union. The stereotype is of cultural essentialism and national or regional exceptionalism, as it implies that certain peoples are more freedom-loving than others.

²⁰⁰ A. A. Guseinov, 2015: p. 100.

²⁰¹ David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 25-58.

Marxism over sciences in academic research. Stalin supported the Deborinists as he saw the danger of the mechanists that Soviet philosophy as a guiding ideology may be cancelled.

However, the Deborinists, independent minds well versed in German idealism,²⁰² posed another danger that their philosophy may be incompatible with Stalin's political hermeneutics of Marxism as the official ideology. Within this context, M. B. Mitin (1901-1987) emerged in the early 1930s, accusing Deborinists of being anti-Marxism and "Menshevistic idealism".²⁰³ Stalin knew that Mitin, P. F. Yudin (1899-1968), et al. were no talented philosophers but propagandists and that was exactly the reason he chose them to be his apologists: "Mitin and Yudin do not grab stars from the sky, but they know the technique well."²⁰⁴ As Stalin's power consolidated during the 1930s, his philosophy and philosophers also consolidated their positions in Soviet academia.

Table 2: Stalinization of Soviet Philosophy during the 1930s

1932	Yudin as the director of the Institute of Red Professors (ИКП)
1934	<i>Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism</i> , ed. Mitin
1936	Mitin as the director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CPSU Central Committee (ЦК КПСС)
1938	Stalin, <i>Dialectical and Historical Materialism</i>
1939	Mitin as academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences and member of the CPSU Central Committee

Tabulation: author.

The philosophical Stalinism, presented by Ch. 4: §2 of his 1938 work *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, titled "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", dominated Soviet philosophy from the fall of Deborin to the death of Stalin in 1953. Australian Marxist philosopher Eugene Kamenka (1928-1994) harshly commented:

"Until 1948, at least, few Western philosophers would have hesitated in characterizing Soviet philosophy as a tedious and distasteful mixture of naive but confident dogma and childish but unskillful aggressiveness, a philosophy that knew no argument except the appeal to authority and no form of criticism except name-calling and unprincipled distortion."²⁰⁵

As director of the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, A. A. Guseinov (1939-) noted that Soviet philosophy is often referred to as "Soviet religion", but this is true only "during the 1930s and 1940s."²⁰⁶ After Stalin, Soviet philosophy went through three stages of vitalization during Khrushchev Thaw, Brezhnev Stagnation, and Gorbachev Reform.

Evald V. Ilyenkov

²⁰² Deborin graduated from Universität Bern in 1908 and worked intensively on Hegel.

²⁰³ "Menshevik Idealism," *Brief Philosophical Dictionary* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1954), ed. M. M. Rosenthal and P. F. Yudin [Меньшевистствующий идеализм // Краткий философский словарь / Под редакцией М. М. Розенталя и П. Ф. Юдина. — Издание четвертое, дополненное и исправленное. — М. : Политиздат, 1954.], p. 343.

²⁰⁴ Kipnis S. E. "Walks along Novodevichy," *Lechaim*, vol. 139, no. 11 (2003) [Кипнис С. Е. «Прогулки по Новодевичью». Технику дела знали хорошо // Лехаим. — 2003. — № 11 (139)].

²⁰⁵ Eugene Kamenka, "Philosophy in the Soviet Union," *Philosophy* 38, no. 143 (1963): p. 1.

²⁰⁶ A. A. Guseinov, 2015: p. 100.

The death of Stalin in 1953 paved the way for the debate between the “epistemological school” led by E. V. Ilyenkov and the orthodox “metaphysical school” during the 1950s and 1960s. The “metaphysical school” was in defense of the legacy of Soviet philosophy after “three struggles”, while the “epistemological school” argued that Marxism is an *epistēmē* of knowing the world, instead of a metaphysical system that defines the world, thereby highlighting the subjectivity and agency of humankind and the variability and fallibility of “truth”.

In April 1954, junior lecturers Ilyenkov, whom Slavoj Žižek described as “the only Soviet Marxist to be taken seriously”,²⁰⁷ and V. I. Korovikov (1924-2010) at Moscow State University delivered a speech during a departmental meeting, titled “Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of Their Historical Development”,²⁰⁸ also known later as the “epistemological theses”.

Ilyenkov argues that philosophy, or in the Soviet context, “Marxism”, should be distinguished from the “knowledge of nature and society”, i.e., natural sciences and social sciences. This distinction is against the Stalinist position that “philosophy” covers concrete sciences – dialectical materialism for the studies of nature and historical materialism for the studies of society. Ilyenkov argues that according to the history of philosophy and sciences, the two should not be confused. He acknowledges that philosophy and knowledge were considered as “something whole and unified” in ancient philosophy, but that was due to “its lack of development”, and since Aristotle, the two had been separated.²⁰⁹ Ilyenkov proposes that philosophy should be understood as the “science of sciences”,²¹⁰ to be precise, the “science of scientific thinking, its laws and forms...a materialist science”.²¹¹

The “epistemological theses” was criticized by the Stalinist philosophical establishment for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, Ilyenkov’s redefinition of philosophy or Soviet orthodox was a retreat from the idea that “Marxism” imposes direct control and final verdict over academia to a condition under which Soviet “Marxism” can only indirectly exercise its authority over the epistemological, cogitation-related issues. Practically, the “epistemological theses” demanded the autonomy of natural sciences from political and bureaucratic interventionism²¹² and the restorations of the academic establishments of social sciences disciplines, e.g., sociology,²¹³ anthropology, and political science. The then director of the philosophy department, Moscow State University, A. P. Gagarin (1895-1960), confessed in 1955:

“We, the members of the academic committee, treated our comrades liberally so that the anti-Party ‘Theses’ appeared. Related to the ‘Theses’ is the slogan: doubt everything and

²⁰⁷ S. Žižek, “Evald Ilyenkov’s Cosmology: The Point of Madness of Dialectical Materialism,” *The Philosophical Salon* (Los Angeles Review of Books), Dec. 10, 2018.

²⁰⁸ E. V. Ilyenkov and V. I. Korovikov, “Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of Their Historical Development (1954),” trans. David Bakhurst, *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the 20th Century, a contemporary view from Russia and abroad*, ed. Marin Bykova and Vladimir Lektorsky (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Point 4.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Point 8.

²¹¹ Ibid., Point 14.

²¹² Cf. Joravsky, David. *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science, 1917-1932*. Columbia University Press, 1961.

²¹³ The term “sociology” was avoided and was replaced with historical materialism until 1953 (p. 173), and in 1958, a group of prominent Soviet scholars met at the Institute of Philosophy, USSR Academy of Sciences, and established the Soviet Sociological Association (p. 171), cf. Shalin, Dmitri N. “The Development of Soviet Sociology, 1956-1976.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 4, no. 1 (1978): 171-191.

all problems should be brought up for discussion. Is even the object of philosophy a question that can be discussed? ... This question has been settled once and for all in the first few lines of Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*.²¹⁴

Consequently, Ilyenkov was transferred from the Moscow State University to the USSR Academy of Sciences and Korovikov was dismissed. Ilyenkov and Korovikov were part of a larger academic community named “second university” at the philosophy department, Moscow State University, which also includes P. V. Kopnin (1922-1971)²¹⁵, A. A. Zinoviev (1922-2006), B. A. Grushin (1929-2007), G. P. Shchedrovitsky (1929-1994), M. K. Mamardashvili (1930-1990), et al.²¹⁶ Above all, the very danger of Ilyenkov and his epistemological school colleagues for the metaphysical school was that “Marxism as epistemology” paved a way to individual subjectivity in the pursuit of knowledge, and skepticism, liberalism, ideological pluralism, value nihilism...all came in the way. Ilyenkov was reasonably interested in reforming the Soviet educational system: “Our Schools Must Teach How to Think!”²¹⁷ Indeed, the ability, activity, or creativity of independent thinking is the best antidote to superstition and blind obedience.

The emphasis on subjectivity through reinterpreting Marxist dialectics was a common approach of Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism. In “epistemological theses”, Ilyenkov already suggested that what can be taken as truth and certain is not the whole of knowledge but the approach to knowledge. In *Dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Das Kapital* (1960),²¹⁸ he further developed a philosophical approach to the understandings of *Das Kapital* – the approach of *Das Kapital* is more truthful than the content of *Das Kapital*. The book was strikingly similar to K. Kosík's *Dialektika konkrétního* (1963),²¹⁹ although the latter absorbed Heideggerian existentialism and was subtitled as “a study on problems of man and world” instead of a study on *Das Kapital*.²²⁰ The “concrete” per se was an individual-dimension resistance of the unexamined holistic totality of Soviet orthodoxy.

The intellectual trajectory of Ilyenkov during the 1970s and the cause of his 1979 suicide remain ambiguous. What is certain is that, on the one hand, Ilyenkov encountered increasing political pressures after 1968. The Czechoslovak “socialism with a human face” in 1968 was also “the ideal of the ‘Sixtiers’²²¹ [Soviet] philosophers, for whom the human face was more important than socialism.”²²² The attacks from the orthodoxy camp may have attributed to Ilyenkov's suicide. In

²¹⁴ Cited in An Qinian, 2023.

²¹⁵ Before joining the Institute of Philosophy, USSR Academy of Sciences, Kopnin worked in Kyiv from 1958 to 1968 and is considered a leading figure of the “Kyiv epistemological school”.

²¹⁶ Jia Zelin, 2001: p. 90.

²¹⁷ E. V. Ilyenkov, “Our Schools Must Teach How to Think!” *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2007): 9-49. See also Ilyenkov, Evald V. “A Contribution to the Discussion on School Education (1964).” *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2007): 50-55; Ilyenkov, E. V. “A Contribution to a Conversation About Aesthetic Education (1974).” *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2007): 81-84; Ilyenkov, Evald V. “A Contribution on the Question of the Concept of ‘Activity’ and Its Significance for Pedagogy.” *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2007): 69-74.

²¹⁸ E. V. Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Das Kapital* (1960), trans. Sergei Kuzyakov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982).

²¹⁹ Kosík, Karel. *Dialektika konkrétního*. Praha: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1963.

²²⁰ The book's 3rd chapter “philosophy and economics” does deal with *Das Kapital*, notwithstanding, from a, compared with Ilyenkov, more anthropological approach.

²²¹ As “glasnost [гласность]” referring to both the late 19th century and the mid-1980s Russia, the term “Sixtiers [шестидесятник]” also contains dual meanings: “progressivists of the 1860s Russia” and “generational representatives of the 1960s USSR, who are in favour of liberalization and democratization”, e.g., Gorbachev.

²²² A. A. Guseinov, 2015: p. 97.

December 1968, Ilyenkov's colleague at the Institute of Philosophy, USSR Academy of Sciences E. D. Modrzhinskaya (1910-1982)²²³ reported during a conference held by CPSU Central Committee:

“What just happened in Czechoslovakia may be repeated in the Soviet Union. The leaders of the revisionist forces there are philosophers such as K. Kosík. We also have such philosophers here, e.g., Ilyenkov. He wrote in an article published in the United States that under the socialist system, alienation may also occur.”²²⁴

On the other hand, according to Ilyenkov's student V. A. Lectorsky (1939-), apart from Ilyenkov's tensions with the official ideologues, “some of his supporters began to choose other philosophical paths”.²²⁵ The new philosophy movement or undercurrents during Stagnation (1964-1985), further shifted its focus from knowledge to humanity during the 1970s, when many philosophers disappointed by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia turned to non-Marxist phenomenology, existentialism, anthropology, and Kulturphilosophie methodologically and humanism ideologically. The anti-humanist, orthodox Soviet philosophers after 1953 included Pyotr N. Fedoseev (1908-1990), Mark B. Mitin (1901-1987), F. Vasilyevich Konstantinov (1901-1991), et al.²²⁶

Ilyenkov's writings, especially *The Concept of the Ideal* (1977),²²⁷ during the 1970s do reflect the general trend in Soviet philosophy of “anthropological turn” at that time, but he largely remained as an advocate of scientism, regarding his *Dialectical Logic* (1974)²²⁸ as the true Marxism and “science of science”. This view became increasingly contradictory to the emerging idea that Marxism is a philosophy of liberational activism.

Ivan T. Frolov

When Frolov was studying at the philosophy and biology departments, Moscow State University, law student Gorbachev met the philosophy student, and later his wife Raisa M. Gorbacheva there. Raisa's philosophy schoolmates included I. T. Frolov and the Georgian-Soviet Marxist humanist M. K. Mamardashvili.²²⁹ Frolov's professional career before 1985 was rather conventional. He worked for the USSR Academy of Sciences Press, *Voprosy Filosofii*, and *Questions of Peace and Socialism* (Prague), and became a professor at the philosophy department, Moscow State University in 1971.

Table 3: Frolov's Career under Gorbachev's Leadership

1986 | Editor-in-chief of *Communist* magazine

²²³ Modrzhinskaya previously worked for the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) before she came to the Institute of Philosophy and at the Institute, she was interested in “critique of anticommunism” and monitoring the ideological tendencies of the philosophers.

²²⁴ Cited in An Qinian, 2023.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ De George, Richard T., and Lion Chernyak, “Book Review on Marxism in the USSR: A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought by James P. Scanlan,” *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 33, no.1 (1987): p. 76.

²²⁷ E. V. Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic, Essays on its History and Theory*, trans. H. Campbell Creighton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

²²⁸ E. V. Ilyenkov, “The Concept of the Ideal,” pp. 71-99. *Philosophy in the USSR: Problems of Dialectical Materialism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977). See also Ilyenkov, Evald V. “Humanism and Science,” pp. 258-277 *Teoksessa: Science and Morality* (Progress, Moscow, 1975); Ilyenkov, Evald V. “The Biological and the Social in Man.” *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2007): 64-68.

²²⁹ An Qinian, 1997.

	Member of the CPSU Central Committee
1987	Ideological Assistant to the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee President of the Soviet Philosophical Society Academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences
1989	Editor-in-chief of <i>Pravda</i> Member of the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee
1990	Member of the 28 th Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee
1991	President of the Institute of Human Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Tabulation: author.

After March 1985 when Gorbachev came to power, “neohumanist” I. T. Frolov’s “humane and democratic socialism”²³⁰ expeditiously became the mainstream of Soviet philosophy,²³¹ ending with philosophical pluralization in 1991.²³²

In the last years of Soviet Union under Gorbachev, “the notion of a rationally planned economy administered by a single-party state has been completely undermined, and almost all Soviet thinkers now look to ‘the free market’ for a solution to the country’s growing economic problems. Freedom of speech is becoming a reality... Philosophy students are now encouraged to think for themselves and to view their subject as a resource for the discussion of both social and personal issues.”²³³ Not surprisingly, Ilyenkov’s life and works were revived by journals such as *Voprosy Filosofii*.²³⁴

The slogan “humane, democratic socialism” during the 19th Congress of the Central Committee of the CPSU in June 1988 was proposed by Frolov behind the scenes.²³⁵ The period when Frolov served as the de facto chief ideologue of the CPSU witnessed tremendous changes within the Soviet Union and beyond. The Soviet philosophers started rewriting philosophical textbooks, resulting in *Introduction to Philosophy* (1989)²³⁶ chiefly edited by Frolov. The textbook largely abandoned the form and substance of Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. The names of Marx, Engels, and Lenin remain in the textbook, but it also introduces Kant and German idealism,²³⁷ non-Marxist philosophies of the 20th century,²³⁸ and Gorbachev’s “new thinking”.²³⁹ In the chapter of the history of philosophy, it highlights the contrast of medieval theocentrism vs. Renaissance anthropocentrism.²⁴⁰ Moreover, large space is given to topics such as human, praxis, personality,²⁴¹ and the closing remark was titled “humanist philosophy and philosophical

²³⁰ M. S. Gorbachev, “Our Ideal Is a Democratic, Humane Socialism (report to the CPSU Central Committee meeting),” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 5, 1990, Moscow.

²³¹ I. T. Frolov, 2016; pp. 33-34.

²³² An Qinian, 2020.

²³³ David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, pp. 21-22.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²³⁵ I. T. Frolov, 2016.

²³⁶ Фролов, Иван Тимофеевич, Э. А. Араб-Оглы, Г. С. Арефьева, П. П. Гайденоко, В. Ж. Келле, М. С. Козлова, В. А. Лекторский et al. «Введение в философию». 1989.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, Ch. 3: §8-9.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, Ch. 5.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 19: §3.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Ch. 3: §4-5.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 10-11; 18.

humanism”. If there is any ideological monism in the textbook, it would be less of “Marxism” but more of humanism, or a synthesis of Marxist humanism.

Chinese Students at 1950s Moscow

Almost at the same time when Stalin died, the People’s Republic of China started sending fully funded students to study in the Eastern Bloc states, predominantly the Soviet Union. Amongst them some went to the philosophy department at Moscow State University, e.g., Jia Zelin (1934-), Chen Yunquan (1935-), and Ma Jihua (1933-2002). All three studied there from 1954 to 1959. After returning to China, Jia and Chen worked at the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (then Chinese Academy of Sciences) and Ma worked at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

While studying in Moscow, Jia lived in the Стромынка dormitory, where according to Raisa’s memoir *Я надеюсь...* (1991), her wedding with Gorbachev was held in the fall of 1953. In fact, “many of those ‘Sixtiers’ (especially philosophers) who actively supported the post-1985 Reform used to be residents of the dormitory.”²⁴²

In *12 Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup found the resigned attitude of slaves in the American South frustrating. Northup was different because he used to be a freeman in the State of New York. Once freedom is being tasted, one can no longer endure slavery. It was such a spirit unsatisfied with the status quo that made him free again. Like Northup, the Sixtiers were different because they once experienced the Thaw, and thus could no longer endure re-Stalinization. The two decades of Stagnation failed to extinguish the spark of freedom, which the Sixtiers eventually rekindled.

With limited Russian proficiency and political experiences, these 20-year-olds were not fully aware of the silent changes in the Soviet Union at that time. Jia wrote in his memoir: “we did not understand the background and truth of many things that happened in the five years...What we knew was mostly vague and superficial...a smooth graduation was the highest goal that we sought at that time.”²⁴³

Soon later, alongside the Sino-Soviet split during the late 1950s, Chinese students in the Soviet Union felt “ominous premonition”,²⁴⁴ and Beijing eventually terminated the program. The next time when Chinese scholars became able to freely engage with Soviet philosophy was in the 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, the Sino-Soviet relationship was not officially normalized until Gorbachev’s official visit to China in 1989 – the last time was Khrushchev in 1959, but academic and other non-official exchanges were restored earlier.

Not every Chinese scholar educated or specializing in Russo-Soviet philosophy is a Marxist humanist. Amongst Jia, Chen, and Ma, only Jia and Ma fit into this category. Except for his 1961 co-translation of an article authored by a Soviet academic, which was titled “Humanism”²⁴⁵ and might

²⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

²⁴³ Jia Zelin, 2001: pp. 10-11.

²⁴⁴ Jia Zelin, 2001: pp. 10.

²⁴⁵ Denisova, 1961.

be a product of the Thaw, it is unconvincing to associate academician Chen with Marxist humanism.²⁴⁶

Jia's *Annals of Soviet Philosophy: 1953-1976* (1979)²⁴⁷ was the first work to outline the evolution of Soviet philosophy during this period of time. He was apparently impressed by Ilyenkov in particular and described him as a "striking" figure. Jia wrote:

"Ilyenkov strongly opposes the simplified, vulgar move to make dialectics 'sum of instances', i.e., illustrating ready-made and well-known dialectic laws and categories with examples drawn at hand from various fields of knowledge. He points out that...this kind of dialectics is not needed by natural scientists and is viewed by them as a merely empty play on words, a trick to shoehorn anything into an abstract, universal schema."²⁴⁸

Jia also wrote about B. M. Kedrov (1903-1985),²⁴⁹ who was associated with the epistemological school. Chinese academia was intensively observing the trends of Soviet philosophy after 1985. After attending a 1987 conference on logic, scientific methodology, and philosophy of science in the Soviet Union, Jia said during an interview:

"The past two years since the April 1985 Conference of the CPSU is arguably the most exciting period in Soviet history...Soviet political economists have quickly followed up [Gorbachev's Reform], so have the historians, not to mention the artists – they are on the frontline."²⁵⁰

The interviewer ended with a suggestive concluding remark: "isn't our country also cleaning up the things distorted and attached by dogmatism? An intellectual spring is bound to come."²⁵¹

From April to May 1989, the 3rd National Conference on Soviet Philosophy was held in China. Jia published a conference summary titled "Reform, Philosophy, and the Problem of Human",²⁵² in which he wrote: "before 1985, human philosophy experienced a tortuous and difficult process of ignoring, resisting, criticizing and adapting,"²⁵³ thanks to "tenacious struggle of philosophers such as Kopnin and Frolov", Soviet academia is now catching up with "the tide of the world".²⁵⁴ The Chinese participants of the conference "highly regarded *Introduction to Philosophy*, describing it as the "manifestation of the required philosophy for the Reform era".²⁵⁵

Jia remained in contact with Frolov. The last time he saw Frolov was in June 1999, when they were attending the 2nd All-Russian Philosophical Congress in Yekaterinburg, Frolov told him that

²⁴⁶ Due to time and length limits, the chapter focuses on only Jia. Another negotiator between Soviet and Chinese Marxist humanisms, who had no educational experience in the Soviet Union, is An Qian (1947-), a doyen of "Frolov studies" in China.

²⁴⁷ Jia Zelin, 1979.

²⁴⁸ Jia Zelin, 1982: p. 69.

²⁴⁹ Jia Zelin, 1985.

²⁵⁰ Yuan Shiyin, 1987: p. 3.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁵² Jia Zelin, 1989. See also Bo, Xu. "The Third National Conference on Soviet Philosophy." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 39, no. 2 (1990): 141-148.

²⁵³ Jia Zelin, 1989: p. 35.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

he would soon visit Shanghai.²⁵⁶ Unexpectedly, the infirm Frolov died in Hangzhou when he stopped by there.

Other notable Chinese figures who studied in the Soviet Union during the 1950s include historian Zheng Yifan (1935-) and civil jurist Jiang Ping (1930-2023). Both Zheng and Ma were students at Fudan and went to the USSR in 1954. Zheng studied history at Leningrad State University. Zheng's works on Soviet history, especially the pieces written and published since the 1980s, demonstrate an assessment of the Soviet system that is similar to the style of Marxist humanism. Jiang studied law at Kazan (1951-1953) and Moscow State University (1953-1956) and got acquainted with Gorbachev²⁵⁷ and Jia.²⁵⁸ Jiang served as the President of China University of Political Science and Law (1988-1990) before he was removed for his sympathy towards student protesters and became an unequivocal advocator of the protection of individual rights and constitutionalism in China.

Six Gentlemen at 1980s Fudan

Apart from translational and introductory works by those born in the 1930s, a younger generation from the philosophy department at Fudan made original contributions to the Chinese equivalent of “epistemological theses” in the early 1980s.

From 2nd to 10th June 1983, at a philosophical conference held in Guilin on “Modern Natural Science and Marxist Epistemology”,²⁵⁹ later known as the Guilin Conference, six graduates – master's students Yu Wujin (1948-2014), An Yanming (1955-), Wu Xiaoming (1957-), and doctoral students Zhou Yicheng (1946-), Xie Xialing (1945-), Chen Kuide (1946-), later known as six gentlemen [junzi²⁶⁰] from Fudan,²⁶¹ co-authored a paper, titled *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, later also known as the “epistemology reform theses”. Behind *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* was the unsung hero Li Jizong (1937-), then deputy director of the philosophy department at Fudan (director was vacant) and one of the main organizers of the Guilin Conference. He assigned the six authors of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* to co-author this conclusive speech at the end of the Conference.²⁶²

Opinions on Epistemology (Draft) argues that the existing dogma of epistemology is “in a sense, separated from the torrent of scientific development, [which] seems narrow-minded, outdated and poor”,²⁶³ because “modern sciences have proved that the subject does not know the object only under the influence of the object, but more importantly, the subject must influence the object.”²⁶⁴ Furthermore, “no truth is purely objective, but the unity of subjectivity and objectivity... Truth is

²⁵⁶ Jia Zelin, 2001: p. 97.

²⁵⁷ Jiang Ping, 2010: p. 86.

²⁵⁸ Jia Zelin, 2001: p. 40.

²⁵⁹ Yu Wujin and Zhou Yicheng, 1983.

²⁶⁰ The Confucian term corresponding to gentleman.

²⁶¹ Another notable participant at the 1983 Guilin Conference was Ding Xueliang (1953-), who graduated from the philosophy department at Fudan in 1982 and was a researcher at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (now Academy of Marxism), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, alongside reformist theoreticians Yu Guangyuan and Su Shaozhi. Amidst the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, he almost failed to receive his master's degree because of his master's thesis on Marxist humanism, which later received an academic prize that enabled his studies in the United States, where he earned PhD in sociology at Harvard in 1992, under the tutelage of Daniel Bell.

²⁶² Zhou Yicheng, 2023: pp. 17-23.

²⁶³ Zhou Yicheng, 2020: “Opinions on Epistemology (Draft),” Preface.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Point 2.

not singular, truth allows multiple. The multiplication of truth is a basic premise of the progress of human civilization.”²⁶⁵ The authors call for a re-evaluation of Kantian subjectivity²⁶⁶ and Humean empiricism²⁶⁷ and suggest that the essence of Marx’s philosophy is “the theory of practice” that transcends the dichotomy of subjectivity and objectivity.²⁶⁸

On 8th June, Chen Kuide delivered the speech at the Conference, which received overwhelming appreciation, “at least 70 out of 70 plus participants appreciated it”, and many participants asked for a hard copy of the speech.²⁶⁹ However, Xiao Qian (1924-2007), philosophy professor from Renmin University of China, in his remarks criticized *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* point by point for being deviating from the “fundamental principles of Marxist epistemology”, insisting that “the interpretation or textbook system of Marxist philosophy must remain unchanged for centuries”.²⁷⁰

Xiao’s dissatisfaction came from his role in editing the textbook *Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism*, which was originally edited by Chinese Marxist philosopher Ai Siqu (1910-1966) in 1961. The Ai Siqu textbook was the first of its kind Marxist philosophy textbook that was adopted nationwide. Xiao Qian, then a secretary of Ai Siqu, was amongst its main contributors. After the Cultural Revolution, Xiao Qian co-edited *Principles of Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism*, which was based on the Ai Siqu textbook.²⁷¹ From Ai Siqu to Xiao Qian, the official Chinese textbook structurally followed Ch. 4: §2 of Stalin’s *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (1938), titled “Dialectical and Historical Materialism”.²⁷²

As one of the authors, An Yanming recalled, “the specific content and even ideas of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* were not consistent, but the object it challenged was completely clear.”²⁷³ That was the dominant interpretation of Marxist philosophy back to the Stalin era. Thus, *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* emerged in a context almost identical with to the one in which “epistemological theses” emerged in Moscow, and both documents shared the same object to be challenged, a focus on epistemology, and a common ground: subjectivity. Whereas in the 1954 text, subjectivity was limited to the realm of epistemology, the six gentlemen extended subjectivity to praxis and a less explicit expression of humanism. In terms of the contents, “epistemological theses” focused on “the object of philosophy”, while *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* proposed an alternate system of Marxism on a much wider range of subjects from epistemology, subjectivity, to praxis. The proposal of ideological pluralism in *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* went far beyond “epistemological theses”.

In fact, *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* was not simple imitation or even plagiarism of “epistemological theses”, but an original contribution to the praxis-based Marxist epistemology in the light of Jean Piaget’s theoretical framework of genetic epistemology.²⁷⁴ In contrast to the reflection theory of the orthodox interpretation of Marxism that regards subject as passive and mechanic receiver of external information, genetic epistemology shows that human perception also “depends on the

²⁶⁵ Ibid., Point 4.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Point 5.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., Point 6.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., Point 8.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁷¹ Correspondence with An Yanming, 19th April 2023.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Zhou Yicheng, 2023: p. 9, 18, 24.

observer's experience, knowledge, expectations, and general psychological state".²⁷⁵ What coincided with the Six Gentlemen at Fudan was Praxist philosopher Rudi Supek, who was a student of Piaget while studying psychology at Paris and later incorporated Piaget's psychology into the praxis-based Marxist epistemology and aesthetics.²⁷⁶ Behind such an epistemological paradigm shift was a new focus on human agency and subjectivity.

Given the fact that Ilyenkov was introduced to China chronologically beforehand, there might be evidence of causality between the 1954 "epistemological theses" and 1983 *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. In terms of their intellectual backgrounds, the six gentlemen did not study in the Soviet Union during the 1950s and were more familiar with German-language philosophical literature. Yu, with arguably the highest philosophical achievements amongst the six, later earned his joint PhD between Fudan and Frankfurt. An became a researcher on Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher. Xie published intensively on Kant. Wu focused on the history of Marxism. Notably, Zhou, who was amongst the six the only one interested in Soviet philosophy and dialectics of nature,²⁷⁷ had already "read some articles by Kedrov, Kopnin, and Frolov",²⁷⁸ and translated an interview with Kedrov in 1980²⁷⁹ and an article by Kopnin in 1981,²⁸⁰ it is thus legitimate to assume that Zhou played a role in agenda setting when drafting the *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. Zhou kept following the dynamics of Soviet philosophy after 1985 and noted Frolov's role in Soviet Marxist humanism.²⁸¹

Born and raised in Shanghai, where middle schools had their foreign language classes divided into English and Russian during the 1960s, Zhou was assigned to the Russian group.²⁸² He kept his eye on the dynamics in the Soviet Union, from Vsevolod Kochetov's *Regional Committee Party Secretary* (1959) to Russian-language academic journals subscribed by the philosophy department at Fudan such as *Voprosy Filosofii*, from *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980) to "the studies and promotion of human, human nature, and humanism in the Soviet philosophical and political circles and the whole society at large during the period from the 20th to the 22nd National Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."²⁸³

According to Li Jizong, "Xiao Qian's negative attitude towards *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* represented the old forces behind the academic circle",²⁸⁴ namely, the conservative politicians within the Party. The incident was deemed a case of "spiritual pollution" in the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign later this year. It remains unclear how the document was reported to the Ministry of Education and/or the Party's publicity department – Xiao Qian was suspicious, but no evidence has been found.²⁸⁵ For criticizing the textbook definition of epistemology, the authors of *Opinions*

²⁷⁵ Zhou Yicheng, 2020: "Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)," Point 2.

²⁷⁶ Rudi Supek, *Umjetnost i psihologija* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1958).

²⁷⁷ As a field of study, dialectics of nature was the Soviet equivalent of philosophy and history of science.

²⁷⁸ Correspondence with Zhou Yicheng, 23rd April 2023.

²⁷⁹ Zhou Yicheng, 1980.

²⁸⁰ Zhou Yicheng, 1981.

²⁸¹ Zhou Yicheng, 1988.

²⁸² Correspondence with Zhou Yicheng, 25th April 2023.

²⁸³ Zhou Yicheng, 2023: p. 39.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 265.

on *Epistemology (Draft)* were forced to attend a “reeducation class” and do “self-criticism” from 22nd October to 2nd December 1983, the heyday of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign.²⁸⁶

Alongside the end of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, the storm was quickly over. The six gentlemen did not stop their unorthodox philosophical sophistication. When the political atmosphere turned better, they resumed their collective activities, including a series of commentaries based on the spirit of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*.²⁸⁷ They co-authored “Brief Discussions on Several Problems in Philosophy Reform”²⁸⁸ and “Economic System Reform and the Destruction of the Worship of Dogma”²⁸⁹ in 1985, suggesting that “philosophy reform” must follow up the economic reform as manifested in the remarkable 1984 *Decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Economic System Reform*.²⁹⁰ Yu Wujin, Wu Xiaoming, and Zhou Yicheng, while teaching at Fudan, co-authored “On Academic Freedom”,²⁹¹ “Truth Exists in All Schools of Thought”,²⁹² “Academic Debates Should Abide by the Rules of Reciprocity”,²⁹³ and “On the Theoretical Basis of the Double Hundred Policy”²⁹⁴, all in *Jiefang Daily* – the official daily newspaper of the Party’s Shanghai committee, from 1985 to 1986.

Without the philosophical inexplicitness of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, these essays written in a journalistic style for the general public better explained their intentions: behind the discourses of Marxist epistemology were their liberal advocacies for academic freedom, pluralism, and equality of opportunity. Their reference to the 1956 “Double Hundred” policy, i.e., “let a *hundred* flowers bloom, let a *hundred* schools of thought contend”, reflected the contextual comparability amongst China’s Spring of 1957 and 1980s reform, the 20th Congress of the CPSU and Khrushchev’s Thaw that nurtured the generation of Sixtiers, and Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Poznań June, and Polish October, etc., which inspired and/or were inspired by Lukács György, Adam Schaff, et al.

Taking advantage of the new Thaw brought by the end of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, Deng’s Southern Tour in early 1984 and the 3rd plenary session of the 12th Party Congress in October that came up with the *Decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Economic System Reform*, a series of philosophical lectures were held at Fudan’s 3108 Hall, where President Reagan just visited in April 1984, from November 1984 to January 1985. The six gentlemen delivered lectures partially based on *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* during the lecture series – “The Status of Human in Marxism” by An Yanming, “Reform and the Mission of Philosophy” by Yu Wujin, “Sartre and Existentialism” by Wu Xiaoming, “Pluralism and Dogmatism” by Chen Kuide, “Toynbee’s Philosophy of History and Modern Chinese History” and “Kantian Ethics and the Great Tradition of Western Humanism” by Xie Xialing, and “The New Thinkings of Contemporary Soviet Philosophers” by Zhou Yicheng,²⁹⁵ which then received positive coverage by *Jiefang Daily* and *People’s Daily*.²⁹⁶ An Yanming recalled:

²⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 153-202.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁸⁸ Xie Xialing, Chen Kuide, et al., 1985.

²⁸⁹ Zhou Yicheng, 2023: pp. 205-210 [*Wenhui Bao* (Shanghai), 25th January 1985].

²⁹⁰ CPC, 1984.

²⁹¹ Zhou Yicheng, 2023: pp. 223-227 [*Jiefang Daily* (Shanghai), 23rd January 1985].

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 228-231 [*Jiefang Daily* (Shanghai), 12th February 1985].

²⁹³ Ibid., pp. 232-236 [*Jiefang Daily* (Shanghai), 20th March 1985, reposted on 15th April 1985 in *People’s Daily*].

²⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 237-243 [*Jiefang Daily* (Shanghai), 28th May 1985].

²⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 250-256.

“When I walked up to the podium in the 3108 Hall as the first speaker in the lecture series, more than 200 seats were packed, and even the corridors and aisles were filled with audience. I talked about the status of human in Marxism, human freedom, dignity and liberation... I have never had such passion and an audience that had such a warm response. After the speech, I and many in the audience shed tears amid waves of applause.”²⁹⁷

The real turning point in their life trajectories was 1989. After graduation, Yu, Wu, and Xie became professors at Fudan. Zhou also taught at Fudan, but left after 1989, becoming an editor of the renowned émigré journal *Beijing Spring* in the United States. An came back to Beijing, and worked at the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, but eventually went to the U.S. in 1991, becoming a professor of philosophy at Clemson University. Chen went to the U.S. in 1990 and served as the President of Princeton China Initiative and continues to take active roles in the democracy movements of China, including as a columnist for *Radio Free Asia* (Mandarin).

A Side Story of Hwang Jang-yop

Another unforeseeable and noteworthy outcome of the 1950s internationalization of the student body of the philosophy department at Moscow State University was Hwang Jang-yop (1923-2010). After receiving the orthodox education of Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* and obtaining his PhD (1953) there, Hwang became the chief ideologue of the Workers' Party of Korea.²⁹⁸ He not only helped to develop the Juche Idea²⁹⁹ or what was later known as Kimilsungism, but also served as the President of Kim Il-sung University from 1965 to 1979 and as the Chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly from 1972 to 1983. In 1997, he defected to South Korea, calling for Pyongyang to follow China's "reform and opening-up" and gradual democratization thereupon.³⁰⁰

There is no doubt that Hwang belongs to the reformist force in Soviet-type capitals and is a humanist for his advocacy for human rights in North Korea, but whether he could be identified as a "Marxist" humanist for his philosophical sophistication is disputable, as Pyongyang had long replaced Marxism with a set of ideologies that constitute the so-called Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the official orthodox.³⁰¹ The case of Hwang shows that the nominal presence of "Marxism" is insignificant in Soviet-type societies because the dominant ideology, regardless of its verbal designation, is substantially based on the contextual need of Soviet-type societies.

It is conceivable that had Pyongyang under Kim Jong Il decided to open up to the world by the end of the Cold War, following what Vietnam and Laos did, not only could Hwang's defection have been avoided, but he could also have become North Korea's Ivan Frolov (advisor for Gorbachev), Radovan Richta (advisor for Dubček), or Guo Luoji (alleged advisor for Hu Yaobang), humanizing the official orthodox in line with new realities.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.10.

²⁹⁸ Justin Corfield, "Hwang Jang Yop," *Historical Dictionary of Pyongyang* (London: Anthem Press, 2014), p. 62.

²⁹⁹ See also *Juche Idea: Answers to Hundred Questions*. Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2014; So, Chae-Jong and Suh, Jae-Jung. *Origins of North Korea's Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

³⁰⁰ Justin Corfield, p. 63.

³⁰¹ Lee, Rachel Minyoung. "Kim Jong Un: Rise to Power and Leadership Style (Born 1984)." In *Dictators and Autocrats*, pp. 265-281. Routledge, 2021.

On the contrary, post-Cold War North Korea made itself a reference of a living fossil, and of a case scenario for outsiders to imagine what if China's paused economic reforms after 1989 did not restart in 1992. In fact, the autarkists such as Deng Liqun, the proactive oppressor of 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism, continued his belief in the Soviet model and China's 1950s adaptation of it until his death. The notion of Northkoreanization became increasingly unpopular and marginalized, especially amongst China's more modernized parts alongside the country's marketization and participation in the U.S.-led globalization since the 1990s. However, the 1980s conservatives such as writer Wei Hongjie (1920-2008), economist Li Chengrui (1922-2017),³⁰² literary critic Lin Mohan (1913-2008), journalist Yu Quanyu (1935-2010), et al. and their journal *The Pursuit of Truth*, remained as an appreciable force after 1992, in competition with the remnant of 1980s reformists and their journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu*.

Conclusions

To understand the intellectual phenomenon of Marxist humanism, it is vital to trace back the origin to which Marxist humanism was motivated to oppose, i.e., the orthodox stream in Soviet philosophy and its enforcement in various Soviet-type capitals after World War II. The conventional dichotomy between "Soviet orthodoxy" and "(Central) European heterodoxy" is misleading, as it fails to recognize the universality of humanism and Marxist humanist streams in Moscow and beyond.

A. I. Volodin (1933-2004) outlined three interpretations of Soviet philosophy in post-Soviet Russian academia: break, suppression, and progress.³⁰³ The interpretation of "break" neglects the continuation of pre-1917 Russian philosophical and religious traditions and institutions both official and underflowing during the Soviet period. The interpretation of "suppression" points out the rigidity and inhumaneness of Soviet orthodoxy, but it neglects the trend of humanization in the Soviet philosophical circle after 1953. The interpretation of "progress" overlooks the propagandist occupation of the intellectual sphere where philosophical pluralism should be flourishing. Is there a paradigm that could better characterize the multifaceted Soviet philosophical dynamics?

At first glance, the post-1953 Soviet philosophy appears to be a profound transformation from scientism during Thaw to humanism during Reform, but the mainline had essentially been something similar to the classic antagonism of humanism vs. religion. The Soviet philosophy serves as religion, not in an ideational sense – materialism cannot accommodate religion, but in an institutional sense, that its orthodox domination excludes free will and oppresses subjectivity.³⁰⁴ It is misleading, vulgar, and of Zhdanov Doctrine to describe the antagonism of humanism vs. religion as the politically incorrect "idealism" vs. the politically correct "materialism". In fact, both Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment materialism were against their idealist opponents. The idealization of Soviet orthodoxy was exactly how Soviet philosophy turned to be religion, and in the sense of opposing Soviet orthodoxy, Soviet Marxist humanism, from epistemologicalism to humanism – the 1980s "new thinking" of the Sixtiers was exactly what Ilyenkov called for during

³⁰² Li was a former secretary of conservative leader Li Xiannian (1909-1992).

³⁰³ Volodin, A. I. "The Three Ps, or, On Contemporary Versions of the History of Russian Philosophy in the Soviet Period." *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (2000): 70-78.

³⁰⁴ Maidansky, Andrey, and Vesa Oittinen, ed, *The Practical Essence of Man: The 'Activity Approach' in Late Soviet Philosophy*. Brill, 2015.

the Thaw, defended the materialistic legitimacy of human desire and agency. Chinese aesthetician Gao Ertai, who was at least once upon a time a Marxist humanist, wrote with the same logic:

“From the time when Marx voiced these criticisms and placed ‘human’ at the center of world history, while also pointing out that establishing the position of the subject is proof of human freedom – that is, of human essence – and from the time when Marx emphasized that the real human world, including various social relations, ideological states, and the natural world ‘possessed by human,’ is the product of human creativity and a human manifestation formed in history and developed historically, and that man should and can emancipate himself from all that, all previous notions of the human essence became outdated and were no longer worth being seriously debated.”³⁰⁵

The emphasis on human was not accidental or without its concrete context of ideological monism and inhumane oppression in Soviet-type societies from Moscow, Beijing, to Pyongyang. An Yan-ming mentioned the “Zeitgeist” of China’s long 1980s: “it was liberation, i.e., avoiding, rejecting, and denying any form of political persecution and shackles; it was freedom, i.e., pursuing and encouraging different academic paths and intellectual explorations, and expecting to live one’s life with individuality and dignity.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Ertai, Gao. “On the Essence of Man.” *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (1993): p. 27.

³⁰⁶ Zhou Yicheng, 2023: p. 10.

V. Receptions of East-Central European Marxist Humanism³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ Part of this chapter was based on the author's coursework, "Transnationalism of Marxist Humanism in Soviet-Type Capitals," submitted to Trencsényi Balázs in the 2022-2023 winter term at CEU.

Introduction

Following the previous chapter focusing on the transnational entanglements of Soviet Marxist humanism as the result of humanization of Soviet philosophy (religion) after the 1953 death of Stalin, this chapter examines the Chinese receptions of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type (excluding Soviet Union) capitals, namely, East-Central European capitals such as Budapest (Hungary), Prague (Czechoslovakia), Warsaw – Poznań (Poland), and Belgrade – Zagreb (Yugoslavia). The representatives of East-Central European Marxist humanism include movements such as Praxis school and Budapest school, figures such as Lukács György, Márkus György, Karel Kosík, Ivan Sviták, Radovan Richta, Leszek Kołakowski, Mihailo Marković, and Milovan Đilas, as well as texts such as *Dictatorship over Needs* (1983), *Dialectics of the Concrete* (1963),³⁰⁸ *Main Currents of Marxism* (1978),³⁰⁹ “Why Praxis International” (1981),³¹⁰ and *The New Class* (1957).³¹¹

This chapter aims to investigate the not-yet-discovered receptions of East-Central European Marxist humanism during China’s long 1980s, especially in two thematic debates, one on Humanism and Alienation during the early 1980s and another on Praxis Materialism during the late 1980s. First, it explores the positive (is) and normative (ought) accounts of the concept of “Soviet-type society” in which Marxist humanism emerged as an intellectual counterforce to the orthodox interpretation of Marxism in defense of the Soviet-type society. The following parts analyze three keywords in Marxist humanism: (1) humanism, (2) alienation, and (3) praxis materialism. The last but not least part discusses Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies in relation to Western Marxism, especially the similarities and differences in their contexts and interpretations.

What the Soviet-Type Society Is

In order to understand Marxist humanism as an oppositional interpretation of Marxism, it is critical to figure out not only what orthodox interpretation of Marxism was in Soviet-type societies, i.e., the texts of Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* and its derivatives, which Marxist humanists argued against, but also the contexts of Soviet-type societies in which Marxist humanism emerged and to which Marxist humanism opposed. Concerning this issue were two questions: (1) what the Soviet-type society *is* as a positive matter, and (2) what the Soviet-type society *ought* to be from different normative perspectives.

While I use the term “society-type society”, I acknowledge that there have been various substitutable terms for what it stands for. However, no matter which term is in use, the object it refers to remains identical. *Dictatorship over Needs* termed it “Soviet-type society”³¹². Đilas named it the “communist system”.³¹³ Officially, it was self-identified as “real socialism”³¹⁴ during the Brezhnev Stagnation. Alternatively, Sovietologists prefer to use eponymous terms of political ideologies

³⁰⁸ Kosík, Karel. *Dialektika konkrétního*. Praha: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1963.

³⁰⁹ Kołakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

³¹⁰ Marković, Mihailo. “Why Praxis International? (Editorial)” *Praxis International*, 1 (1981), 1, pp. 1-5.

³¹¹ Đilas, Milovan. *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1957.

³¹² Fehér, Ferenc, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus. *Dictatorship over Needs*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983; Lane, Christel. “Dictatorship over Needs (Book Review).” *Sociology* (1983): 584-587.

³¹³ Đilas, 1957.

³¹⁴ Cox, Robert W. “‘Real Socialism’ in Historical Perspective.” *Socialist Register* 27 (1991).

such as Stalinism, Khrushchevism, Brezhnevism, Gorbachevism, Husákism, Kádárism, Titoism, etc. to avoid the trap of generalization.

A key feature of the Soviet-type society, as pointed out by many and reflected by Marxist humanists, is that the Rousseauian “inequality among men”³¹⁵ still systematically exists. In Marxist terminology, that is to say, the “socialist” society under the Communist Party’s leadership remains a “class” society instead of a classless society, which was supposed and declared to be.

The sociological feature of inequality among men is not exclusive to the Soviet-type society, but on the contrary, a normality in human society throughout civilizational history. This normality is also a prerequisite for the Marxist assessment that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”³¹⁶ If there is no inequality, there would be no class, not to mention class struggle. Having said that, the problem is not the inequality per se, but that the Marxists were committed to eliminating systematic inequality, while whether it is feasible in reality remains uncertain, thus resulting in a thorny contradiction.

According to Marx’s analyses of the 19th century Britain in *Das Kapital*, the commonest form of inequality among men within capitalist system was based on the systematically unequal distribution of means of production, especially capital. Reasonably, the socialist society that is theorized to replace capitalism is envisioned upon the abolition of the market economy. However, capitalism was not the only system Marx and Engels opposed but was amongst a series of types of class society. With the abolition of the market economy, the commonest form of inequality among men existing in Soviet-type society was surely not capital-based, but something else. For example, Dīlas wrote:

“Even the most cursory observation reveals how, for example, contemporary Soviet bureaucracy is not without a connecting link with the Czarist system in which the officials were, as Engels noted, ‘a distinct class’. Somewhat the same thing can also be said of the manner of government in Yugoslavia.”³¹⁷

Márkus made a similar observation that the command economy that replaced the market economy did not result in the elimination of class but created “the privileged bureaucratic stratum which, through the one-party system, exercises a dictatorship over the needs of the vast majority of the population” and “antagonistic relations between the corporate ruling group and the rest of the population”.³¹⁸ A new dichotomy could be added after “freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed”³¹⁹: the “new class” with nomenklatura at its core and the rest of the population in Soviet-type societies.

The analyses by Dīlas and Márkus belong to a broader perspective of reflections on the, for sincere leftists, frustrating reality that in Soviet-type society, most people were not the ruling class, but the

³¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, trans. Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.

³¹⁶ Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto (1848),” pp. 98-137, *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969.

³¹⁷ Dīlas, 1957: p. 173.

³¹⁸ Lane, 1983: p. 585; Fehér et al., 1983: pp. 106-136.

³¹⁹ Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, 1848.

ruled class. *The Intelligentsia on the Road to Class Power* (1979)³²⁰ by Konrád György and Szelényi Iván was a similar work in this regard.

What the Soviet-Type Society Ought to Be

Given these abovementioned descriptions of Soviet-type society, the further question is, then, what it *ought* to be. The two fundamental positions in politics and/or attitudes towards the status quo are preservation or change.³²¹ There is no doubt that the orthodox interpretation of Marxism in defense of the Soviet-type society was for preserving the status quo and against change. Based on the shared acknowledgement of the reality in Soviet-type societies, however, those aiming to change the status quo proposed different types of solutions. It is exactly the normative solution instead of descriptive depiction that determines one's ideological position. In opposition to Soviet-type societies is not necessarily a liberal and/or reformist stance; it could also be a revolutionary stance.

A typical revolutionary stance against the status quo in Soviet-type society was Trotskyism. In *The New Class*, Đilas criticized the revolutionary illusion brought up by Trotsky, who was amongst the first to point out the systematic inequality of Soviet society, that the Stalinist degeneration could and should be overcome by another Leninist revolution. From a typically liberal point of view, Đilas insisted on the principle that no just end without just procedure: "Trotsky...did not go much further in his reasoning...Throughout history there have never been ideal ends which were attained with non-ideal, inhumane means, just as there has been no free society which was built by slaves."³²²

Similarly, in Part III of *Dictatorship over Needs*, Fehér Ferenc outlined the Budapest school's solution to the problematic Soviet-type society: "introduction of market elements...decentralization of the economy and self-management...through the equilibrating function of the market".³²³ According to the classification in *Dictatorship over Needs*, notably, Yugoslavia, for its freest economy in the Eastern Bloc, was the only exception to the concept of Soviet-type society. While for mainstream Trotskyists, Yugoslavia under Tito was still an object of a Leninist revolution.

The reformist politicians and economists, and revisionist or humanist philosophers came to a consensus. During the Prague Spring, which Fehér et al. referred to as an exemplar of their advocacy, Marxist humanist philosopher Karel Kosík and chief architect of the short-lived Czechoslovak economic reform Ota Šik actively supported the Dubčekian platform and were denounced by the Husák regime afterwards.³²⁴

Márkus revealed the humanist philosophical arguments for marketization in Soviet-type societies, which could be found in Chinese Marxist humanist discourses in defense of the 1980s Chinese economic reforms as well: command economy constitutes the dictatorship over economic needs,

³²⁰ Konrád György and Szelényi Iván, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. Andrew Arato and Richard E. Allen. New York: Harcourt, 1979.

³²¹ Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?" *The Journal of Politics* 19, no. 3 (1957): p. 343.

³²² Đilas, 1957: pp. 157-162.

³²³ Lane, 1983: p. 586; Fehér et al., 1983: pp. 264-279.

³²⁴ ÚV KSČ, *Poučení z krizového vývoje ve straně a společnosti po XIII. sjezdu KSČ: rezoluce o aktuálních otázkách jednoty strany schválená na plenárním zasedání ÚV KSČ v prosinci 1970*. Praha: Odd. propagandy a agitace ÚV KSČ, 1971.

so as party-state constitutes the dictatorship over political needs, ideological monism constitutes the dictatorship over intellectual needs...what command economy has brought about is political dependence of the population.³²⁵

The political dependence of the labor determined by the mode of production has various precapitalist precedents such as slavery and serfdom. These forms of collective ownership demonstrate no superiority to capitalism in Marxist value judgment. Those in defense of the Soviet-type system, either consciously with vested interests or unconsciously attached to the status quo, in the name of “Marxism”, opposing both the Trotskyist revolution and Dubčekian reform, were in this sense conservative. Historically, humanism was not only ideologically emancipatory but also led to the protestant ethic and the capitalist spirit, which directly contributed to the capitalist mode of production. Humanism in the name of Marxism was playing a similar intellectual rule of capitalist catalyst.

Merely replacing Trotskyist with Maoist, and Dubčekian with Zhaoist, the 1980s China becomes amazingly comparable. The sociological analyses of inequality among men in Soviet-type society were first presented by Chinese liberals during the Spring of 1957, which was suppressed by the party establishment. Mao later developed a systematic theory of class struggles within socialist society, acknowledging the existence of a privileged, bourgeois class within both the state and the party, which led to the Cultural Revolution and diplomatic break with the Eastern Bloc.

“What Dilas depicted was quite similar to what happened in China; he is right. Nonetheless...Dilas argued that the emergence of a privileged class in socialism is inevitable, thereby denying socialism as a whole. We believed that this is not inevitable, as the emergence and development of the privileged class can be prevented through the Cultural Revolution.”³²⁶

After Mao, similar analyses were put forward by reformists again. However, the solution they proposed was no longer a Maoist “continuous revolution”³²⁷ that failed its mission, but an introduction to the market economy and democratic politics. This was the initial context in which the early 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism emerged, while the 1980s conservatives resonated with their Eastern Bloc counterparts, both with their respective 1950s legacies.

Though both were against the Soviet-type society and the orthodox interpretation in defense of it, the reformist, humanist, and liberal stance was profoundly different from the revolutionary stance, at the core of which, as seen in Trotsky’s reasoning, is a belief in the realizability of the promised utopia of communist revolution. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the possible alliance between the two stances, nor does it deny the fact that the revolutionary stance was an intellectual stage for many who eventually became liberals. For example, in the revolutionary Maoist camp during the 1960s were Yang Xiaokai (1948-2004), Wang Xizhe (1948-), and Haraszti Miklós (1945-),³²⁸ who all turn to liberal after disillusion.

The revolutionaries aiming to violently overthrow the revisionist Soviet-type regimes were deemed as (far-left) terrorists and extremely marginalized by the authorities. In contrast, it would be

³²⁵ Lane, 1983: p. 585.

³²⁶ Qi Benyu, 2016: Ch. 26: §6.

³²⁷ Starr, John Bryan. “Conceptual foundations of Mao Tse-tung’s Theory of Continuous Revolution.” *Asian Survey* 11, no. 6 (1971): 610-628.

³²⁸ Haraszti Miklós, *A Worker in a Worker’s State: Piece-Rates in Hungary* (Penguin Books, 1977).

oversimplified and misleading to conclude that the relationship between Marxist humanism and the regime has always been antagonistic, because the regime per se was never a static or homogeneous entity. Whether the relationship is cooperative or conflictive depends much on the political platform of those in charge of the “regime” at a given time. While being oppressed by the conservatives, it was possible for Marxist humanists to cooperate with the reformists or defend the reformist platforms in the “bourgeois liberalization” direction. Whenever the reformists took power, from the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Czechoslovak Prague Spring of 1968, to Gorbachev Reform since 1985, the relationship between Marxist humanism and regimes prospered.

On the one hand, conservatives denounced Marxist humanism in Soviet-type capitals was often denounced as revisionism in the sense of “bourgeois liberalism”. On the other hand, whenever the ideological justifications for reformist agendas become needed, Marxist humanism becomes usable. Marković recalled during the 1970s, when Marxist humanist views were denounced as “anarchism and liberalism” by conservatives in Yugoslavia, that back in the 1950s, the regime did not react unfavorably to the Praxis school, one reason was that the Praxis school’s “criticism of Stalin’s dogmatism coincided with Yugoslavia’s general policy” at that time.³²⁹

Apart from the Praxis school, the intricate cooperation between broadly defined Marxist humanism and the reformists could be found in Ivan T. Frolov (with Gorbachev), Lukács György (with Nagy), Radovan Richta (with Dubček), Adam Schaff (with Gomułka and Jaruzelski), as well as a large number of Chinese Marxist humanists who directly or indirectly played advisory roles for reformist politicians. Amidst the 1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign, it was Zhao Ziyang who saved reformist Marxist theoretician Su Shaozhi from greater persecution.³³⁰ Guo Luoji recalled his interactions with Hu Yaobang, the tributes to whom kicked off the 1989 pro-democracy movement; although he was not an official advisor to Hu, he was clear about their shared course:

“Hu Yaobang revised my articles and approved my articles for publication more than once. I wrote to him, and he wrote back to me. Some Hong Kong media outlets even claimed that I was Hu Yaobang’s adviser. Here, I would like to clarify that I have never talked to him in person, only met him during conferences. I think he represented a faction that was truly for China’s modernization after Gang of Four.”³³¹

Likewise, Wang Ruoshui recalled:

“On March 1989, during the annual plenary sessions of the National People’s Congress, Hu Qili suddenly invited my wife and I to Zhongnanhai to share our ideas...I was later told that he also met with several other intellectuals deemed as liberalizers. I think the move may be attributed to Zhao Ziyang. I already knew that some old people were plotting to oust Zhao. He was possibly seeking support from more intellectuals.”³³²

Both Hu Qili and Zhao Ziyang were firm reformists in the Party’s five-member politburo standing committee. A few months later, they voted against the motion for a military crackdown on the Tiananmen protests. With two votes in favor by conservatives Li Peng and Yao Yilin, and one abstention by Qiao Shi. However, the power was held not by the politburo standing committee at that time, but by what Wang referred to as “some old people”, amongst whom the conservatives

³²⁹ Marković, 1981b.

³³⁰ Zhou Yicheng, 2005: p. 262.

³³¹ Ibid., pp. 317-318.

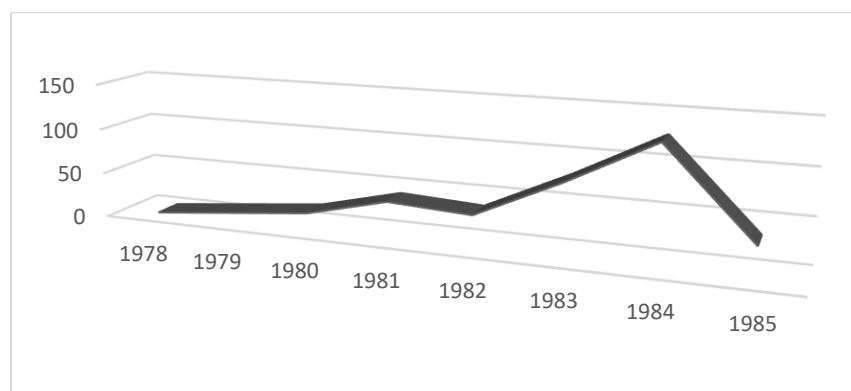
³³² Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui’s Birth*, pp. 64-65.

in defense of their privileges and monopolies overwhelmed. After the crackdown, Zhao, Hu, and Wang were all persecuted, not for being Maoists or Trotskyists, but “bourgeois liberalizers”.

Receptions of Humanism

“Humanism and Alienation” was the theme surrounding Chinese Marxist humanism during the early 1980s. In Marxist humanist discourses, the two concepts, humanism and alienation, were different but interrelated: alienation exists in Soviet-type societies and humanism aims to overcome alienation.

Chart 1: Quantity of Academic Articles on “Humanism” (1978-1985)



Charting: author; source: CNKI.³³³

The etymology of humanism often traces back to Cicero and Renaissance humanism. This is how the label “bourgeois/capitalist humanism”³³⁴ came into Marxist discourses: the bourgeoisie were the citizens of the late medieval cities, and humanism, as the ideology of this emerging class, is progressive vis-à-vis medieval clericalism. Throughout the 20th century, prominent humanist activists such as Charlie Chaplin, Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, et al. were once fellow travellers of the communist movement.

However, the communists, upon the declaration of socialism, turned to be against humanism, rhetorically due to the obsolescence of the bourgeois nature of humanism. According to the conservatives in defense of the status quo, the Soviet-type society has actualized capitalist humanism on a higher level, i.e., “socialist humanism”. If this claim holds true, then Marxist humanist advocacies would be, indeed, regressive and degenerative, namely, from socialist humanism to capitalist humanism.

For those aiming to change the status quo of Soviet-type society – no matter whether their envisioned alternative was liberal or revolutionary, this rhetoric was not in accordance with but the opposite of reality. For example, Đilas argued that the reality was not something, as it was supposed and presumed to be, more advanced than bourgeois civil society, but a restoration to the medieval theocracy; thus, the ambiguous “socialism”, or its much more sophisticated form,

³³³ The academic articles collected by China National Knowledge Infrastructure are subjects of selection and censorship, and the author only counts papers containing “humanism” in their titles.

³³⁴ Ma Jihua, 1984.

“Marxism”, became subject to an institutionalized mechanism of ideological exclusion in Soviet-type society:

“A citizen in the Communist system...is always fearful that he will have to demonstrate that he is not an enemy of socialism, just as in the Middle Ages a man constantly had to show his devotion to the Church...Are not there reasons then for comparing contemporary Communism with religious sects?”³³⁵

When confronted with anarchists, Leninists would argue that the Soviet regime that combined the state and the church adopted only the form of ideological exclusion as seen in medieval autocracy, not the ideological substance of premodern religions. However, the emergence of Marxism humanism serves as a prism, through which not only similarities in form, but also in substance between premodernity and Soviet ideologies are reflected. From this point of view, Marxist humanists in defense of the separation of state and church, freedom of belief, and ideological pluralism, in defense of a more secular society, were actually progressivists vis-à-vis conservatives. This logic applies to not only ideology, but economy, politics, and so on and so forth.

While it is legitimate to claim that the distance between Marxist humanism and Marxism understood as the “ism” of Marx is much shorter than the distance between the orthodox interpretation of Marxism and Marxism understood as the “ism” of Marx, it is, nevertheless, inaccurate to conclude that Marxist humanism and Marxism as understood as the “ism” of Marx are identical. Here, the revolutionary interpretation of Marxism comes into play. From Marx’s perspective, humanism is desirable (distinction from the orthodox interpretation of Marxism), but not the ultimate desirable (distinction from the humanist interpretation of Marxism); what he deems as the ultimate desirable is an alternative account of humanity, which may or may not be actualized – it has not yet been actualized. In contrast, the orthodox interpretation of Marxism was actualized in the status quo and/or reality in Soviet-type societies, and the humanist account of humanity was actualized in liberal states.

The rise of humanist discourses in Soviet-type societies during the 1950s (late 1940s in the case of Yugoslavia that split with Stalin in 1948) was a response to the inhumanity of Stalinism. In contrast, the humanist discourses in Western Marxism came much earlier and were primarily in response to the inhumanity of commodity societies. Thus, the usages of humanism in Marxist discourses within and outside Soviet-type societies had divergent focuses from the very beginning. Their differences could be observed in the former’s favorable and the latter’s unfavorable attitudes towards Western civilization, modernity, Enlightenment, etc.³³⁶ In the later evolution of Western Marxism towards post-Marxism and postmodernism, its skepticism towards metanarratives of these subjects became even clearer.³³⁷

The Chinese discourses of humanism in Marxism were contextually aligned with the Soviet-type instead of Western, modern instead of postmodern paradigm for their sharing comparable Soviet-type contexts. Given the huge wave of translation and introduction of East-Central European Marxist humanism to China from the late 1970s to early 1980s, it may be presumed that China had not known this kind of literature until then. However, the Chinese engagement with Marxist humanism started not two decades after Marxist humanism emerged during the post-Stalin

³³⁵ Dilas, 1957: pp. 132-134.

³³⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972 [1947].

³³⁷ Lyotard, Jean-François. *La Condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Minuit, 1979.

liberalization in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but around the same time. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet and East-Central European Marxist humanism³³⁸ such as Georg Lukács,³³⁹ Adam Schaff³⁴⁰ and Gajo Petrović³⁴¹ and humanist discourses in general were already translated and introduced to China,³⁴² though in a small scale and for “criticism” purpose. For example, the Chinese version of the frequently cited literature in Marxist humanism, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, was published in 1956, although it became popularized within Chinese intelligentsia only after its 1979 republication.³⁴³

The earliest Chinese literature regarding East-Central European humanist discourses could be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, especially the literary association Zuo Lian (League of Left-Wing Writers). Some of China’s most outstanding left-wing writers translated East-Central European liberal-nationalist literature with great sympathy, e.g., Lu Xun’s translations and introductions of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński, and Petőfi Sándor, Mao Dun’s 1921 translation of Petőfi’s *Nemzeti dal* (1848), Yin Fu’s 1929 translation of Petőfi’s *Liberty and Love* (1848) from German that went extremely popular in China: “life really precious, love value more high; if for liberty sake, two both can forsake.”³⁴⁴

It might be a coincidence that the life trajectory of Yin Fu, who, as a member of the communist Party and League of Left-Wing Writers, was executed at the age of 22, resembles that of Petőfi, who presumably died at the age of 26 in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, but it was no coincidence that communist movements in different national contexts all involved idealists such as Yin Fu, and that the longest-lived amongst these idealists turned disillusioned after witnessing how the revolution evolved into a failure to fulfil the revolutionary commitments. For Lukács, the disillusion originated from Moscow; for many members of the League of Left-Wing Writers such as Hu Feng, the disillusion originated from communist-controlled Yan’an.

The receptions of East-Central European humanism during China’s long 1980s, such as the comparison between Hu Feng and Lukács for the “coincidence of intellectual processes”,³⁴⁵ thus came from not only reminiscence of the reformist movements in 1956-1957, but also a reference to the liberalism of 1848. For example, amongst the criticism against literary theorist Qian Gurong in 1957, there was one claim that he drew his humanist views from Lukács,³⁴⁶ who, alongside the fall of the 1956 Revolution, was identified as a “revisionist” in both Hungary and China. No matter Qian had read Lukács or not, the humanism he shared with post-Stalin, especially 1956 Lukács was true. When Qian et al. recalled their roles in China’s Spring of 1957, they related to not only Lukács and the Budapest school, but also the Petőfi Kör in which Lukács played an important role, and what Petőfi stands for – liberalism, which was also their original pursuit when they were young.

³³⁸ Cottier, 1966.

³³⁹ Zita, 1965.

³⁴⁰ Schaff, 1962.

³⁴¹ Petrović, 1961.

³⁴² Cf. Bayer, 1960; Bussmore, 1961; Denisova, 1961; Radhakrishnan, 1961; Huxley, 1964; Maritain, 1966.

³⁴³ An Qian, 2015: p. 286.

³⁴⁴ Chen, N, “Translation as Subversion and Subjugation: Sándor Petőfi’s “Liberty and Love” in China.” *Neohelicon* 48 (2021): p. 587.

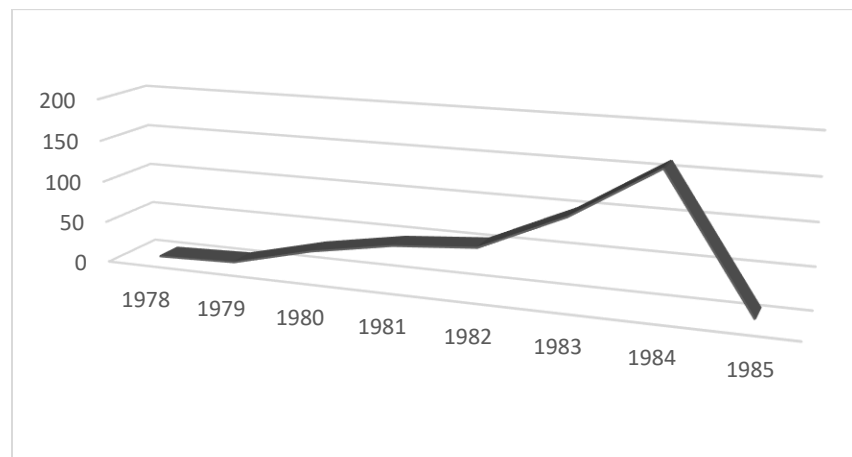
³⁴⁵ Min Hou, 1988.

³⁴⁶ Liu Dan, 2011.

Receptions of Alienation

A statistic shows that from 1978 to 1983, more than 600 articles related to “alienation” were published in China.³⁴⁷ The term alienation or *Entfremdung* was used by Marx in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to describe the phenomenon that the proletariat’s labor does not belong to his/her essential being but is taken at large by the capital owners. In this sense, alienation is caused by systematic exploitation and human inequality, which make people not fully owned by themselves, but to a certain extent, by others, in a relationship of interpersonal dependency. With such dependency, individuals are not autonomous or free in substance, and the society in which they live is, thereby, not substantively democratic. It could be inferred from Marx’s analyses of alienation in capitalism that alienation exists in any type of society in which human inequality exists. For instance, under slavery, the alienation occurs not behind of laws of classical economics, but directly in the slave owner’s blatant deprivation of the proletariat’s labor force. Therefore, alienation is not a phenomenon exclusive to capitalist society, but applicable to all class societies.

Chart 2: Quantity of Academic Articles on “Alienation” (1978-1985)



Charting: author; source: CNKI.³⁴⁸

After the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* was published in 1932, alienation became thematically central in Western Marxism as well as in Marxist humanism which developed later on, but their intellectual concerns were not exactly the same. The representative works on alienation by the Frankfurt school, *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *Eros and Civilization* (1955), and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), followed a critique that is based on Freudian psychoanalytic diagnoses of the incomplete and pathological people-to-people relationship in modern capitalist and industrial society.

In contrast, the theme of alienation in Marxist humanism is manifested, by astonishingly distant authors, in one classical expression: alienation also exists in the alleged “socialist” or Soviet-type societies. The expression could be found in Ilyenkov, who was accused of “writing in an article published in the United States that under the socialist system, alienation may also occur”,³⁴⁹ but also in many others from East-Central Europe. Predrag Vranicki wrote: “practice has shown that many forms of alienation are still possible in socialist... Socialism is also a ‘hierarchical’

³⁴⁷ Zhou Yicheng, 2023: p. 191.

³⁴⁸ The academic articles collected by China National Knowledge Infrastructure are subjects of selection and censorship, and the author only counts papers containing “alienation” in their titles.

³⁴⁹ Cited in An Qinian, 2023.

society...The political forms in which socialism develops are in essence special forms of alienation.”³⁵⁰ Adam Schaff wrote: “the means of supervision are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the state, the state’s function of ‘administrating things’...is constantly and vigorously expanding...[this] is sufficient to prove that the problem of alienation in socialism is a real problem.”³⁵¹ Apparently, the concern over alienation by Marxist humanists were about the sociological and political dimension of “real socialism”. The argument was presented by Āilas:

“In a Communist government, or state, just as in an absolute monarchy, the development of human personality is an abstract ideal. In the period of the absolute monarchy, when mercantilists imposed the state upon the economy, the crown itself – for example, Catherine the Great – thought that the government was obliged to re-educate the people. The Communist leaders operate and think in the same way.”³⁵²

In a word, the alienation in Soviet-type society is caused by the state’s oppressions due to the lack of democracy in formality and the presence of autocracy in essence. This is not to exclude the revolutionary potential of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies striving for a normatively higher goal but to acknowledge that the practical priority of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies was different from that of their Western colleagues due to the difference between their contexts.

Accompanied by intensive translations and introductions of Marxist humanism to China during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the iconic essay of Chinese Marxist humanism, “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism” by Zhou Yang (written by Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, Wang Yuanhua) came into being. It argued that:

“Alienation is an objective phenomenon, and we do not need to make a fuss about this term. A thorough materialist should not be afraid to admit reality. Alienation can only be overcome by acknowledging that there is alienation...The current reform of the economic system and political system...is aimed at overcoming economic and political alienation. Mastering Marx’s theory of alienation is of great significance for promoting and guiding the current reform. With regard to the issue of alienation, the academia has already carried out some conducive discussions, and it is hoped that this discussion can be further deepened.”³⁵³

Notably, unlike the Soviet and Eastern European texts on alienation being published in journals with small circulation in the grey area or in the West, the essay was published in *People’s Daily*. However, it is clear that The Chinese Marxist humanist account of alienation followed the one from Soviet-type societies, instead of Western Marxism. One thing was in common in Soviet-type societies: the conservative ideologues, wherever they were in Moscow, East-Central European capitals, or China, could all be called “alienation deniers”.

Opposing changes to the status quo by denying the inadequacies of the status quo is at the heart of the orthodox interpretation of Marxism. If there is no inadequacy in Soviet-type societies, then there would be naturally no justification for any change – reform or revolution – to Soviet-type societies. In conservative discourses in defense of Soviet-type societies, the alleged “socialist”

³⁵⁰ Vranicki, 1983 [1965]: pp. 5-6.

³⁵¹ Schaff, 1981 [1975]: p. 67.

³⁵² Āilas, 1957: p. 97.

³⁵³ Zhou Yang (Wang Ruoshui et al.), 1983.

nature of Soviet-type societies already made the status quo immune to inadequacies such as alienation. Thus, positive questions over the alleged “socialist” nature of Soviet-type societies, e.g., pointing out the presence of alienation, became dangerous to the regime. Hu Qiaomu’s refutative essay to “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism” – “On Humanism and Alienation”, logically connected the two opponents of his conservative stance – revolution and reform:

“It is entirely justified to denounce the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, these comrades should be reminded: are not the rhetoric of the so-called ‘political alienation’ and ‘power alienation’ and ‘public servants becoming social lords as a regular phenomenon’ similar to the rhetoric of ‘continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat’, ‘capitalist roaders within the Party’, ‘the bourgeoisie is within the Party’? Are not those ideas exactly the ‘theoretical foundation’ of the Cultural Revolution? Is not it clear whether the Cultural Revolution guided by these theories helped overcome the negative phenomena in our society, and what effect it had on overcoming the unhealthy tendencies among the cadres?”³⁵⁴

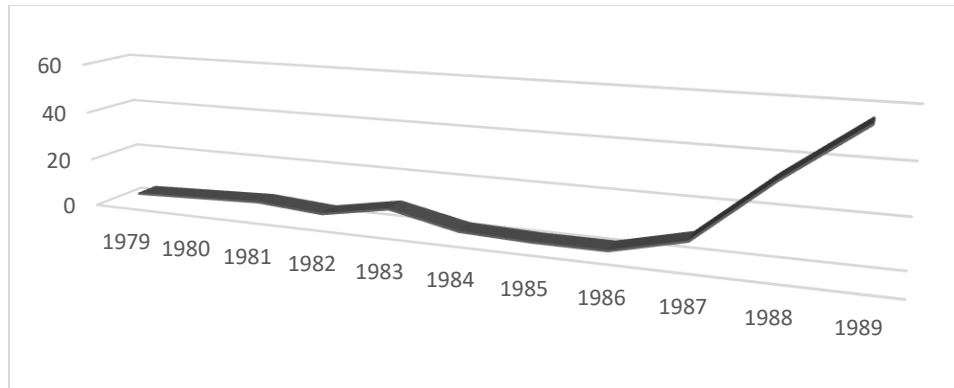
For Hu, any change to the system before the Cultural Revolution, which was restored alongside the end of the Cultural Revolution, is now a suspicious attempt at “revolution”; as the Cultural Revolution failed its goals, any change, whether it is in the name of the 1960s “proletarian revolution” or the 1980s “bourgeois liberalization”, is now conceived futile. The two indeed shared one enemy: the rebel movement in the early few years of the Cultural Revolution aimed against the established Soviet-type society in pre-1966 China, and the reformist platform that Marxist humanists stood for was in competition with the conservative platform in favour of restoration to the pre-1966 system throughout China’s long 1980s. However, their divergent approaches are also obvious – any force in favour of the Cultural Revolution had been extinguished from China’s political stage after 1978. The 1980s Chinese Marxist humanism and the reformist platform it was in defense of, just like in the cases of Tito-Stalin split, Khrushchev Thaw, 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Prague Spring and Gorbachev Reforms, was by no means aiming for another communist revolution.

Receptions of Praxis Materialism

“Praxis Materialism” became the keyword surrounding Chinese Marxist humanism during the late 1980s. The keyword of the keyword, practice/praxis, could trace back to the 1978 Debate on the Criteria of Truth that ended up with the slogan “Practice Is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth”, their contexts were different. In 1978, the purpose of emphasizing practice was to set up a general attitude of realism, empiricism, and pragmatism against the Gang of Four and Fanshi factions. In the late 1980s, “praxis materialism” represented the reformists’ efforts to revise a philosophical dogmatism that aimed for unprincipled maintenance of the status quo, targeting the conservative faction during China’s long 1980s.

Chart 3: Quantity of Academic Articles on “Praxis Materialism” (1979-1989)

³⁵⁴ Hu Qiaomu, 1984.



Charting: author; source: CNKI.³⁵⁵

The philosophical dogmatism that praxis materialism proposed to replace was the binary structure of textbook Marxist philosophy – dialectical materialism and historical materialism, which originated from Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. As the chart above demonstrates, a number of academic papers on praxis materialism as a possible alternative to the existing textbook structure of Marxist philosophy appeared from 1985-1986 and eventually reached its peak in 1989.

Conceivably, the proposal of praxis materialism also triggered a wave of oppositional voices insisting on dialectics, similar to the ones in the 1983 Debate on Humanism and Alienation. Dialectics is the meta of philosophical Stalinism: the application of dialectics in the natural world is called dialectical materialism, that in the social world is called historical materialism, together the two components of “Marxism” or “philosophy” are absolutistic truth. Praxis materialists rejected this view. On the one hand, Marx indeed stands for the 18th century materialistic, mechanist conception of humanity, rejecting the Old Hegelian conception of humanity; on the other hand, he criticizes his Young Hegelian colleague Ludwig Feuerbach in *Theses against Feuerbach* (1845), where Marx argues that Feuerbach’s conception of humanity lacks the understanding of “sensuous human activity, practice...subjectively...the significance of ‘revolutionary’, of ‘practical-critical’ activity”.³⁵⁶ Praxis materialists argued that the starting point of Marxism is the category of practice/praxis instead of substance, subject instead of object and that the dichotomy of consciousness and matter should be replaced by the trichotomy of consciousness, practice and matter.³⁵⁷ Furthermore, Gao Qinghai (1930-2004), professor of philosophy at Jilin University, called for transcendence of the dichotomy of materialism and idealism, arguing that it is unnecessary to add the suffix of the ontological “materialism” after praxis, Marxist philosophy is “praxis philosophy”.³⁵⁸

The most comparable scene in East-Central European Marxist humanism to the late 1980s Chinese Debate on Praxis Materialism must be the long-standing polemic between Praxis school and dialectics school, reformists and conservatives in Yugoslavia from the 1950s to 1970s. Chinese praxis materialists and Yugoslav Praxists shared the same opponent. Marković recalled that the Praxis school originated from skepticism by the most talented philosophy students at Belgrade and Zagreb towards Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which was

³⁵⁵ The academic articles collected by China National Knowledge Infrastructure are subjects of selection and censorship, and the author only counts papers containing both “practice” and “materialism” in their titles.

³⁵⁶ Marx, Karl. *German Ideology. Theses against Feuerbach* (New York: Prometheus Books: 1998), p. 569.

³⁵⁷ An Qinian, 2015: pp. 291-292.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 294-296.

until 1947 the dominant interpretation of Marxism introduced by Soviet philosophers to Yugoslavia.³⁵⁹

Furthermore, it could be envisioned that the introduction of the philosophical-political dynamics in Yugoslavia had more or less, direct or indirect impact on the late 1980s Debate on Praxis Materialism in China, although the Chinese case was no simple imitation of the Yugoslav case. The Praxis school was introduced to China in the late 1970s and early 1980s as part of a broader wave of translations and introductions of Eastern Bloc Marxist humanism. In 1979, the *Collection of Yugoslav Philosophical Papers*, translated and edited by the editorial department of *Philosophy Translation Series*, Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was published. One of the editors, a former activist during the Spring of 1957, Liu Binyan (1925-2005), later became an outspoken dissident and was expelled from the Party in the 1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign. *Philosophy Translation Series* published a number of translations and introductions of the Praxis school, including “An Introduction to Yugoslav Philosophy”,³⁶⁰ “Several International Symposiums on Socialism Held in Yugoslavia”,³⁶¹ etc. From 1982 to 1984, the Soviet-trained Jia Zelin was a visiting scholar at Univerza Edvarda Kardelja v Ljubljani.³⁶² Jia authored *Contemporary Philosophy in Yugoslavia* (1982)³⁶³ and published a series of overview articles on the praxis school, including an introduction to M. Marković.³⁶⁴ Incidentally, he was the first to introduce what later became the swaddle of the Central European University – Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik to China.³⁶⁵

Like Jia Zehua, Zhang Dexiu (1931-) belongs to the same cohort of Chinese students studying in the Soviet Union. Zhang studied at the economics department, Moscow State University from 1954 to 1959 and then worked at the economics department, Peking University. Zhang, who later earned his PhD at the University of Belgrade in 1981, is known for his contributions to introducing the Yugoslav economic model to China.³⁶⁶ His 1983 paper titled “Marx’s Idea of ‘Associations of Free Individuals’ and the Practice of Yugoslavia” is particularly relevant, as it stood at the crossroad of economics and philosophy. He wrote: “the system of ‘workers’ self-management’ implemented in Yugoslavia is neither unrealistic utopianism nor a slogan of anarcho-syndicalism, but a concrete, practical approach to Marx’s idea of ‘Association of Free Individuals’.”³⁶⁷ The Titoist-Kardeljian model resembles what Fehér referred to in *Dictatorship over Needs*. Marketization and decentralization (including the establishment of a series of southeast coastal special economic zones) were exactly what the Chinese reformists aimed for.

Therefore, the 1980s Chinese receptions of Yugoslavia were not only about philosophical texts, but also about political and economic contexts. On the one hand, the influence of the translations and introductions of the Praxis school to China could be observed in the 1983 climax of a smaller scale; on the other hand, the sudden emergence of praxis materialism in the late 1980s China could be attributed to its context of the intensified political atmosphere of reformism. During the 1988

³⁵⁹ Marković, 1981b.

³⁶⁰ Jia Zelin, 1979a and 1979b.

³⁶¹ Jia Zelin, 1979c.

³⁶² Jia Zelin, 2001: p. 97.

³⁶³ Jia Zelin, 1982.

³⁶⁴ Jia Zelin, 1982.

³⁶⁵ Jia Zelin, 1985.

³⁶⁶ E.g., Zhang Dexiu, 1981.

³⁶⁷ Zhang Dexiu, 1983: p. 30.

Symposium on Reform of Philosophical System,³⁶⁸ reformist politburo member Li Ruihuan delivered a speech, titled “Reform Needs Philosophy, Philosophy Needs Reform”, which was regarded as an open call for replacing dialectical materialism and historical materialism with praxis materialism.³⁶⁹ Once a carpenter, Li, who later became a politburo standing committee member and was referred to as a possible candidate as China’s Gorbachev,³⁷⁰ displayed an unusual interest in philosophy, especially the “philosophy for reform”. When meeting with former American President Richard Nixon in 1989, Li said: “advocating openness is the proper meaning of Marxism, and denying openness is not true Marxism. For the Chinese, Marxism per se was imported from abroad.”³⁷¹

The Chinese interests in the practices of Yugoslavia as the first within (or not according to its self-identification of non-alignment) the Eastern Bloc to renormalize its relationship with China had another background. Although it became crystal clear in 1992 that what impressed Deng the most was the postwar practices of Japan and the Four Asian Tigers, instead of the practices of any allegedly “socialist” state, Yugoslavia represented a relatively desirable case of economic liberalization and relatively high performance. In this regard, what they considered to be the “socialism of the Yugoslavian model”³⁷² and to a lesser extent, Hungary, attracted the attention of Chinese theoreticians in defense of the reformist platform. Reformist Marxist theoretician Su Shaozhi (1923-2019) recalled:

“In 1980, I went to Yugoslavia to participate in the ‘Socialism in the World’ symposium. This symposium can be said to be the only one that brought together different schools of socialism, communism, and Marxisms from the East and the West. There I was exposed to various schools of thought and learned various perspectives. Yu Guangyuan was in favor of me attending such a symposium and asked me to introduce various viewpoints at the symposium after my return. I was an early opponent of Stalin in China also because I learned the truth about the Bukharin incident there. This symposium was held annually, and I participated in three times. In particular, the Praxis school, though not the most cutting-edge, played a role in breaking through dogmatism in the former communist camp.”³⁷³

Alongside Deng Liqun (1915-2015) and Hu Qiaomu (1912-1992), Yu Guangyuan (1915-2013) was amongst the three most trusted theoreticians of Deng Xiaoping when he shortly resumed power in 1975. Unlike the other two, Yu was in favour of reform. While Hu served as the President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Yu served as the Vice President of the Academy and the first Director of its Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (now Academy of Marxism), and Su served as the Deputy Director, and later the second Director of the Institute from 1982 to 1989, succeeding Yu.³⁷⁴ Compared with Yu, Su’s reformist stance was even more explicit, for which he went exile after 4th June 1989 for his support for the pro-democracy movement.

³⁶⁸ “Philosophical system” refers to the composition of Marxist philosophy, especially embodied in textbook structure.

³⁶⁹ An Qinian, 2015: pp. 290-291; 297.

³⁷⁰ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Is There a Reformer in China’s Future?” *The New York Times*, 17th June 1990.

³⁷¹ Li Ruihuan, 2007: no. 164.

³⁷² Li Ke, 1980.

³⁷³ Zhou Yicheng, 2005: p. 264 [*Beijing Spring*, October 1995].

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

In Relation to Western Marxism

Compared with the Soviet and Chinese variants of Marxist humanism, the East-Central European variant of Marxist humanism interacted more with Western Marxism, which was a result of not only geographical and/or cultural proximity between East-Central and Western European and North American capitals such as Paris, London, West Berlin, New York City, and San Francisco, but also institutional arrangements such as the Korčula Summer School attended by both East-Central European Marxist humanists and Western Marxists, as well as the fact that some figures, e.g., Lukács, seemed to have transcended the dichotomy between East-Central European Marxist humanism and Western Marxism. When it comes to the philosophical sophistications as shown in their texts, Western Marxism that inspired the late 1960s New Left movements in developed democracies and East-Central European Marxist humanism in underdeveloped Soviet-type dictatorships, indeed, appeared on the same boat for their shared motifs and terminologies such as humanism, alienation, and praxis.

However, a paradox of East-Central European Marxist humanism is between its inspirations from Western Marxism and its estrangements from Western Marxism. On the one hand, it is particularly reasonable for the disciples of Lukács, a pioneer of the Marxist tradition focusing on alienation, praxis, the works of Young Marx, and Hegelianism, to envision a common ground with their seeming counterparts in the West, based on a “belief that the aspirations of the New Left and the ambitions of the Prague Spring could be reconciled”.³⁷⁵ On the other hand, as Kis János acknowledged, “this hope proved to be naïve”.³⁷⁶ The intricacy between Marxist humanism and reformist platform is attributed to the collaborative instead of confrontational approach of some ideologues, as well as the theoretical affinity between the two. It is exactly due to the theoretical affinity that the “leading activists and theorists of the New Left in the West attacked” the East-Central European Marxist humanist proposal of transforming “the Soviet-type regimes into democratic and market-compatible socialism” as a restoration of capitalism.³⁷⁷

The abovementioned “belief that the aspirations of the New Left and the ambitions of the Prague Spring could be reconciled” was also upheld by *Praxis International*, which was committed to “a larger international scale, in all those countries where progressive intellectuals and independent critical Marxists share similar aspirations and commitments.”³⁷⁸ However, how similar were those countries, especially between Soviet-type societies and non-Soviet-type societies? How similar were their “aspirations and commitments”? Could the divergence between Western Marxism and East-Central European Marxist humanism be erased in an inexplicit category of “progressive intellectuals and independent critical Marxists”?

I believe that there are two aspects in explaining this paradoxical relationship between Western Marxism and Marxist humanism. Their different and even insulated contexts determined the different purposes and political demands behind their theorizations. Contextually speaking, the Soviet-type society was the one in which Marxist humanism emerged and what it primarily opposed, while the society in which Western Marxism emerged was not Soviet-type, nor was the Soviet-type society its primary target of critique. Textually speaking, the prototype document that Marxist

³⁷⁵ Kis, János. “Preface,” Márkus, György, János Kis, and György Bence. *How Is Critical Economic Theory Possible?* Edited by Grumley, John Edward and János Kis (Leiden: Brill, 2022), p. XI.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. XXVII.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. XXVI.

³⁷⁸ Marković, 1981: p. 1.

humanism opposed was Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which never had a significant presence in non-Soviet-type societies, including the ones in which Western Marxism emerged.

According to this logic, the Young Lukács represented by his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), which had explosive effects in and led to what was later referred to as Western Marxism, and the Budapest school-in-exile after the 1973 Trial of Philosophers, which relied on Australian and American institutions, were more of Western Marxism and/or left-wing scholarship in Western academia in general, instead of East-Central European Marxist humanism. For Young Lukács, the Soviet-type context was not yet formed; for the Budapest school-in-exile, the Soviet-type context was already detached. While the anti-Stalinist, Old Lukács in 1956, who had lived in Moscow for over a decade and under Stalin for over two decades and went through an intellectual conversion similar to the ones that occurred in Hu Feng and Old Zhou Yang, and the Budapest school-in-Budapest, which took shape in Hungarian de-Stalinization and Thaw, were more of East-Central Marxist humanism.

Li Zehou made meticulous observations on the subtle distinction between Young Lukács and Old Lukács, Frankfurt school and Budapest school as early as the 1980s. On the one hand, Li was, if not the first, amongst the first, to bring Kantian subjectivity, in the name of practice/praxis, into the dominant, orthodox interpretation of Marxism in China:

“Without the theory of practice/praxis, historical materialism would become a general sociological principle...losing its original living content of activities, losing its practical nature...and humans would become passive, determined, dominated, and controlled...insignificant grains of sand or gears”.³⁷⁹

On the other hand, Li Zehou carefully clarified and distinguished that Kantian subjectivity is incompatible and should not be confused with the “understanding of practice/praxis as a purely subjective force... as seen in the Frankfurt school’s critical theory and the Young Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*.”³⁸⁰ He described this kind of understanding of subjectivity as voluntarism, idealism, or utopianism, which resembles the revolutionary radicalism during the Cultural Revolution.

In his distinction between Marxist humanism and Western Marxism, Li Zehou referred to the Cultural Revolution, at least a (mis)reception of a fragment of which, as an aspiration of the New Left in the West, which involved not only the Frankfurt school but also Louis Althusser, *Tel Quel* (1960-1982), so on and so forth. In contrast, Maoism was either not in the eyesight of East-Central European Marxist humanism, or in a negative reception. For example, in the third volume of Kołakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism*, which was dedicated to world Marxisms after 1917, five chapters are on Soviet Marxism, seven chapters are on European Marxism, only one section in the last chapter is on Mao’s “peasant Marxism”, in a country that is more populous than Europe and the Soviet Union combined. In general, East-Central European Marxist humanists could not accommodate the appreciations of Maoism by Western Marxists, “East European reformers saw their New Left critics as nothing but new Stalinists”.³⁸¹ Kołakowski even referred to Marcuse, one of

³⁷⁹ Li Zehou, 1985.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Kis, János. “Preface,” p. XXVI.

the “3 M’s” – Marx, Mao, and Marcuse of the New Left in the West,³⁸² as “the ideologist of obscurantism”.³⁸³

Li made it clear that his account of subjectivity was aligned with Enlightenment rationalism instead of counter-Enlightenment irrationalism, Marxist humanism instead of Western Marxism. In fact, Althusser’s structuralist view that humanity and subjectivity as such are artificial constructions of bourgeois ideology, or in the Gramscian term, capitalist “cultural hegemony”, made itself incompatible with Li’s emphasis on human agency and individual freedom. Here, a dilemma emerged in Li’s account of subjectivity, and would later reemerge in Chinese Marxist humanist discourses over and over again. On the one hand, subjectivity is confronted by a counter-Enlightenment romanticism: the absolutist tendency in Hegel and Marx and the violent aesthetics of Leninism defended by the Young Lukács reject the agnosticism and rationalism manifested by Kantianism. On the other hand, subjectivity is confronted by unenlightened ignorance and blind obedience to established ideas, reality, and order, as well as their ideological apology, i.e., “Marxism” as the party-state orthodox in China.

What is really paradoxical is that in the ideational superstructure of Soviet-type society, these two enemies of subjectivity appeared in one form: the former metamorphosed into the latter, and the latter in the name of the former. By rejecting both, Li’s philosophy of subjectivity faced dual challenges, and so did different variants of Marxist humanism. This is what I refer to as “subjectivity in dilemma” in Marxist humanism of Soviet-type contexts. Therefore, in the whole picture was a trichotomy of Marxism amongst (1) Marxist humanism, (2) Western Marxism, and (3) orthodox interpretation of Marxism based on Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, instead of a dichotomy (Marxist humanism vs. Western Marxism or Marxist humanism vs. orthodox interpretation of Marxism based on Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*).

Conclusions

The East-Central European Marxist humanism arose out of the background of de-Stalinization and/or the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The Praxis school in Yugoslavia emerged earlier during the late 1940s, since Yugoslavia was the only Soviet-type state in East-Central Europe not militarily controlled by Moscow. The year of 1956 witnessed the first wave of climaxes of reformist movements in Hungary and Poland, which became political manifestos of Marxism humanisms in Hungary and Poland. The belated de-Stalinization against Antonín Novotný in Czechoslovakia erupted in 1968, which also witnessed student protests in Poland and Yugoslavia. After the failure of Prague Spring, a wave of crackdown on Marxist humanism, from Normalization to the 1973 Trial of Philosophers, stretched across East-Central Europe. After a decade of silence, East-Central European Marxist humanism revived in the 1980s, especially after 1985.

The short-lived germination of Chinese Marxist humanism during the late 1950s, alongside the Spring of 1957, and its maturation during China’s long 1980s, together with the reform and opening-up movement, followed the general trajectory of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies,

³⁸² Wiatr, Jerzy J., and Henry F. Mins. “Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of a Lost Radicalism.” *Science & Society* 34, no. 3 (1970): p. 319; Julka, K. L. “Herbert Marcuse’s Messianic Humanism: Politics of the New Left.” *Social Scientist* (1979): p. 13.

³⁸³ Kołakowski, 1978: p. 420.

but not without appreciable differences. Similar to the case of Yugoslavia, the trajectorial differences of Chinese Marxist humanism from its Soviet and East-Central European counterparts, should be attributed to geopolitical conditions – whether and to what extent, a Soviet-type capital was militarily controlled by Moscow which enabled the linkage effect between them. In the case of China, not only had it never been Stalinized in the sense of being militarily controlled by Moscow following World War II, but the linkage between Moscow and Beijing also evaporated the late 1950s Sino-Soviet split. In the following two decades, China experienced Maoist movements such as Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, which were unseen in other Soviet-type contexts. Consequently, the revival of Chinese Marxist humanism followed Mao's death in the late 1970s instead of Gorbachev's leadership since the mid-1980s, towards the second wave of the climax of reformists around the Revolutions of 1989.

In spite of these temporary incongruities, the Chinese variant falls into the category of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies due to their shared domestic Soviet-type contexts. It is true that China was never Stalinized in the sense that Stalin never controlled China at any point, unlike most East-Central European satellite states, and therefore there was not de-Stalinization in the Soviet and East-Central European sense, but de-Maoization was the Chinese equivalent to de-Stalinization, both of which were accompanied by reform movements.

While Beijing deviated from Moscow's trajectory since the late 1950s, especially during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, Mao's China presented a heterotopia just the right amount amidst the New Left movement in the West. At first glance, from Beijing, Belgrade, Prague, Paris, to New York in 1968 seemed to be connected in some mysterious way to form a worldwide revolutionary storm. This illusion is the result of a series of misperceptions including the New Leftist towards Mao and reformists towards the New Left. These misperceptions have been demonstrated in the tensions between Marxist humanism and Western Marxism: the former found the latter's Maoist invigoration dangerous, and the latter found the former's political agenda unappealing.

I believe this paradox is ultimately due to the liberal nature of Marxist humanism in Soviet-type societies as well as the reformist movements of which it was in defense. Marković wrote: “ironically, it was precisely these ideas of Marx that the League of Communists of Yugoslavia relied on to attract a generation of partisan fighters of the Liberation War against Stalin's rule... The mortal sin of the Praxis school seems to be that they really take these ideas seriously.”³⁸⁴ The problem is that the “ideas of Marx” that guided the partisan struggles led by Yugoslav communists were duet: (1) liberalism against Axis dictatorships and Kingdom of Yugoslavia autocracy, and (2) socialism/communism against liberalism. This dilemma was not only of Yugoslavia, but of all Soviet-type societies including China where the communist revolution overthrew not a liberal/capitalist state but a not-yet-liberal/capitalist one,³⁸⁵ as well as of Marxism per se vis-à-vis liberalism.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁸⁵ Marković was not unaware of this. A question in the Praxis school's intellectual realm was exactly “how do we explain the fact that the socialist revolution did not occur in the developed industrial countries of the West, but instead occurred in the backward agricultural society of the East?” (Ibid.)

VI. Conclusions³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ Parts of this chapter are based on the author's coursework, "Human Rights in the 1990s Historical Reflections on the 20th Century China," submitted to Michael Ignatieff in the 2022-2023 winter term and "Modernization Theory in the 1990s Chinese Debates on Reform and Revolution Revisited," submitted to Bozóki András in the 2023-2024 winter term at CEU.

Broader Contexts of Marxist Humanism

The previous chapters have outlined Chinese receptions of Marxist humanism within its long 1980s context. In fact, the intellectual phenomenon of Chinese Marxist humanism is rooted in even broader contexts of 20th century Chinese intellectual history. Wang Ruoshui was surely an iconic figure of Chinese Marxist humanism, but also of an intellectual community, which Yang Jisheng coined the term “sincerely from beginning to end (of their life)” [liangtouzhen] in describing it:

“When they were young, they *sincerely* participated in the revolution in pursuit of truth. After retirement, they *sincerely* gained great enlightenment in the face of social reality. Some foreign media called them ‘democrats within the Party’. In fact, they are Chinese liberals.”³⁸⁷

To name a few notable ones, apart from Wang Ruoshui, they included, according to birth year, Du Runsheng (1913-2015), Yu Guangyuan (1915-2013), Hu Jiwei (1916-2012), Li Rui (1917-2019), Qin Benli (1918-1991), Su Shaozhi (1923-2019), Li Shenzhi (1923-2003), Zhu Houze (1931-2010), Guo Luoji (1932-), Bao Tong (1932-2022), Fang Lizhi (1936-2012), et al. By the way, the intellectual trajectory of Milovan Đilas could be considered a Yugoslav case of “sincerely from beginning to end”. This intellectual community was the first to advocate for democracy during China’s long 1980s, even before the students did at that time. Many joined the communist Party during the 1930s and 1940s when they were in their 20s. Wang Ruoshui recalled himself at the turn of spring and summer of 1989:

“I came back to China on 19th May, right after the martial law was declared. Nevertheless, I took part in three demonstrations. When I was walking in front of the *People’s Daily* parade, passing through the cheering crowds on the roadside and heading straight to Tiananmen Square, I suddenly realized that more than 40 years ago, I had also walked this road in the parade, chanting slogans such as ‘we want democracy’ and ‘we want freedom’...now I am over 60 years old, but I still love my motherland as much as I did when I was a boy, and I still pursue the truth as much as I did in my youth.”³⁸⁸

In terms of the casualties, the subsequent crackdown, though undoubtedly a case of human rights violations in China, was objectively insignificant in the startling history of human rights violations throughout the civilizational history of the land. Therefore, the significance of 1989 was mainly intellectual. In Wang’s words: “the ruthless reality tore the ideals when I was young to pieces. Sometimes I wake up from my sleep at night and ask myself painfully: Is this the new socialist China for which countless martyrs shed their blood and sacrifices, and for which I also fought?”³⁸⁹

Speaking of the “truth” that Wang pursued when he was young and continued to pursue when he became old, was it Marxism or liberalism? The intellectual crisis of Marxism could be summarized as one question: why Marxism, which they believed in, as a manifestation of an ideal society where everybody has a decent life, turned to be in violation of basic human rights in practice, contrary to their expectations? Did they misbelieve Marxism? Therefore, the general background behind the intellectual phenomenon called “Marxist humanism” – humanized and/or liberalized Marxism, was the long-standing relationship and debates between Marxism and liberalism both in theory and in historical reflections.

³⁸⁷ Yang Jisheng, 2004: p. 519.

³⁸⁸ Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui’s Birth*, p. 66.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

Marxist historicism, i.e., historical materialism, views history as a process towards a just end from primitivism, feudalism, and capitalism to socialism and communism. From this point of view, capitalist liberalism and/or humanism is only a stage towards Marxism. In the Chinese case, the 1949 Revolution led by the communists and supported by democrats thus came with two founding goals: reconstruction of the republican order marked by the 1911 Revolution and creation of a society that is supposed to be more advanced than the republican order.

While the end of the Cultural Revolution of dystopian utopianism signaled the evaporation of the second founding goal, Wang Ruoshui et al. retained the position that the People's Republic should stick to its minimum commitment in order to distinguish itself from what it replaced in 1949: the one-party dictatorship of authoritarian capitalism. This was why they spoke up for democracy during China's long 1980s. However, with the 1989 crackdown eliminating the prospect of immediate democracy and the 1992 political reaffirmation of the market economy, even the first founding goal of the People's Republic had now evaporated.

Make no mistake, Deng's market economy program of what I hereinafter refer to as the 1992 System,³⁹⁰ a political economy model characterized by party-state capitalism³⁹¹ and developmental dictatorship,³⁹² i.e., the capitalist mode of production, which failed to be established in China's turbulent 20th century, is better than the feudalist mode of production, which was supported by the Party's ultraconservative autarkists led by Chen Yun et al. and manifested in North Korea today, on the scale of value of Marxism and/or Enlightenment. The capitalist economic system of equality of economic opportunities, openness, and liberties was not only amongst the demands of 1989 but has also indeed brought China economic prosperity, technological advancement, poverty alleviation...all the fruitful results of industrialization that contributed to China's human rights improvements significantly. It is an achievement for humankind that China has farewelled the utopian economics of Marxism (Mao) as well as premodern autarky in the name of Marxism (Chen). China traversed an extremely tortuous path in the dilemma of humanism before arriving at this point. Nonetheless, the question concerning political rights still remains.

Two Frontiers of 1992 System

To better illustrate the Dengist platform or 1992 System's in relation to the two frontiers it is faced with – (1) revolutionary and (2) conservative trajectories, which have not taken place after 1992, I would like to make two comparisons.

The first comparison involves two paradigms of evolution – modernization and revolution and showcases how the 1992 System, economically, as a modernization paradigm is different from the revolution paradigm. The second comparison involves two types of autocratic legitimacy – developmental and traditional and showcases how the 1992 System, politically, as a case of developmental legitimacy is different from traditional legitimacy.

³⁹⁰ I draw this term from the “1955 System” (1955-1993) of postwar Japan, which has been marked by the Japanese economic miracle and the conservative Liberal Democratic Party's consecutive rule. The periodization of 1992 as a threshold is widely acknowledged, cf. Ma Licheng, 2011.

³⁹¹ Pearson, Margaret, Meg Rithmire, and Kellee S. Tsai. “Party-State Capitalism in China.” *Current History* 120, no. 827 (2021): 207-213.

³⁹² Pei, Minxin. *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

The modernization v. revolution comparison originated from the post-World War II North American academia of East Asian studies and Southeast Asian studies, which was traditionally divided into two camps: the right-wing with Japan as an exemplar of modernization without revolution, and the left-wing with China as an exemplar of revolution without modernization. The division was apparently entangled with the political context of Vietnam War, anti-War movement, and 1960s counterculture at large. In 1980, two scholars from the conservative Hoover Institution complained that the revolution paradigm had superseded the modernization paradigm in American Sinology.³⁹³

Their complaint came right across a historic moment, at which the power balance between the two paradigms was quietly reversing, due to the groundbreaking changes within China. On 1st January 1979, the United States established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China; in October 1978, then vice premier Deng Xiaoping visited Japan, during which he experienced the Japanese high-speed railway Shinkansen. When asked about his feelings on the train, he answered "I only feel the high speed, which China is in need of".³⁹⁴

Behind this scene were profound irony and symbolism. In their respective pursuits for modernity since the mid-19th century, China should have taken the lead as early as 1911, when it abolished its monarchy in an attempt to establish an American-style democratic republic; when post-World War II Japan was imposed by an American-drafted Constitution – still with certain Japanese characteristics including the traditionalist retention of the monarchy, China was on the edge towards alleged "socialism" – something more advanced than bourgeois democracy. However, in the contrast between the "advanced" socialist republic of China and the "backward" capitalist monarchy of Japan by the late 1970s, as Deng noted in his comment on Shinkansen, was the exact opposite: China was much less modernized than Japan.

China's lack of modernization compared to Japan was not limited to the technoeconomic dimension. Many of those who fought for a democratic China before 1949 would soon speak out against the autocratic nature of the communist regime in the guise of socialism, and almost-a-revolution against the ancien régime would eventually break out in 1989.

When the KMT was in power in the Chinese mainland, it defended its one-party dictatorship with the claim that China was too underdeveloped to practice democracy – most people were illiterate or poorly educated, the bourgeoisie was not yet mature, etc., and promised that it would democratize China once the required degree of modernization is met. The communists, alongside liberals who sympathize with them, debunked these discourses as deceitful lies.

After decades of developmental dictatorship, the promise was about to come true. Around the late 1980s, while the right-wing dictatorships in South Korea and Taiwan were loosening, paradoxically, the communist regime in Mainland China brutally crushed the pro-democracy movement that aimed to fulfilling the communists' 1949 promise of democracy, and the communist leaders would now recycle the conservative discourses half a century ago that China was too underdeveloped to have democracy.

For example, Deng Xiaoping claimed in 1987 that China "has such a large population, imbalanced developments among regions, and so many ethnic groups; the [socioeconomic] condition is not

³⁹³ Myers, Ramon H., and Thomas A. Metzger. "Sinological Shadows: The State of Modern China Studies in the United States." *Washington Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1980): 89.

³⁹⁴

yet ripe for direct elections at the top level. First and foremost, the educational level of the population is not satisfactory”,³⁹⁵ so “universal suffrage could be implemented” only by the mid-21st century.³⁹⁶ As such, it was no wonder that he decided to crackdown the pro-democracy movement two years later. However, the modernization theory, which Deng used to justify the postponement of democracy in 1989, could also be used to delegitimize the 1949 revolution and the communist regime established thereupon as legitimize the KMT regime that it overturned: if the KMT had not lost the Mainland and continued its developmental dictatorship there, China could have had the socioeconomic condition for democracy by, if not the late 1980s when Taiwan’s democratization started to take place, at least much earlier than Deng’s “mid-21st century” promise.

Exactly within this context, the modernization theorists with Japan as an exemplar, alongside Four Asian Tigers (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) and Tiger Cub Economies (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Philippines) to a lesser extent, overwhelmingly triumphed in its competition with those “revolutionary” scholars who regarded China, alongside Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, as alternatives by the end of the Cold War.

As Fukuyama noted in 1992 that modernization theory, once the dominant paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s but overridden by dependency theory thereafter, looked “much more persuasive in 1990 than it did 15 or 20 years earlier when it came under heavy attack in academic circles...from Spain and Portugal to the Soviet Union and China to Taiwan and South Korea, have all moved in” the direction of capitalist liberal democracy.³⁹⁷ Contributed to the early 1990s revival of modernization theory were not only the economic rise of the Four Asian Tigers and the decline of the Soviet Union,³⁹⁸ but also China’s course of developmental dictatorship that took shape from 1978 to 1992, which Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia that also went through communist turmoil, later followed.

Now, I would like to move the second comparison, i.e., two types of autocratic legitimacy – developmental and traditional (non-developmental). Both could be used in defense of China’s post-Cold War dictatorship, but they are contradictory to each other, and the 1992 System is based on developmental legitimacy rather than traditional legitimacy.

Conceivably, the revival of modernization theory was accompanied by the marginalization of dependency theory. Japan, Four Asian Tigers, and Tiger Cub Economies demonstrated how late-developing countries converged with the developed countries, thus falsifying dependency theory’s claim that the periphery states can never become core states in the capitalist world system.³⁹⁹ The remarkable stories of China and Vietnam on a much larger scale in the post-Cold War era only made dependency theory at best a theory of nonuniversal validity – if not a fringe theory, in mainstream economics.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that the dichotomy of dependency theory v. modernization theory covers the whole picture, thus wishfully classifying this dichotomy into a simplistic left-right or revolutionary-counterrevolutionary rivalry. Again, a trichotomy is needed here.

It is true that Japan under its 1955 System was ruled by a right-wing party for decades, that Four Asian Tigers, and Tiger Cub Economies were under right-wing dictatorships, that the Chinese

³⁹⁵ Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1993), 242.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

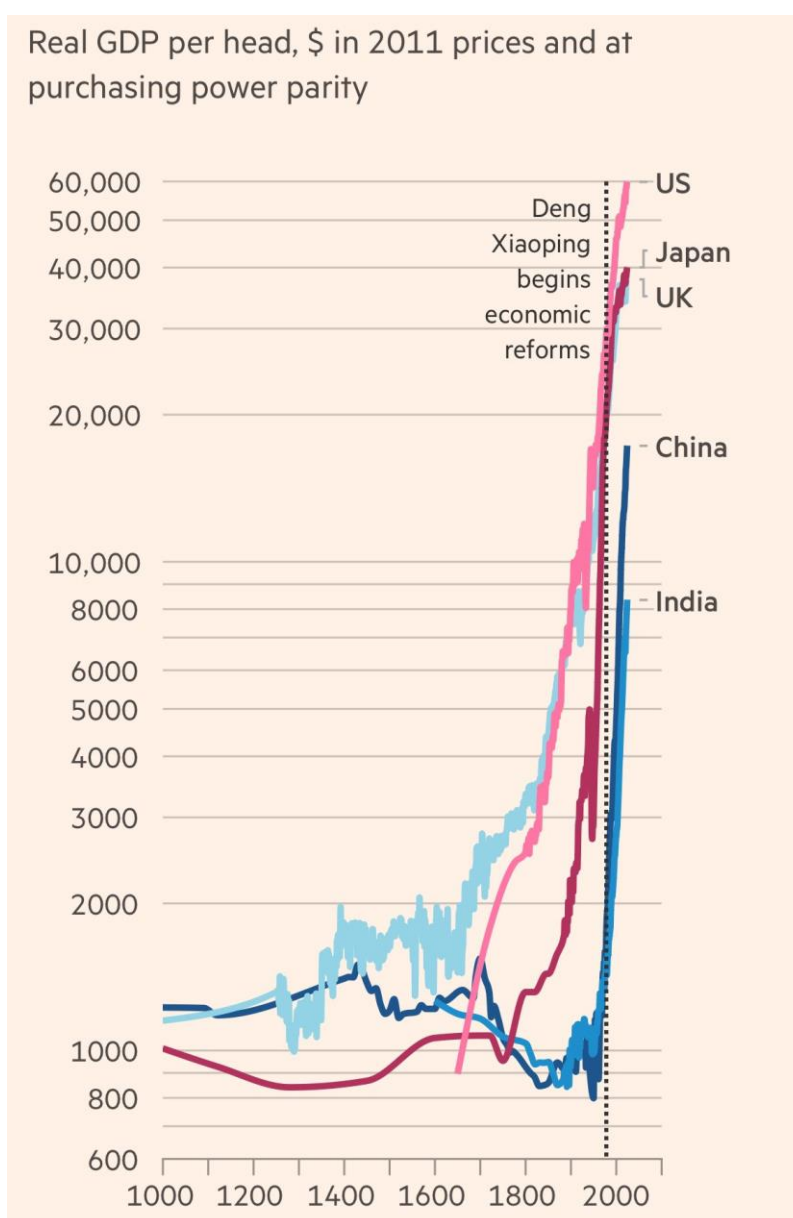
³⁹⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 133.

³⁹⁸ Wolfgang Knöbl, “Theories That Won’t Pass Away: The Never-ending Story of Modernization Theory.” *Handbook of Historical Sociology* (Washington: SAGE, 2003): 104.

³⁹⁹ Cf. Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Communist Party's chief ideologue since the 1990s, Wang Huning, was inspired by these impressive exemplars of authoritarian politics combined with market economy,⁴⁰⁰ that modernization theory implies a conservative mindset of “waiting for democracy to come”, however, I need to point out that this type of autocratic legitimacy, colloquially speaking, a social contract between the people and the government in exchange of economic development at the expense of political freedom, is a historically latter-day form of autocratic legitimacy, which is different from the prevalent form of autocratic legitimacy throughout precapitalist history.

Graph 1: Dengism and China's Economic Modernization



⁴⁰⁰ Lei, Letian. *The Rhetoric of Conservatism: Intellectual Reconstruction of Chinese Ideology in the Early 1990s*. Prague, 2022. Bachelor's Thesis. Department of Historical Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University.

Source: The Maddison Project; IMF. Visualization: *Financial Times*.⁴⁰¹

Here, I refer to this type of autocratic legitimacy as a “developmental” one. The graph above shows that in the far-flung history of Chinese autocracy, no significant economic progress per capita was made until the recent reintroduction of capitalism. Therefore, it is clear that economic development in this sense, under the 1992 System, is not a necessary condition for Chinese autocracy’s duration for millennia.

Unlike the development-for-dictatorship social contract provided by the developmental dictatorship, the traditional or non-developmental autocratic legitimacy is based on a law-of-the-jungle maxim: whoever established a regime is therefore entitled to rule. According to this maxim, the justification of the 1989 crackdown would not be the modernization theory that the socioeconomic condition was immature, but the simple fact that the opposition failed in the military clash for power – if they succeeded in 1989, just like the communist army did against the KMT in 1949, they would be entitled to dictate China and use whatever means, including establishing a new dictatorship, to maintain its power.

It was this traditional type of autocratic legitimacy, instead of the developmental type of autocratic legitimacy in the 1992 System, that stood throughout millennia of China’s dynastic cycle: no dynasty was based on a development-for-dictatorship contract with its subjects, but a simple fact that the autocrats established the dynasty and thereby entitled to rule.

In fact, the traditional type of autocratic legitimacy was not without its conservative supporters such as Chen Yun and Li Xiannian, who believed that it was exactly the economic liberalization that led to popular demands for democracy, therefore the economic reform must be terminated in order to secure the regime. It is evident that the conservatives’ defense of the dictatorship was a traditional or non-developmental one.

China’s avoidance of becoming a non-developmental dictatorship like North Korea is largely attributed to Deng’s ostensibly military coup d’état in the name of the 1992 Southern Tour. Deng’s 1989 decision of crackdown brought about a liquidation of the reformists, including the house arrest of General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, which broke the pre-1989 balance between reformists in favour of both economic liberalization and political democratization and conservatives in favour of neither. Deng, however, a supporter of developmental dictatorship, started worrying about the post-1989 situation and eventually summoned military leaders to defend the economic reforms that he launched. In 1992, Deng appointed several successors, including General Secretaries Jiang Zemin (1989-2002) and Hu Jintao (2002-2012), and Premier Zhu Rongji (1998-2003), to continue his market economy line. Therefore, the two decades after 1992 could be characterized as a prolonged technocratic caretaker government.

In this regard, a comparison between China as a developmental dictatorship and North Korea as a non-developmental dictatorship in the post-Cold War era is illustrative. While China withstood conservative pressures and adopted the developmental type of autocratic legitimacy, North Korea made the de facto Kim dynasty de jure, which made the 1948 establishment of North Korea in the name of a (democratic, people’s, republican) revolution⁴⁰² a continuation of the millennia of the dynastic cycle in the Korean peninsula.

⁴⁰¹ Martin Wolf, “The future of ‘communist capitalism’ in China,” *Financial Times*, 12th March 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/58bb9713-2d71-4a50-b825-f7213907491b?shareType=nongift>.

⁴⁰² The official name of North Korea is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Since 1948, South Korea went through the stage of developmental dictatorship and eventually embraced democratic legitimacy, while North Korea still refuses developmentalism. Is not this comparison sobering? When the Western leftists enthusiastically supported the “revolution”, imagining (cf. John Lennon’s song *Imagine*) a better Korea/China and criticizing “imperialist” American-supported “right-wing”, puppet dictatorship in South Korea/Taiwan, they could not have expected an even worse scenario that comes after revolution.

Both modernization theory and dependency theory are based on the condition of modern capitalism, which is not given in many cases of isolated, premodern autarkies. For most parts of the world, substantial transformation is required to meet this condition. Therefore, the dichotomy of modernization theory v. dependency theory is missing an important stance on the ground, which is in line with neither modernization theory nor dependency theory, i.e., a defense of premodern conditions, rejecting both gradualist evolution and radical revolution.

Due to the length limit, I would not trace the historical origins of this conservative stance back to the mid-19th century in the East Asian context. Nevertheless, the comparison between Deng and his conservative colleagues, 1992 System and North Korea demonstrates in what ways this conservative stance exists, and as an opponent of modernization theory, its rhetorical and practical similarity to its “enemy’s enemy”, i.e., dependency theory. As such, it also becomes critical to reflect the worldview of dependency theory, which provides a comfortably utilizable framework for the most conservative position against modernity.

Historical Failure to Transcend Humanism

We are now familiar with the developmental type of autocratic legitimacy, which is concretized as a development-for-dictatorship social contract, but what did the traditional type of autocratic legitimacy look like? In 1965, when the unprecedented Cultural Revolution was about to be launched, Mao recalled an episode during his childhood:

“The Qing army arrived by train, and the rebels were caught, then the army ate their hearts out, killing them like cutting rice. A leader of the rebels named Liu Daoyi, a member of Tongmenghui, in his 20s, chose to die instead of surrender. Very tragically, he was beheaded four times before his head eventually fell off. This was what impressed me the most when I was a child: the government forced the people to rebel.”⁴⁰³

As such, the 13-year-old Mao witnessed how the 22-year-old republican revolutionary Liu Daoyi (1884-1906) was killed by the royal army in the downtown of Changsha, which happened to be my hometown. Liu’s sacrifice for a democratic China was commemorated, before Mao in his words above, by Sun Yat-sen, who wrote a poetry titled *In Memorial of Liu Daoyi*, of which two lines read: “on frontiers, battle stallions neighing in autumn breeze; over famished inland, wild geese cry at sunset bleak.”

The striking scene Mao depicted, from a present-day point of view, is human cannibalism. Human cannibalism, historically, was a widespread phenomenon across different cultural contexts in both

⁴⁰³ Cited in Ma Shexiang, 2006: p. 151.

prehistory⁴⁰⁴ and civilizational history.⁴⁰⁵ The motives of human cannibalism are of two categories: food shortage and others. The two are interrelated. For instance, if famine were a phenomenon that periodically occurs, human cannibalism would then be considered less contraindicated. In modern days, human cannibalism incidents still exist, but the number significantly decreased.

In evolutionary biology, the threshold between animal cannibalism and human cannibalism is unclear. The former never touches upon moral or legal issues. It is exactly the identity of “humankind” that makes human cannibalism an issue. Human cannibalism violates human rights in the minimum sense – the right to life, and in such a physical, and thus chilling manner. Therefore, the reduction and elimination of human cannibalism is itself a manifestation of the progress of human rights.

Another striking point is the normalized political logic behind the royal army’s brutality against dissidents: the sovereign, i.e., the emperor, has all-fledged domination over his subjects, including the power to deprive their lives. The civilizational history of China is a periodical history of dynasties, meaning that no sovereign is everlasting; dynasties rise and fall. However, no matter what new dynasty replaced the old one, the political logic that the state violence apparatus is royal to one, instead of all, remained.

The 1911 Revolution led by Sun aimed to end premodern China – not a particular dynasty (of Qing) or House (of Aisin-Gioro), but the premodern system that operates according to the above-mentioned political logic. The 1911 Revolution manifested the two noble goals of modernity: economic modernization, e.g., eradication of famine, extension of life expectancy, improvement in literacy and educational attainment, and political democratization, e.g., state neutrality, protection of individual rights, and rule of law. Both contribute to the progress of human rights.

However, it seems that the premodern economic structure and political logic have persisted for so long that it penetrated into people’s minds. The fragile republican order quickly collapsed in subsequent civil wars. When the right-wing dictatorship Chiang took over China in 1927, the country fell into a toxic division between right-wing and left-wing authoritarians, in which liberalism was suffocated. Both sides rejected the basic principles of respecting individual political rights and the liberal, middle-way solution of constitutionalist politics in which their left-right divergences could be settled peacefully.

Resentment laid out the groundwork. The inhumane suppressions against communists by right-wing nationalists, as in the case of Liu Daoyi that Mao referred to, justified the tit-for-tat brutality against the “class enemies” of the communists. Mao’s words were no descriptive exaggeration: “the government forced the people to rebel”.⁴⁰⁶ However, should this justify the violent revenge based on the same political logic? Should the change of government be determined by “rebellion” or motion of no confidence?

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Stoneking, Mark. “Widespread Prehistoric Human Cannibalism: Easier to Swallow?” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 18, no. 10 (2003): 489-490; Villa, Paola, Claude Bouville, Jean Courtin, Daniel Helmer, Eric Mahieu, Pat Shipman, Giorgio Belluomini, and Marili Branca. “Cannibalism in the Neolithic.” *Science* 233, no. 4762 (1986): 431-437.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Lee, Harry F. “Cannibalism in Northern China between 1470 and 1911.” *Regional Environmental Change* 19, no. 8 (2019): 2573-2581; Aguadé, CM Pijoan, and Josefina Mansilla Lory. *Evidence for Human Sacrifice, Bone Modification and Cannibalism in Ancient Mexico*. Gordon and Breach: Amsterdam, 1997; Charnock, Richard Stephen. “Cannibalism in Europe.” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 4 (1866): xxii-xxxi.

⁴⁰⁶ Cited in Ma Shexiang, 2006: p. 151.

The 1949 Revolution was initially a restoration of the 1911 republican order and indeed was endorsed by a large number of Chinese liberals including Sun's widow. However, Mao soon abandoned the now "outdated" bourgeois ideas and institutions and launched a set of what fits into the Popperian concept of "utopian engineering".⁴⁰⁷ Consequentially, the most horrifying form of human rights violations reappeared.

The first case was the widespread famine and consequent human cannibalism after the failed Great Leap Forward.⁴⁰⁸ In this case, the main motive of human cannibalism was food shortage. "Some ate cooked flesh, some ate raw flesh...Many of the so-called 'cooked pork' sold at stalls in the suburbs, market towns, and villages were human flesh."⁴⁰⁹ It is thus ironic that the society that ideationally had transcended the backward capitalism demonstrated what regularly occurs in pre-modern society, namely, human cannibalism due to food shortage.

The second case was the Guangxi Massacre during the Cultural Revolution, in which human cannibalism was widely observed.⁴¹⁰ One cannibal defended himself: "I ate human flesh, but what I ate was landlord's flesh! Spy's flesh! ...At that time, we were all proud of eating human flesh."⁴¹¹ Apparently, human cannibalism, in this case, was driven not by food shortage, but spiritual convictions, e.g., "class hatred", "firm standing", and "drawing a clear line [with the enemies]."⁴¹² In other words, simply killing the enemies without trial is not enough to manifest the enormous hatred; the more terrifying the way of human cannibalism was, the more "revolutionary" it was considered.

In this context, Mao's words on the death of Chen Daoyi became relevant. The Maoist regime did not recognize, and in fact, disdained "human, humankind, individual human being, human rights, humanity, humanism",⁴¹³ not because some are inherently evil, but that these principles were never established in this country.

The historical fate of 20th century China is not isolated. In 1918, Nicholas II was executed by the Bolsheviks in the same way in which he and his ancestors executed the Decembrists, Socialist Revolutionaries, Constitutional Democrats, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks. According to the principle of *lex talionis*, the "revolutionary" executions of Nicholas II and Louis XVI were apparently just. However, what happened following these two events was turbulences, disorders, violence, reactions...the opposites of the humanist, Enlightenment ideas. Guo Luoji, the 1980s Marxist humanism who has been in exile in the United States since 1989, concluded:

"China's feudalist ideology is extremely developed. It is impossible to jump directly from traditional thoughts to Marxism without going through the intermediate stage of bourgeois rationality. Without comprehension and mastery of the outstanding achievements of bourgeois ideology, you can only...transfer the blooms of Marxism to the haggard woods of

⁴⁰⁷ Popper, Karl. "The Poverty of Historicism, II. A Criticism of Historicist Methods." *Economica* 11, no. 43 (1944): p. 122.

⁴⁰⁸ Yang, Jisheng. "The Fatal Politics of the PRC's Great Leap Famine: The Preface to *Tombstone*." *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, no. 66 (2010): p. 765.

⁴⁰⁹ Yang Jisheng, 2008: p. 142.

⁴¹⁰ A case study is Sutton, Donald S. "Consuming Counterrevolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxuan, Guangxi, China, May to July 1968." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 136-172.

⁴¹¹ Zheng Yi, 1993: p. 54.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

feudalist ideology. The deconstruction of ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’ would then be nothing but the promotion of tyranny, privilege, and terror.”⁴¹⁴

Guo’s intellectual reflections illustrate the view that China went through a “historical cycle” during the 20th century and present the infeasibility of Marxist commitment to subverting the “bourgeois” mechanism of human rights and its failure to transcend humanism. Thereby, those rejecting the status quo and aiming to change China must learn from the failure of violence in the past and take an approach of peaceful evolution, respecting human rights, including those of the privileged oppressors.

Peaceful Evolution and Human Rights

The prevalence of Marxist humanist discourses during China’s long 1980s was replaced by the predominance of human rights discourses under the 1992 System. As Zhou Yicheng noted, conservative theoreticians could use Marxism as a weapon against the “bourgeois theory of human rights”, while reformist theoreticians could appreciate Marxist theories concerning human nature and human rights.⁴¹⁵ In Soviet-type societies, “intellectuals could not argue against the Party from an anti-Marxist viewpoint” out of the risks of political persecution.⁴¹⁶ Under such conditions, the Marxist humanist explorations of “true”, “humanist” Marx, “from Yugoslavia, Hungary, Soviet Union, to China”, thus contained their undeclared liberal advocacies for human rights.⁴¹⁷

On international occasions, Chinese diplomats have been tirelessly repeating that from a socio-economic perspective, Chinese people now enjoy the highest level of human rights in Chinese history. It has to be acknowledged that the statement per se is factually true, be it in comparison with Maoist, dystopian China or with premodern, feudal China. As Charter 08 acknowledged:

“The ‘Reform and Opening Up’ in the late 20th century has freed China from the widespread poverty and absolute totalitarianism of the Mao era. Private wealth and people’s living standards have increased significantly, personal economic freedom and social rights have been partially restored, civil society has begun to grow, and people’s calls for human rights and political freedom are growing. While the ruling party is carrying out economic reforms towards marketization and privatization, it has begun to change from rejecting human rights to gradually recognizing human rights.”⁴¹⁸

For example, in 2004, the National People’s Congress of China passed a constitutional amendment in 2004, which stipulated that: “one paragraph is added to Article 33 of the Constitution as the third paragraph, which reads, ‘The State respects and preserves human rights.’ The original third paragraph is changed to be the fourth.”⁴¹⁹

“The State respects and preserves human rights”⁴²⁰ came into being alongside a series of constitutional amendments on the legal protections of private, economic human rights, especially property rights in China since the 1990s. In 1993, “the State implements a planned economy on the basis of

⁴¹⁴ Guo Luoji, 2002.

⁴¹⁵ Zhou Yicheng, 2023b [1990]: pp. 82

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 83

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Liu Xiaobo et al., Charter 08, 2008.

⁴¹⁹ Article 24, *Amendment to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* (2004).

⁴²⁰ Id.

socialist public ownership” was changed to “the State implements a socialist market economy”.⁴²¹ In 1999, it was added that “the People’s Republic of China governs the State according to law and makes it a socialist State under rule of law”.⁴²² In 2004, “the State guides, supervises and manages the individual and private economy” was changed to “the State encourages, supports and guides the development of the non-public economy, and supervises and manages the non-public economy according to law”,⁴²³ so on and so forth.

The seven words or nine Chinese characters of “the State respects and preserves human rights”⁴²⁴ represented something remarkable. Though its implementation remains a subject of legitimate investigations, the legal form of the very idea is already an accomplishment. It declared the abandonment of (1) the “class struggle” idea that the violation of “certain” people’s human rights is justified for the expansion of human rights, as well as (2) the premodern norm in which the idea of “human rights” was unborn.

Under the 1992 system, both liberals and conservatives acknowledge that bourgeois economy, politics, and socioculture are of an insurmountable and desirable⁴²⁵ stage – in the official terminology, it is called the “primary stage of socialism”, in China’s developmental path. The debate is on where the end of the developmental dictatorship or “feudalist capitalism”⁴²⁶ is and what the way in which it ends is, that is to say, when democracy will come.

In this regard, of course, the political struggles between liberalism and conservatism similar to those during China’s long 1980s have continued. On the one hand, the precept “I think a healthy society should not have just one voice”⁴²⁷ was said Li Wenliang, the whistleblower of COVID-19, came from not a dissident, but a Party member. One does not have to read much of the classics of political philosophy to express the fundamental principle of free speech and pluralism in liberalism, nor does it require one to become a political activist. The silent liberal majority, including many Party members, are necessary for future democracy, and so are explicit manifestos such as Charter 08.

On the other hand, just like conservatism in the West is a constant, and so is it in China. A famous Chinese intellectual and University of Chicago alumnus, who sympathizes with American “sociocultural conservatives”⁴²⁸ and maintains “little respect or even patience with the greater majority of liberal and New Left scholars in the West”,⁴²⁹ believes that:

“Conservatism is of urgent need in China. There are always unsatisfactory, unjust, or unreasonable situations in society, but they are not necessarily resolvable by regime change. Sometimes you have to tolerate. This is common sense in the West, but China has been a society that experienced drastic changes in the past more than 100 years, during which, it

⁴²¹ Article 7, Id. (1993).

⁴²² Article 13, Id. (1999).

⁴²³ Article 21, Id. (2004).

⁴²⁴ Article 24, Id. (2004).

⁴²⁵ This is in accordance with the avoidance of the two frontiers of Marxism: without insurmountability, it falls into utopianism; without desirability, it falls into feudalism.

⁴²⁶ Li Zehou and Zhang Lifan, 2009. “Today’s China is capitalism with feudal characteristics, i.e., official-cored ideal, and the government has too much power. Isn’t the official-cored ideal a feudal characteristic?”

⁴²⁷ Green, Andrew. “Li Wenliang.” *The Lancet* 395, no. 10225 (2020): p. 682.

⁴²⁸ Gan Yang, “I Would Rather Have a Slower Pace of Reform,” *Civilization, State, and University* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2018), p. 525.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 522.

was basically believed that change is always good, anyway better than no change...without conservatism, no rule of law can be established. Its prerequisite is not how well-established the laws are but that the unreasonable or even bad laws, unless abolished through legal procedures, are still laws to be abided.”⁴³⁰

Speaking of tolerance, Hu Shih, the most prominent 20th century Chinese liberal intellectual’s 1959 precept retains its relevance in the 21st century China: “tolerance is more important than freedom”.⁴³¹ At first glance, the precept may be accused of being bottomless concessions to the powerful. However, tolerance is not given by the powerless only, it also applies to the powerful: the tolerance for dissent is more important than their freedom of committing human rights violations. To avoid repeating the human rights tragedies results of one side’s violent domination over the other of the 20th century, a consensus on whither China must be established. Consensus, an indispensable component of liberalism, reflects the value of compromise, i.e., respecting everybody’s voice; it is not one voice that dominates.

For liberals, tolerance includes respect for the conservative voices in defense of the status quo such as one that values “character of stability”⁴³² is difficult when the status quo is, e.g., as undesirable as Mao described, “the government forced the people to rebel”.⁴³³ However, the most important lesson from the 20th century history of China is that the only way to get rid of this vicious circle is not to fall into this circle of violence-against-violence once again. To do so, both sides must acknowledge that human rights are desirable, although they reserve their right to disagree on the prioritization of certain genres of human rights. The liberals must not fall into the trap of retaliatory human cannibalism in dystopia, and the conservatives must not fall into the trap of oppressive cannibalism in feudalism; in either trap, it would lead to an inhuman and unhealthy society that has just one voice.

Final Remarks

There has been a long-standing critique on the profound contradiction between Marx’s commitment to Enlightenment and his aspiration to transcend or aufheben Enlightenment including the bourgeois constructions of human nature and humanism as such. Young Marx inherited the Enlightenment discourses from his father and ex-French Rhineland where he was born and raised, defending freedom of the press⁴³⁴ and the liberal platform of the Revolutions of 1848.⁴³⁵ However, through his readings of French utopian socialist and communist literature, Marx turned to question the foundations of bourgeois ideologies and developed a matured form of “Marxism”, which Althusser argues is theoretical antihumanist and against Cartesian knowing subject and subjectivity. Structure, e.g., ideological state apparatus, instead of agency, Althusser argues, is what ultimately determines human history.⁴³⁶ Althusser is accurate that matured Marx is no longer contend with

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 523.

⁴³¹ Hu Shih, 1959.

⁴³² Gan Yang, “I Would Rather Have a Slower Pace of Reform,” p. 524.

⁴³³ Cited in Ma Shexiang, 2006: p. 151.

⁴³⁴ Marx, Karl. “On Freedom of the Press (May 1842).” In *MECW*, Volume 1, pp. 132-181. Hardt, Hanno. “Communication Is Freedom: Karl Marx on Press Freedom and Censorship.” *Javnost-The Public* 7, no. 4 (2000): 85-99.

⁴³⁵ Shoikhedbrod, Igor. “Marx and the Democratic Struggle Over the Constitution in 1848-9.” *History of Political Thought* 43, no. 2 (2022): 357-381.

⁴³⁶ Smith, Steven B. “Althusser’s Marxism without a Knowing Subject.” *American Political Science Review* 79, No. 3 (1985): 641-655.

humanism and matured Marxism should not be confused with or reduced into humanism; it goes a step forward or beyond humanism.

This delicate position raises two concerns. First, is it tenable and if so, to what extent? Second, if it is not, what would an attempt to establish this position end up with? Take the example of free press, matured Marx would now demand not censorship, which means a step backwards or behind free press, but “greater” freedom of the press, allegedly through a structural change of the society and economy, i.e., a transition to socialism. Is such a “greater” freedom of the press tenable and if so, to what extent? If it is not, what would an attempt to establish one, renouncing freedom of the press, end up with?

To a large extent, my thesis stands as an intellectual contribution to this genre or tradition of critique of Marxism, though from not a philosophical-theoretical but a historiographical-practical approach. To the first concern, while it is impossible to rule out the future possibility of a tenable position of postcapitalist subjectivity, it is fair to conclude, through the prism of the transnational historiography of Marxist humanism, that all the previous efforts, predominantly the communist practices in the name of Marxism during the 20th century, have unanimously failed. That is to say, to the second concern, an attempt to establish a “greater” freedom of the press would not end up with a “greater” freedom of the press, while the renunciation of freedom of the press would simply result in censorship. Moreover, the same logic applies to not only freedom of the press, but also freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, association, free market, free trade, parliamentarism, civic or liberal-democratic nationalism, humanism, Enlightenment, modernization, universal values, so on and so forth.

Marx’s colleague at *Rheinische Zeitung*, Moses Hess described Marx as someone who “will deal a fatal blow to medieval religion and politics...If you combine (I mean combine, not make do) Rousseau, Voltaire, d’Holbach, Lessing, Heine, and Hegel into one person, you get Dr. Marx.”⁴³⁷ Marxism, in its original form, i.e., the ism of Marx, as Guo Luoji wrote, “contains and transcends liberalism, democracy, and humanism.”⁴³⁸

The problem is never the fact that Marxism contains liberalism, democracy, and humanism – which Marxist humanism has been in defense of, but its attempt to transcend or sublate/aufheben liberalism, democracy, and humanism, which not only has never succeeded, but also resulted in failed products not even containing liberalism, democracy, and humanism. In Soviet-type societies where Marxism was held as the orthodox, Marx’s intellectual legacy was (mis)used as a conservative interpretation of Marxism, which took the form of Marx’s critique of humanism, but not the revolutionary essence of transcending humanism through humanism. Thus, this interpretation became in defense of “medieval religion and politics” per se, i.e., the reality in Soviet-type societies, and in this way, became a target of the particular intellectual phenomenon known as Marxist humanism. As a liberal interpretation of Marxism, Marxist humanism advanced bourgeois liberalization platforms such as subjectivity and humanism in the name of Marxism. The eventual results included the cancellation of ideological monism and/or the establishment of market economy in Soviet-type societies, instead of the realization of Marx’s ideal beyond humanism.

⁴³⁷ Cited in An Qinian, 2015: p. 21 [cited in Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels. Leur vie et leur oeuvre*. Paris, 1955].

⁴³⁸ Guo Luoji, 2002.

Appendix I. Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)⁴³⁹

Foreword

The brand-new material and spiritual conditions of the present age are unimaginable and unreasonable for most of the past thinkers. As Marx predicted, history is refreshing everything, and it will certainly refresh our thinking.

Philosophy, as the spiritual cohesion of an era, cannot transcend its time and space.

Epistemological principles are also a historicized formation, not a textbook consistent for decades.

Compared with the founders of Marxism who paid close attention to the natural sciences and social sciences and compared with the magnificence of contemporary material and spiritual life, the current study on epistemology is, in a sense, separated from the torrent of scientific development, and it appears narrow, outdated and poor.

- To simply divide the colourful intellectual schools of history and contemporary times into black and white, and to be satisfied with an absolute binary opposition, is the root of the impoverishment of epistemology
- The reflection theory of mechanical materialism has become the basic feature of this impoverishment
- The new three-stage pattern from “abstract matter” to “perceptual knowledge” to “rational knowledge” is the basic model of this impoverishment

It is true that there is a historical rationale for forming this epistemology, but we cannot stop here today. Time has sublated this epistemology. Without modern science, without modern culture, without modern life, in a word, without human, epistemology will wither.

The epistemology of the new era, advancing along the path of Marxist theory, has no intention of proclaiming the conclusion of permanent invariance. It is an exploration, a criticism, a method, an evergreen tree rooted in the soil of modern human practice, and a system that is always open and thus constantly learning from the old and absorbing the new.

1

Fundamentally speaking, the basic part of the long-standing epistemological model of “matter-perceptual knowledge-rational knowledge”, e.g., matter, is a material without any normativity and separated from human.

This kind of abstract matter, because of its lack of prescriptiveness, is outside science and human experience, so it has become the “God” of the mechanists. This is what Marx attacked as “abstract matter, or rather, a direction of idealism.” (*Collected Works of Marx/Engels*, vol. 42, p. 128)

⁴³⁹ XIE, Xialing; CHEN, Kuide; ZHOU, Yicheng; YU, Wujin; WU, Xiaoming; AN, Yanming. *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, 1983. In ZHOU, Yicheng. *Nature, Human, Thinking*. Barnes & Noble Publishing House, 2020. Translated by LEI, Letian. In *The Subjectivity in Dilemma: Receptions of Marxist Humanism in 1980s China*. Vienna: Central European University, 2024. The original work is a collective speech delivered by six doctoral and master’s candidates (and teachers) from the Philosophy Department of Fudan University, Xie Xialing, Chen Kuide, Zhou Yicheng, Yu Wujin, Wu Xiaoming, and An Yanming, at the academic conference on “Modern Natural Science and Marxist Epistemology” in June 1983. The translation and its publication were authorized by An Yanming and Zhou Yicheng. For the biographies of the authors, see Appendix II.

The founders of Marxism believe that the view of opposing and separating spirit and matter, human and nature is absurd and antinatural. This view has its historical roots. Since the beginning of modern philosophy, in the struggle against the abstract subjectivity of Christianity, when overcoming the spiritualism that hates human and rejects human body, materialism has not jumped out of the scope of its opponents. They have forgotten human, despised the spirit, and insisted on one-sided matter, and caused a situation where materialism and idealism in later generations were at odds with each other.

In Marx's view, materialism and idealism should be combined; the absolute duality between human and nature, spirit and matter, subject and object should be dissolved, and the unity of human and nature should be realized. Human society is this kind of unity.

Marx opposed the abstract concept of matter that was once paranoid by modern science. The so-called reality between human and nature refers to "the existence of human as nature to human and the existence of nature as human to human." (*Collected Works of Marx/Engels*, Vol. 42, p. 131)

When we state that the natural world is the starting point of all sciences, this natural world is not a "thing-in-itself", nor is it an alien thing that is absolutely opposed to human. The real nature is the humanized nature. This is the research object of modern natural science. Natural science studies the interaction between nature and human, that is, it studies human, so natural science is also a science about human.

2

Intuitive, mechanical and passive reflection theory is the logical successor of the abstract concept of matter.

This reflection theory stipulates that the essence of episteme is the reflection of some specific matter to another matter. This mirror-like reflection and imitation initially constituted the so-called "perceptual knowledge".

This is a skeuomorphic analogy borrowed from classical optics. If it is still regarded as the essence of episteme, it must be said that it is an anachronism.

Modern psychology, including Piaget's genetic epistemology, has shown the inadequacy of the one-way reflection theory. Human perception does not only depend on the reflection characteristics of sensory organs, but it depends on the observer's experience, knowledge, expectations, and general psychological state. Different individuals do not "see" or "hear" the same thing in the same direction.

Marx once rejected the popular materialism that tried to find the basis of all thoughts and spiritual phenomena in the abstract matter and attributed all concepts to the deformation of sensation. According to this type of materialism, human is forever a recipient of influences. Why do thinking and episteme develop? How do they develop? Why did episteme happen to have different qualities in different ages? Why did human deepen their understanding of objects and themselves in the long river of history? These have become the eternal mystery of the Sphinx.

Modern science has proved that the subject does not know the object only when it is influenced by the object, but more importantly, the subject must act on the object. Knowledge is born from the interaction between subject and object.

Humans change their own nature while changing external nature.

The theory of intuitive reflection fails to understand that it is not the essence of nature, but the evolution process of nature caused by humans, that is the closest basis of human thinking. Human intelligence develops according to how human learns to change the natural world.

If the abstract concept of matter is not given up, and still clings to the theory of intuitive reflection, the epistemology cannot eliminate the one-sidedness and negativity of the old materialism. Importing the concept of “agency” on this basis only reduces the agency of subjective function to the different curvatures of different “mirror surfaces”.

3

Dividing the cognitive process into two stages, perceptual and rational, is a long-standing popular epistemological doctrine.

The so-called perceptual knowledge refers to feelings, impressions, perceptions, representations and vivid intuition of things; the so-called rational knowledge refers to concepts, judgments and reasoning. What humans recognize in the perceptual stage is considered to be “the phenomenon of things, each side of things, and the external connections of things”; in the stage of rational cognition, humans recognize the so-called “common essence of things and the laws of motion of things.” Every human realization can be measured under a standard scale, and thus be classified into two separate stages.

Unfortunately, such stages do not exist in reality. There is neither pure perceptual knowledge nor pure rational knowledge in the world.

If this mechanical dichotomy is put into practice, it is easy to find its flaws. In the process of real cognition, we cannot find “perceptual knowledge” that only has feelings, perceptions, and appearances but no concepts, judgments, and reasoning, nor can we find “rational knowledge” that has only essence but no phenomena and no perceptual factors.

The powerful logic of modern science proves that theory precedes observation, and observation depends on theory. Theory guides observation and operation, and is the premise of the observation statement, which is full of theory. Even the simplest propositions such as “flowers are red” and “streets are clean” are structured in a certain theoretical language. It obviously contains concepts, judgments, and even reasoning, which have already surpassed the scope of perceptual knowledge such as sensation, perception, and appearance.

Moreover, for the same phenomenon, due to the different theoretical premises used, the conclusions obtained are completely different.

Therefore, low-level cognition does not completely exclude rational participation, and high-level cognition does not reject purely rational knowledge of sensibility.

Contemporary cognitive science provides many aspects and details of the cognitive process, far beyond the traditional simple categories of so-called sensation, perception, representation, concept, judgment, and reasoning. The dichotomous perceptual-rational cognitive process mode has been naturally sublated.

When studying the cognitive process, one cannot ignore Marx’s rich expositions on the thinking journey from perceptual concreteness to abstraction, and from abstraction to concrete thinking.

Sensibility and rationality, concreteness and abstraction always present a unified picture of cognition that interacts and blends with each other and deepens continuously. The “author” of this picture is the vivid practical activities of humans. This is the real process of human cognition.

The logical result of sublating the abstract material view and simple reflection theory is to reform the monism of truth.

Modern natural science shows that the same batch of empirical phenomena can be summarized by completely different theories. The scientific model is of multiplicity.

The founders of modern science have repeatedly emphasized that completely different systems of natural laws can be applied to the same physical event without conflict.

No truth is purely objective, but the unity of subjectivity and objectivity.

Any truth expressed in theoretical form has hypothetical and constructivist elements. The content and form of truth are inseparable. The objective thing itself does not matter whether it is true or false, right or wrong. Therefore, there is no ontological truth or absolute truth, although many have a firm belief in this.

The naïve notion that science can reflect the world ultimately and uniquely is due to the success of classical science and philosophical dogmatism. The so-called dogmatism here includes the speculativeism of Plato and Hegel, as well as the empiricism of Bacon and Locke.

The dogmatist view of monistic truth has been abandoned by modern science.

From both the vertical and horizontal aspects, we can see that the truth is not singular, and the truth allows multiplicity.

The multiplication of truth is the basic premise of the development of human civilization. The richness and variety of the history of natural sciences and humanities all show the flaw of truth monism.

Just as truth, goodness, and beauty are not absolutely separated, neither is the theory of value absolutely separated from the theory of truth. Truth is also a kind of value, which has the value of guiding human practice.

One of the origins of the multiplicity of truth lies in its value factor.

Science is by no means a singular, final explanation of the universe competing with theology. Science challenges the dogmatic and rigid theology with its multiple models, constant renewal and vitality.

It is the mission of contemporary philosophers to unify epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, etc. on a broader basis.

5

To advance epistemology, the history of philosophy must be re-reflected.

Kant marks an important turning point in the history of philosophy. Kant's theory is not only a great synthesis of rationalism and empiricism, but also a pioneer of modern humanism and philosophy of science, and his achievements in the field of epistemology are particularly eye-catching.

However, Kant's philosophy is often misinterpreted. People criticize Kant's transcendental idealism tirelessly but seldom think about its true connotation and value. In fact, it was through the transcendental theory that Kant exalted the initiative of the cognitive subject, thus historically establishing the concept of human subjectivity.

This quiet philosopher solemnly declares that episteme is not a linear and passive process from sensation, perception to concept; on the contrary, subjective agency is the premise of any

knowledge. In other words, human cognition does not rotate with the outside world, but the outside world rotates with human prior consciousness.

If in La Mettrie's mind, human is just a passive machine and a negative appendage of nature, then in Kant, human is revered as the centre of all things in the universe and the real master of nature.

Kant outstandingly raised the issue of human subjectivity, which had a profound impact on modern philosophy and trends of scientific thought. Its justification has been extended to the "schema" concept of Piaget's epistemology and the "paradigm" theory of Kuhn's philosophy of science.

Agnosticism is another charge against Kant's philosophy. The opponents focus on Kant's limitation of the reliability of knowledge to the sphere of *Verstand*.

In this aspect, Kant's philosophy also has something worthy of attention.

By dividing *Verstand* and reason, Kant draws a gap between epistemology and ontology. From then on, epistemology cannot avoid the "demarcation problem", which is called "Kant's problem".

The essence of the so-called "Kantian agnosticism" is the demarcation of epistemology. With the rapid development of natural science, this point has been increasingly recognized by many philosophers. It is also in this sense that the main trend of analytical philosophy has become the "rejection of metaphysics".

Kantianism is a great synthesis and revolution in the history of philosophy, the beginning of classical German philosophy – a source of Marxist thought, and a vigorous source of power for modern philosophy and new scientific trends, we should justly evaluate and re-examine Kant's philosophy and dig deeper.

6

Starting with the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, the modern scientific revolution that emerged at the beginning of this century, is the biggest turning point in the history of science. It has fundamentally changed the way of human social life and thinking.

From the perspective of epistemology, it is undoubtedly the historical task of contemporary philosophy to analyse the spiritual preparations for the scientific revolution and to summarize the spiritual achievements of this revolution.

Spiritual preparations. As the first attack on mechanical materialism, the pioneer of the modern scientific revolution, and the enlightener of the new scientific spirit in the 20th century, the philosopher and scientist Mach has a ground-breaking status through his criticism of the foundation of classical mechanics.

Tracing back from this, the revolution can also be traced to a further source of thought: Hume.

The subjective idealism of Hume and Mach should be sublated. However, as an important spiritual source of the modern scientific revolution, it deserves a comprehensive re-evaluation by the history of epistemology.

Spiritual achievements. (1) Strict determinism is abandoned. The concept of probability has penetrated into all fields of empirical science and is rising to the category of philosophy, which shows the carelessness of traditional inevitability and contingency. – The Universe, Life Evolution, Quantum Mechanics, Molecular Biology, Systems Science, Theory of Dissipative Structures.

(2) Causality comes under critical scrutiny. Hume's famous argument re-emerged in quantum physics and its interpretation of the uncertainty principle. The principle of simplicity, the consequences of delayed choices.

(3) The boundary between subject and object cannot be clearly defined. The probability function of quantum mechanics combines objective and subjective factors, the inseparable interaction of the instrument and the research object, and the objective evaluation of the principle of complementarity.

(4) Quark confinement. The inexhaustibility of objects?

(5) Rejection of absolute time and space and integration of space and time. Entities are replaced by events – relativity. Difficulties posed by the concept of time – big bang cosmology and quantum mechanics.

(6) Infinite Universe: General Relativity and Big Bang Cosmology.

(7) Genetic engineering, intelligent simulation, and the subject cognition system combining the two. The possibility of genetic engineering.

(8) Operationalism is a reasonable factor in the philosophical summary of the creation process of quantum theory and the theory of relativity.

(9) The debate between teleology and mechanism has been revived. Cybernetics, systems theory, dissipative structure theory, synergy.

(10) Anthropic principle. We know our universe.

It is necessary to summarize the philosophical epistemology of the new achievements of science, and its essence can be summed up in one point: destructively attacking mechanical materialism and valuing human.

“Nature precedes man, man precedes science,” “on the stage of nature, we are both spectators and actors”. The old adages have regained their meanings in modern science.

It is difficult for the traditional epistemological framework to accommodate the abovementioned spiritual achievements. Adding ad hoc hypotheses to the traditional epistemology can only lose its coordination of logical consistency. Reform of epistemology is needed.

7

The new achievements of modern cognitive science deserve our special attention.

Following the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, the empirical science of cognition, which focuses on human cognition, is also differentiated from the matrix of philosophy. Cognitive science uses scientific means to explore the occurrence and development of human cognition concretely and precisely. The speculative discussions of previous philosophy in this area have regressed to become its background knowledge. It advances the research on human cognition with new scientific achievements in physiology (neurophysiology, brain physiology), psychology (cognitive psychology), logic and language.

John Carew Eccles et al.'s theory of mutual interaction between brain and mind in developmental neurology, Piaget's epistemology in developmental psychology, and cognitive science in the technological aspects, namely, computers and intelligent simulations, have achieved remarkable achievements. Especially Piaget's genetic epistemology, which scientifically demonstrates the construction process of cognitive development and the complex interaction between subject and object. Piaget's genetic epistemology has had a huge impact on contemporary scientific and philosophical thought.

Cognitive science is science, not philosophy. In the face of science, what we need to clarify is the boundary between science and pseudoscience, the boundary between proven theories and hypotheses that have not been fully verified; just as it is absurd to discuss the philosophical partisanship of Newtonian mechanics and Einstein's theory of relativity, there is no necessity to argue for the philosophical affiliation of Eccles' or Piaget's theory.

It has become a new trend in the development of contemporary philosophy and science that epistemological philosophers and cognitive scientists jointly explore epistemological issues. The thematic symposium on "Consciousness, Brain, and the External World" held by the 16th World Conference on Philosophy is a sign. Our epistemological research should strive to stand in front of the trend, at least not to stay out of it.

8

The theory of practice is Marx's creative summary of previous philosophies and is the essence of Marx's philosophy. Because of its great stability and inclusiveness, it is in harmony with modern natural science and cognitive science achievements, especially with Piaget's epistemology.

Practice is the unity of subject and object, man and nature. In practice, on the one hand, humans transform or create their own object world, imprinting their own essential power on it; on the other hand, humans transform and create themselves, construct and develop the logical category of thinking structure.

There is no object without a subject. There is no subject without an object. Both get their stipulations from the other, and both get their true meaning in the process of unified practice.

Practice is a fluid, historical concept. Both human and nature, as well as their interrelationships, are in eternal flux. The so-called history includes not only the development process of human, but also that of nature. The so-called transformation of nature by human is also the self-creation of human.

In Marx's view, practical activity is the fundamental starting point of epistemology. The two aspects, human cognition of the object world and the cognition of human self, are simultaneously generated in the same perceptual activity. The content of cognition is either the activity itself or the result of the activity. These include: the natural world as the object of human activities (natural science), the social organization formed by humans to transform this object (social science), and human thinking and ways of knowing (cognitive science). These three are unified and are the science of human. Without practice and creative activities of the subject, the origin and development of human cognition will always be shrouded in fog.

Here are three revelations.

- The basic starting point of epistemology should be human activity. The most fundamental categories and concepts of knowledge originate from human activity, not from objective matter itself.
- Humans are not receivers and reflectors. Humans have cognitive means, cognitive structures and human feelings. Scientific knowledge comes from the corresponding human processing and transformation in perceptual activities.
- Human sensory ability, the formation of cognitive structure and the acquisition of knowledge are social and historical processes, and the formation and laws of human knowledge should be tracked from both historical and social aspects. The epistemological system should be the result of such a comprehensive investigation.

The epistemological topics of each era are relevant to the era.

In view of the comprehensive penetration of modern science into human life, in view of the eye-catching theoretical changes in the development of science, and in view of the fact that individual propositions have unambiguous meanings only in the theoretical system, positive scientific theories composed of universal propositions should be the research focus of contemporary epistemology.

The following three topics are the most basic.

(1) The composition of scientific theories

One of the significances of Newton's theory is that it has established a standard form for scientific theories, and later generations of scientific theories had been hypothetical deductive systems under the Newtonian form. The standard form of science includes definitions, hypothetical propositions, and operation rules, among which hypothetical propositions must be empirical hypotheses. These hypotheses are of fundamental importance to a theoretical system. In this way, the theoretical system's series of inferences are also empirical propositions, which can be confirmed or denied by observation and experiment.

Here, epistemology needs to address two issues:

- i. How are empirical propositions constituted? Our basic point of view is that empirical propositions have two sources, sensuous multiplicity and category, both of which are indispensable. As mentioned earlier, Kant has historical merit on this point. His shortcoming is that he did not research the occurrence and transformation of categories and temporal and spatial perceptual forms. This is a question that should be explored in epistemology.
- ii. How does the deductive system, especially the rules of logical operation, come about? As mentioned earlier, Piaget's achievements in this area are worthy of attention.

(2) The growth of scientific knowledge

The so-called "cognition process of the objective world" often has double meanings, one is the process of understanding the origin of the world and the ontology, and the other is the process of understanding the order of the perceptual world. When people use terms such as "history of knowledge" and "cognition process", they actually refer to the latter.

"Knowledge goes deep from phenomenon to essence" actually refers to the formation of scientific theories; "from the first-level essence to the second-level essence, and finally to infinity" actually refers to the growth of scientific knowledge, that is, the renewal of the theoretical system.

Generally speaking, the problem of the growth of scientific knowledge studies the law of the development of empirical knowledge; in particular, the problem of the growth of scientific knowledge studies the law of the development of scientific theories. In modern epistemology, the latter is the emphasis.

The philosophy of science, represented by Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, et al., is worthy of reference for the research on the abovementioned issues, but they all neglect the research on the process of scientific discovery, i.e., the process of putting forward hypotheses and propositions. It is logical to add the logic of discovery.

(3) The value of scientific theories

When we discuss which of several scientific theories about the same kind of phenomenon has greater truth, we are really discussing which one deserves the higher evaluation. In view of this, the value concept of scientific theory must be introduced.

There are basically two principles for judging the value of scientific theories.

- i. The principle of correspondence. The higher the degree of correspondence between the scientific theory and the objective existence as the ontology, the higher the value the scientific theory has.
- ii. The principle of utility. A scientific theory has greater practical significance, i.e., it can generalize a wider range of phenomena; the higher the frequency of use, the greater the success rate, and the simpler it is, the higher the value the scientific theory has.

The principle of correspondence is absolute. However, since the scientific theory that summarizes empirical phenomena cannot be compared with the ontology, the so-called “degree of correspondence with the ontology” is meaningless. In practical application, the correspondence principle is transformed into the utility principle.

The difficulty with the utility principle is that the evaluation criteria sometimes conflict with each other. In practice, scientists use the inclusive principle in the utility principle to evaluate, i.e., a theory as a unified theory can accommodate previous theories, and its value is higher.

The establishment of evaluation principles is the key to the value of scientific theories. To some extent, it defines the direction of theoretical evolution. Contemporary epistemology is facing this problem.

10

It doesn't take great acuity to sense that a tide of change is brewing in philosophy. In a way, it heralds a historic confluence of two currents.

The separation of scientism and humanism has tormented the human spirit long since Kant. They are at the two poles of the spirit, belonging to two worlds that are difficult to communicate.

Scientism ignores human. Under the pressure of material civilization, alienated humans are small and passive; humanism despises logic and desperately shouts for poetic humans. Because of deep-seated irrationalism, there is a great schism between those with inflated wills and those with shrunken intellects.

Marx's ideal is the basis for the unification of life and science. It is the mission of contemporary epistemology to embed practical human into the epistemological system, establish a new theory of epistemology based on the unity of science and human, and thereby practice Marx's ideal.

The real human is both the subject and the object; it is both our starting point and our destination. The banner of Marx is calling us.

Appendix II. Biographies of Chinese Marxist Humanists⁴⁴⁰

AN, Qinian (安启念) (1947-): born in Shanxi, he obtained BE (1970) and MA in philosophy at Renmin. He was a visiting professor at Odesa and Moscow. He is a professor in philosophy at Renmin and published intensively on Soviet philosophy, especially I. T. Frolov (1929-1999), as well as Russian philosophy.

AN, Yanming (安延明) (1955-): born in Beijing, he obtained BA (1982) and MA (1985) in philosophy at Fudan and worked as associate researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, CASS. He was an author of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. He moved to the U.S. in 1991 and obtained PhD (1997) in East Asian language and culture at Michigan. He is a professor at Clemson.

CHEN, Kuide (陈奎德) (1946-): born in Nanjing, he obtained PhD (1985) in philosophy at Fudan and worked as associate professor at East China University of Science and Technology and director of the university's Institute for Cultural Studies since 1988. He was an author of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. After 4th June 1989, he moved to the U.S. and became a visiting professor at Princeton and president of Princeton China Initiative.

CHEN, Zhishang (陈志尚) (1935-): born in Shanghai, he graduated from (1961) and worked as a professor at the department of philosophy, PKU. Alongside Huang Nansen, he deeply engaged in the 1980s revaluation of Feng Ding's Marxist philosophy, debates on humanism, alienation, and praxis materialism and continued his research on Marxism, human studies and human rights since the 1990s.

DAI, Houying (戴厚英) (1938-1996): born in Anhui, she graduated from ECNU in 1960 and worked for the Gang of Four during the Cultural Revolution. Afterwards, she turned to be a humanist writer of the scar literature movement and authored novel *Human, Ah, Human!* (1980).

DING, Xueliang (丁学良) (1953-): born in Anhui, he obtained MA in philosophy (1981) at Fudan, MA and PhD in sociology (1992) at Harvard under the tutelage of Daniel Bell. His master's thesis was on Marx's idea of comprehensive human development argued for humanism. He is a professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

FENG, Ding (冯定) (1902-1983): born in Zhejiang, he graduated from Moscow Sun Yat-sen University and worked for the popularization of Marxist philosophy in China. After 1949, he became a professor of Marxist philosophy, deputy secretary of the Party committee, and vice president at PKU. During the 1960s, he was criticized for his "individualist" and "revisionist" philosophy. He was elected as an academician of CASS.

FENG, Qi (冯契) (1915-1995): born in Zhejiang, he obtained BA and MA (1941) in philosophy at Tsinghua and worked as a professor at ECNU. His philosophy is known for its integration of Marxism and humanism. He is a member of the Tsinghua school of humanities.

FENG, Xuefeng (冯雪峰) (1903-1976): born in Zhejiang, he studied Japanese literature at PKU and became a founding member of the League of Left-Wing Writers. After 1949, he was appointed as the first president and editor-in-chief of People's Literature Publishing House and vice president of China Writers Association. Alongside Hu Feng, He was persecuted during the 1950s due to his humanist views and was rehabilitated in 1979, three years after his death.

GAO, Ertai (高尔泰) (1935-): born in Jiangsu, he graduated from Soochow University and became an art teacher. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 and thereafter, he was persecuted for his humanistic views. He was rehabilitated in 1977 and later he taught at the

⁴⁴⁰ The list is incomplete.

department of philosophy, Lanzhou University, Nankai, and Nanjing. He was a key advocator for Marxist humanism during the 1980s. He was arrested for one year after 1989 and moved to the U.S. in 1993.

GAO, Qinghai (高清海) (1930-2004): born in Heilongjiang, he studied at Jilin and Renmin and worked as associate professor, professor, distinguished professor (academician equivalent), director of the department of philosophy, vice president at Jilin. During the 1950s, he criticized Stalinist interpretation of Marxist philosophy. In the debate on “praxis materialism” during the late 1980s, he proposed “praxis philosophy” to replace dialectical materialism.

GU, Xiang (顾襄) (1930-2015): born in Jiangsu, he studied philosophy at Renmin and worked for various cultural institutions. Alongside Wang Ruoshui and Wang Yuanhua, he was one the three authors of “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism” (1983). He also published commemorative works on the Old Zhou Yang as a humanist.

GUO, Guanyi (郭官义) (1934-2022): born in Henan, he studied Germanistik at PKU, Leipzig, and Jena, and worked as associate researcher and researcher at Institute of Philosophy, CASS. He translated various German-language text of Marxist humanism during the 1980s and the major works of Jürgen Habermas later. He was editor-in-chief of *World Philosophy*.

GUO, Luoji (郭罗基) (1932-): born in Jiangsu, he graduated from the department of history, PKU and worked as a professor at PKU and Nanjing. In 1986, Deng Xiaoping named Guo Luoji as a “representative of bourgeois liberalization.” After being expelled from the Party due to his strong objection to the suppression in 1989, he moved to the U.S. and became a visiting scholar at Colombia and Harvard. He authored commemorative articles on Chinese Marxist humanists Wang Ruoshui and Feng Ding in *Modern China Studies*.

HU, Feng (胡风) (1902-1985): born in Hubei, he studied at PKU, Tsinghua, and Keio, during which he joined the Communist Party of Japan and was responsible for the Tokyo branch of the League of Left-Wing Writers. In 1938, he became a professor at Fudan. He was persecuted for his literary view in favour of humanity, humanism, subjectivity, and personality during the 1950s and was rehabilitated during the 1980s.

HU, Jiwei (胡绩伟) (1916-2012): born in Sichuan, he studied at Sichuan and work as deputy editor-in-chief, editor-in-chief, and president of *People's Daily*. During the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983, he was forced to step down due to his emphasis on people over party. In 1989, he was dismissed from all posts and placed under probation by the Party for two years due to his support for Zhao Ziyang and objection to the suppression.

HUANG, Nansen (黄楠森) (1921-2013): born in Sichuan, he graduated from the department of philosophy, PKU, and worked as lecturer, associate professor, professor, distinguished professor (academician equivalent) there. Alongside Chen Zhishang, he deeply engaged in the 1980s revaluation of Feng Ding's Marxist philosophy and debates on Marxist humanism and continued his research since the 1990s.

JIA, Zelin (贾泽林) (1934-): born in Heilongjiang, he graduated from the department of philosophy, Moscow and worked as researcher at Institute of Philosophy, CASS. He obtained PhD at University of Ljubljana and translated intensively on Soviet and Yugoslav Marxist humanist literature.

LEI, Yongsheng (雷永生) (1936-2023): born in Tianjin, he graduated from the department of philosophy, PKU in 1960. Later, he taught there and Hebei University. From 1980 to 1987, he worked at the Institute of Philosophy, Beijing Academy of Social Sciences. After 1987, he taught at the China Youth University of Political Studies (now UCASS).

LI, Guiren (李贵仁) (1943-2020): born in Zhejiang, he obtained BA in literature (1965) at Shaanxi Normal University and studied at Renmin from 1979 to 1982. His master's thesis, titled "Humanism: The Soul of Literature", was not defended due to political pressure. He was arrested for five years after 1989, following his support for the pro-democracy movement.

LI, Jizong (李继宗) (1937-): born in Anhui, he graduated from the department of philosophy at Fudan and since then worked there. From 1983 to 1992, he served as deputy director and director of the philosophy department at Fudan. Then the deputy director of the philosophy department at Fudan, he directed the writing of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*.

LI, Zehou (李泽厚) (1930-2021): born in Hunan, he graduated from the department of philosophy, PKU and worked as a researcher at Institute of Philosophy, CASS. Inspired by Kantianism, he initiated "philosophy of subjectivity", which was considered the harbinger of the humanist revival and New Enlightenment movement in 1980s China. He moved to the U.S. in 1992 and died in Boulder, Colorado.

LIN, Li (林利) (1921-?): as the third daughter of republican and later communist revolutionary Lin Boqu (1886-1960), she lived in the Soviet Union until 1946. During the 1950s, she obtained Candidate of Sciences in philosophy in the Soviet Union and was arrested for seven years during the Cultural Revolution. In 1979, she was rehabilitated. She was a professor at the Central Party School and researcher at Institute of Philosophy, CASS. During the 1980s, she engaged in the translation and introduction of Soviet Marxist humanist literature.

LIU, Zaifu (刘再复) (1941-): born in Fujian, he graduated from Xiamen and worked as researcher and director at Institute of Literature, CASS and editor-in-chief of *Literary Review*. Inspired by Li Zehou's "philosophy of subjectivity", he proposed "literary subjectivity" in 1985, which sparked a debate in literary theory. After 1989, he went into exile overseas. He was a visiting professor at Chicago and Stockholm.

MA, Jihua (马积华) (1933-2002): born in Zhejiang, he studied literature at Fudan and graduated from the department of philosophy, Moscow. He worked as associate researcher. During the 1980s, he translated intensively on Soviet Marxist humanist literature.

MAO, Chongjie (毛崇杰) (1939-): born in Hubei, he graduated from Nanjing and Graduate School of CASS (now UCASS). In the 1980s debates on aesthetics, he was an advocator for Marxist humanism, and he continued his research thereafter. He was a researcher at Institute of Literature, CASS.

QIAN, Gurong (钱谷融) (1919-2017): born in Jiangsu, he graduated from National Central University. In 1957, he was criticized for his paper titled "On Literature as the Study of Humanity". After 1978, he was rehabilitated. During the early 1980s, he was an advocator for humanist literature. He was a professor, director of the institute of literature at ECNU and editor-in-chief of *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*.

RONG, Jian (荣剑) (1957-): born in Zhejiang, he obtained MA in philosophy from Renmin and continued his doctoral studies, during which he published intensively on Marxist humanism, especially Marx's state and social theory. After being expelled from Renmin due to his involvement in the 1989 protests, he moved to the U.S. and became an independent scholar.

RU, Xin (汝信) (1931-): born in Jiangsu, he graduated from St. John's University, Shanghai and Graduate School of CASS (now UCASS). He became a researcher, vice director, director of Institute of Philosophy, and vice president of CASS. He published "Is Humanism Necessarily Revisionism? A Revaluation of Humanism" (1980) in *People's Daily*. He was elected as an academician of CASS.

RUAN, Ming (阮明) (1931-): born in Shanghai, he studied at Yenching and worked for *Beijing Daily* and Publicity Department of the Party. In 1977, he became a political advisor for Hu Yaobang. He engaged in the Debate on Humanism and Alienation. In 1985, he was expelled from the Party due to his reformist position. He moved to the U.S. in 1988 and became a citizen of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in 2002.

SU, Shaozhi (苏绍智) (1923-2019): born in Beijing, he studied at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Chongqing (BA), and Nankai (MA). He taught at Fudan (1949-1963) and worked for *People's Daily* (1963-1979). In 1982, he was appointed as director of Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (now Academy of Marxism), CASS. As an unequivocal advocator of democratization, he was dismissed from all posts inside and outside the Party during the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign in 1987. He moved to the U.S. after 4th June 1989 and died in Beijing.

SUN, Bokui (孙伯鍈) (1930-2004): born in Jiangsu, he graduated from the department of history, PKU and became a professor at PKU and Nanjing. During the 1980s, he engaged in the Chinese Marxist humanist movement. He also published on György Lukács. Zhang Yibing was his student and co-author.

WANG, Renshu (王任叔) (1901-1972): pen name Baren, born in Zhejiang, he was a member of the League of Left-Wing Writers, the first ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Indonesia (1950-1954), vice president and deputy editor-in-chief of People's Literature Publishing House. From 1959 onwards, he was criticized and persecuted for his humanist literary views during the late 1950s. He was rehabilitated in 1979, seven years after his death.

WANG, Ruisheng (王锐生) (1928-): born in Macau, he obtained Candidate of Sciences from Institute of Philosophy, CASS and worked as assistant researcher, associate researcher, and researcher at Institute of Philosophy, CASS. He intensively engaged in the 1980s Chinese Marxist humanist movement and continued his research since the 1990s.

WANG, Ruoshui (王若水) (1926-2002): born in Shanghai, he obtained BA in philosophy (1948) at PKU and worked as editor of *People's Daily*. In 1977, he was appointed as the deputy editor-in-chief of *People's Daily*. Alongside Gu Xiang and Wang Yuanhua, he was one the three authors of "Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism" (1983). During the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign in 1987, he was expelled from the Party due to his supports for the 1986 student protests. He moved to the U.S. after 1989 and died in Boston.

WANG, Yuanhua (王元化) (1920-2008): born in Hubei, he was professor at ECNU. Alongside Hu Feng, He was persecuted during the 1950s due to his humanist views and was rehabilitated in 1981. Alongside Wang Ruoshui and Gu Xiang, he was one the three authors of "Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism" (1983). He was editor-in-chief of *New Enlightenment* (1988-1989).

WU, Xiaoming (吴晓明) (1957-): born in Shanghai, he obtained BA, MA, and PhD in philosophy at Fudan and worked as associate professor, professor, distinguished professor (academician equivalent), and dean of the Fudan School of Philosophy. He was an author of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*.

XIE, Tao (谢韬) (1922-2010): born in Sichuan, he graduated from the department of sociology, Nanjing and worked as professor at Renmin. Alongside Hu Feng, He was persecuted during the 1950s due to his humanist views and was rehabilitated in 1980. He became vice president of Renmin and the Graduate School of CASS (now UCASS). In 2007, he published "Democratic Socialism and China's Future" in *Yanhuang Chunqiu*.

XIE, Xialing (谢遐龄) (1945-): born in Chongqing, he obtained BE in electronics (1968) at Tsinghua, MA (1982) and PhD (1985) in philosophy at Fudan and worked as associate professor and professor at Fudan. He was an author of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. He joined the China Democratic League in 1995 and served as a standing committee member of its central committee from 2002 to 2012.

XING, Benshi (邢贲思) (1930-): born in Zhejiang, he graduated from BFSU and Institute of Philosophy, CASS and worked as researcher, deputy director, and director of the Institute and editor-in-chief of *Philosophical Research* and *Qiusi*. He published intensively on humanism, Enlightenment, and Marxism.

XUE, Dezhen (薛德震) (1932-2023): born in Jiangsu, he was an editor, deputy editor-in-chief, editor-in-chief, and president of People's Publishing House. Alongside Yuan Zhiming, he published intensively on Marxist humanism during the 1980s.

YAN, Hongyuan (燕宏远) (1940-): born in Henan, he graduated from BFSU and worked as a researcher at Institute of Philosophy, CASS. During the 1980s, he translated intensively on the German-language literature of Marxist humanism and Western Marxism, including *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*.

YI, Junqing (衣俊卿) (1958-): born in Heilongjiang, he graduated from PKU (1982) and obtain PhD in philosophy (1987) at Belgrade. He worked as head of the department of philosophy, vice president, and president at Heilongjiang University. In 2010, he was appointed as director of Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (deputy ministerial-level). He published intensively on the praxis school and organized the translations and research of Eastern European Marxist humanist literature.

YU, Guangyuan (于光远) (1915-2013): born in Shanghai, he graduated from the department of physics, Tsinghua. During the 1980s, he was an economist and Marxist theoretician and supporter of the reformist movement. He was elected as an academician of CASS.

YU, Wujin (俞吾金) (1948-2014): born in Hangzhou, he obtained BA (1982) and MA (1985) in philosophy at Fudan and joint PhD (1992) in philosophy at Fudan and Frankfurt. He was an author of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. He worked as associate professor, professor, distinguished professor (academician equivalent) at Fudan and director of Fudan Institute of Modern Philosophy. He was a visiting professor at Harvard (1997-1998).

YUAN, Zhiming (远志明) (1955-): born in Hebei, he was a doctoral student of philosophy at Renmin. Alongside Xue Dezhen, he published intensively on Marxist humanism during the 1980s. He was also an author of *River Elegy*. His PhD degree was unawarded due to his involvement in the 1989 protests, and he was subsequently moved to the U.S., where he turned to be a Protestant pastor.

ZHANG, Xianyang (张显扬) (1936-2013): born in Jiangsu, he graduated from the department of philosophy, Renmin, and worked at the department of philosophy, PKU. In 1980, he became a researcher at Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (now Academy of Marxism), CASS. He was expelled from the Party during the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign in 1987. He signed for Charter 08.

ZHANG, Yibing (张一兵) (1956-): born in Shandong, he obtained BA in philosophy at Nanjing and PhD in philosophy at Sun Yat-sen University. He served as director of Department of Philosophy, assistant president, vice president, deputy secretary of the Party committee, and secretary of the Party committee at Nanjing. He published intensively on praxis materialism, Western Marxism, postmodernism, etc. He is distinguished professor (academician equivalent) at Nanjing.

ZHOU, Xuliang (周煦良) (1905-1984): born in Anhui, he graduated from ECNU and obtained MA in literature (1932) at Edinburgh. He joined the China Association for Promoting Democracy in 1945. He participated in the Spring of 1957. He was professor at the department of foreign literature, ECNU and translated intensively on Marxist humanism and humanism during the early 1960s.

ZHOU, Yang (周扬) (1907-1989): born in Hunan, he graduated from The Great China University (now ECNU) in 1928 and subsequently studied in Japan. He worked as the leader of the League of Left-Wing Writers, president of Yan'an University, vice president of Renmin, vice president of CASS, vice president and president of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. "Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism" (1983) was published in his name. He was elected as an academician of CASS.

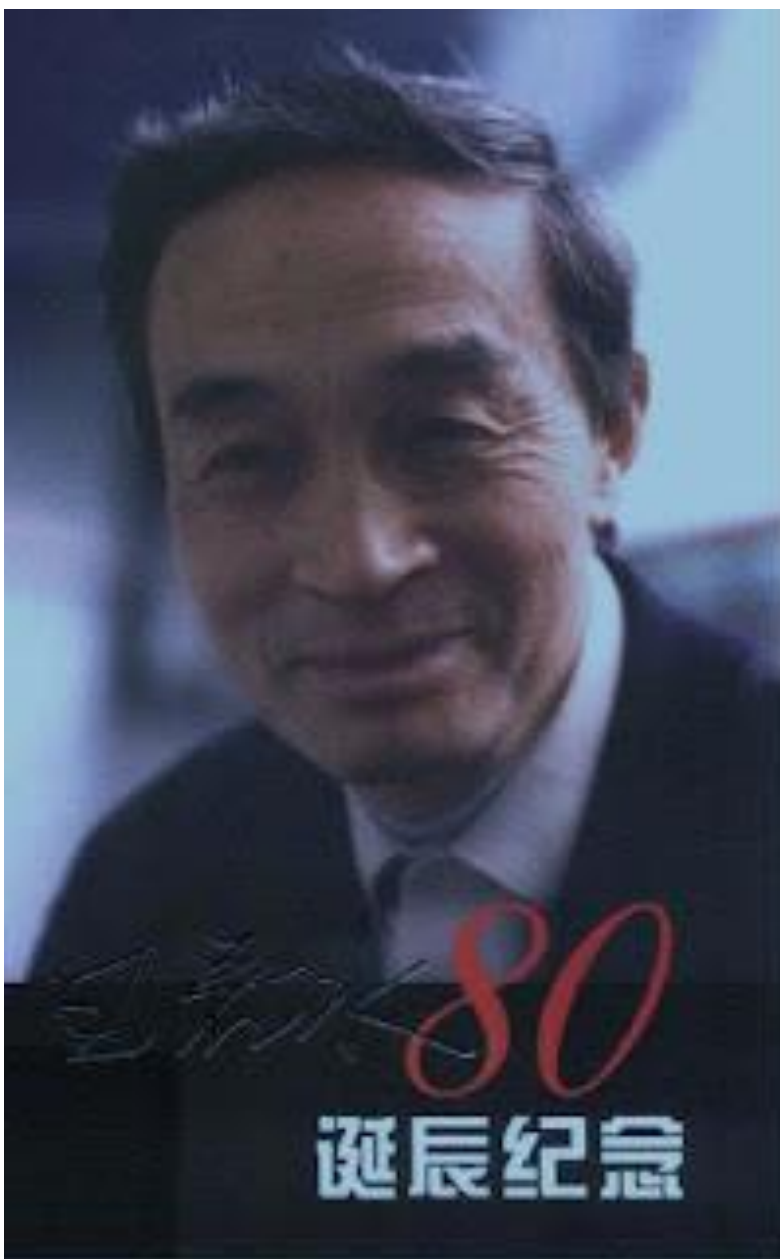
ZHOU, Yicheng (周义澄) (1946-): born in Shanghai, he obtained BA in journalism (1968), MA (1981) and PhD (1986) in philosophy at Fudan and worked as associate professor at Fudan. He was an author of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*. He moved to the U.S. after 4th June 1989. He was a visiting professor at Kyiv and Colombia.

ZHU, Guangqian (朱光潜) (1897-1986): born in Anhui, he studied literature, psychology, and aesthetics at Wuhan, Hong Kong (BA), Edinburgh (MA), UCL, Paris, Strasbourg (PhD). In 1933, he became a professor and director of the department of foreign literature, PKU. After 1949, he accepted Marxism and joined the China Democratic League. His late years were marked by his introduction of Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*, translation of Vico's *La Scienza Nuova*, and advocacy for humanistic aesthetics. He was elected as an academician of CASS.

Abbreviations of Academic Institutions

BFSU – Beijing Foreign Studies University
CASS – Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Clemson – Clemson University
Columbia – Columbia University in the City of New York
ECNU – East China Normal University
Fudan – Fudan University
Jilin – Jilin University
Kyiv – Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Moscow – Moscow State University
Nanjing – Nanjing University
Nankai – Nankai University
PKU – Peking University
Renmin – Renmin University of China
Tsinghua – Tsinghua University Chinese
UCASS – University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
UCL – University College London
Xiamen – Xiamen University
Yenching – Yenching University

Appendix III. Gallery of Chinese Marxist Humanism⁴⁴¹



1. A portrait of Wang Ruoshui, in *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui's Birth* (2007), edited by Wang's widow Feng Yuan.

⁴⁴¹ Special acknowledgements go to Feng Yuan and Zhou Yicheng for their authorizations.



1983年2月在天津为周扬起草“纪念马克思逝世一百周年”的讲话。左起前排：周扬、王元化；后排：顾骧、王若水、周扬秘书。

2. Zhou Yang and members of the drafting group for his speech commemorating the centenary of the death of Marx, February 1983, Tianjin. Front row from left are Zhou Yang and Wang Yuanhua; back row from left are Gu Xiang, Wang Ruoshui, and Zhou's secretary.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² Feng Yuan, ed., *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui's Birth*, p. 54.



3. Authors of Zhou Yang's speech commemorating the centenary of the death of Marx, February 1983, Tianjin. From left to right are Gu Xiang, Wang Yuanhua, and Wang Ruoshui.⁴⁴³

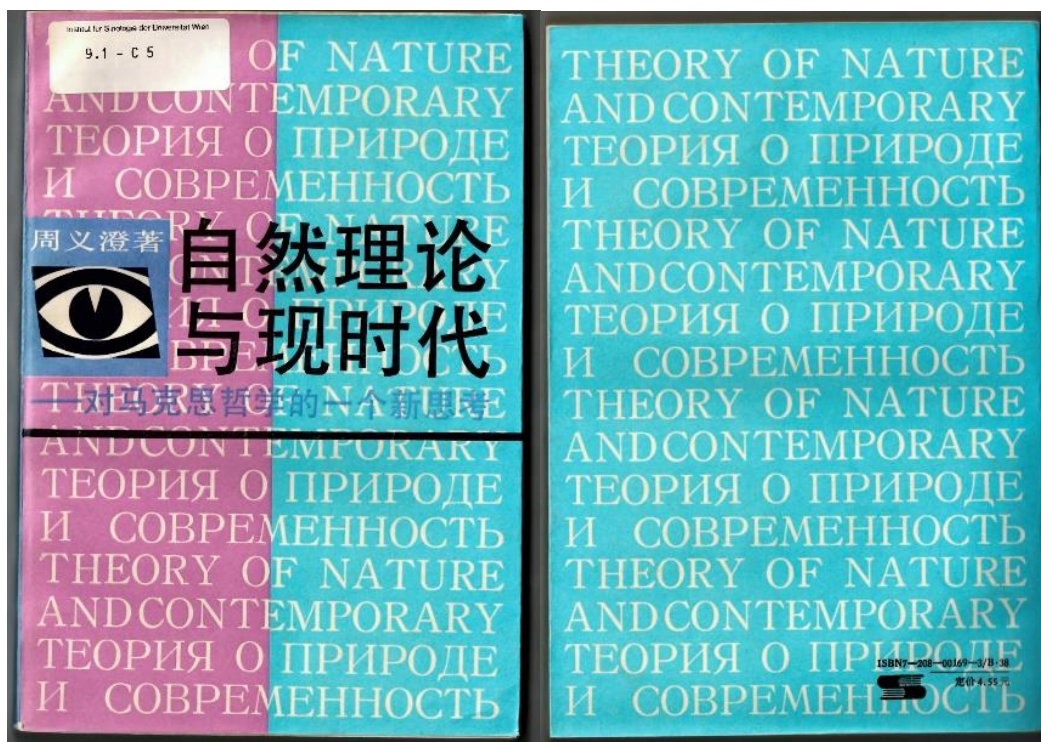
⁴⁴³ Ibid., p. 55.



1988年10月29 日在太湖洞庭西山·新启蒙丛刊开会

4. A conference of the *New Enlightenment* Book Series in Lake Tai on 29th October 1988. Wang Ruoshui was the second from right on the middle row.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 62.



5. ZHOU, Yicheng. *Theory of Nature and the Contemporary: A New Reflection On Marx's Philosophy*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1988. Stored in the East Asian Studies Library, University of Vienna.



6. Participants from the philosophy department at Fudan in the 1983 Guilin Conference. Front row from left to right: Yang Xiaomei, Li He, Zhou Yicheng, Xie Xialing, Ding Xueliang; Back row from left to right: Shang Geling, Yu Wujin, Chen Kuide, An Yanming, Wu Xiaoming.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁵ Yicheng Zhou, *Documentary of the Incident of Spiritual Pollution in Contemporary Chinese Philosophy* (Barnes & Noble Publishing House, 2023), p. 24.

关于认识论的几点意见 (草稿)

前言

当代崭新的物质状况和精神状况，为以往绝大多数思想家所难以想象和无法推论。如马克思所预料的那样，历史在刷新一切，也必将刷新我们的认识。

作为一个时代的接触和凝聚，哲学不可能超越时间和空间。

认识论原理也是一种历史形态，而不是几十年一贯制的教科书。

与马克思主义创始人对自然科学、社会科学的热烈关注相比，与当代物质和精神生活灿烂瑰丽相比，现行认识论的研究在某种意义上脱离了科学发展的洪流，显得狭隘、陈旧和贫乏。

把历史和当代五彩缤纷的学派简单地判为黑白二色，满足于绝对的二元对立，是认识论贫困化的根源；

机械唯物论的反映论，成了这种贫困化的基本特征；

从抽象物质到“感性认识”到“理性认识”这一新三段式，则是这种贫困化的基本模式。

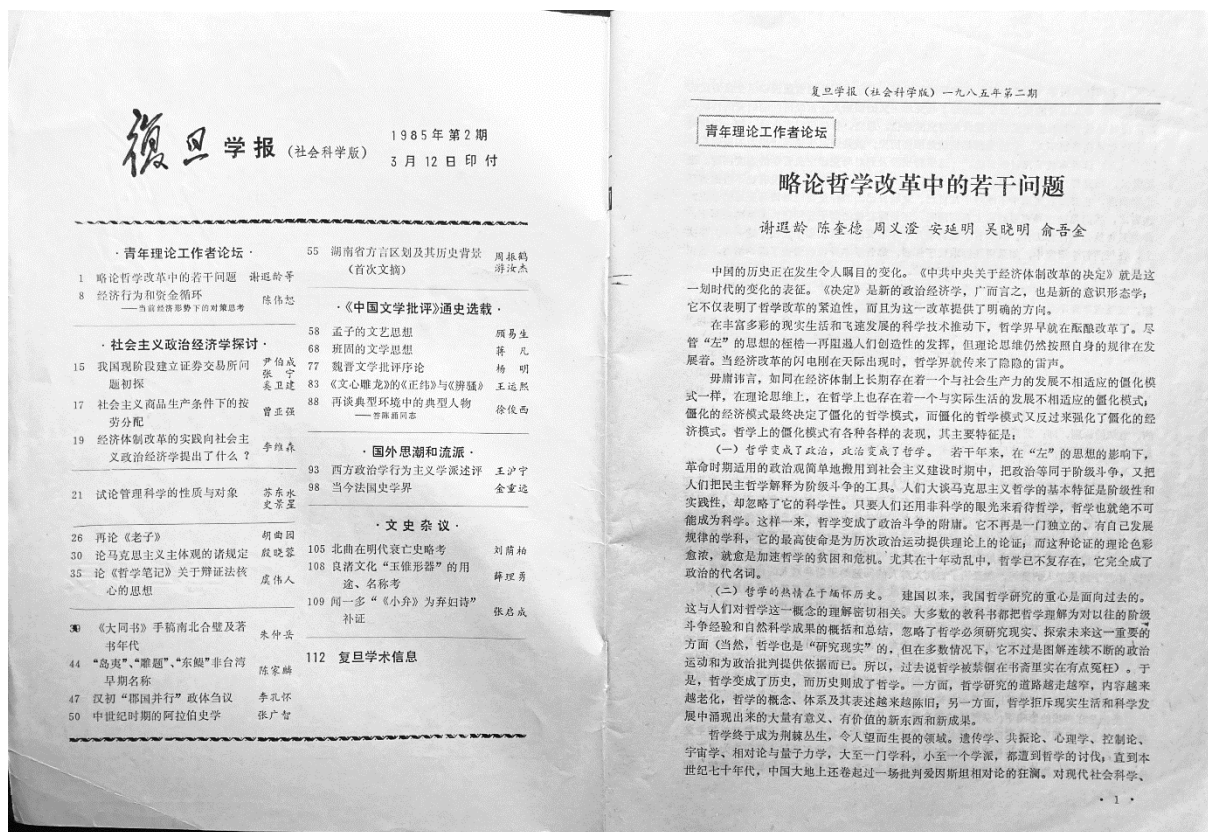
诚然，形成这种认识论有历史的合理性，但时至今日，我们已经不能在这里停留。时代抛弃了这种认识论。渐开

复旦大学稿纸

- 1 -

7. The first page of a copy of the handwritten manuscript of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, co-authored by Xie Xialing, Chen Kuide, Zhou Yicheng, Yu Wujin, Wu Xiaoming, and An Yanming, 1983.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.



10. “Brief Discussions on Several Problems in Philosophy Reform,” co-authored by the authors of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, in *Fudan Journal (Social Science Edition)*, vol. 2, 1985.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 222.

Appendix IV: Interviews and Correspondence

(1) With Kovács András

In 1977, Kovács András (1947-) initiated, edited and co-authored the illegally reproduced and distributed volume *Marx in the Fourth Decade*, which was the first major publication of the Hungarian samizdat movement. It was 270 pages long and contained the replies of 21 young intellectuals to a questionnaire on Marxism. The respondents were asked to answer how they perceived Marxism.⁴⁵² After the publication of the book, Kovács was banned from employment in Hungary until 1989.

Part I⁴⁵³

Kovács: The orthodox Marxism originated from Engels' works aiming at systematizing Marx's thoughts after Marx's death and was represented by the 1890s 2nd International German social democrat theoreticians such as Karl Johann Kautsky. The orthodox Marxism is a naturalist, evolutionary view of history. This determinist view of history suggests that a revolution will come not because it will be initiated by the revolutionaries, but as an objective result of the historical process, in which human agency could be ignored. Then, in the 1920s, when there was still a certain degree of ideological pluralism in the USSR, a group of Marxist philosophers, centred on a journal named...developed this type of dialectical materialism. That was before Stalin came to power in the 1930s. Ilyenkov, Frolov et al. represented a minor trend in revising the dialectical materialism system.

Lukács during the 1950s was not Lukács during the 1920s. Lukács, when he wrote *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), held a revolutionary position, emphasizing on human initiative rather than objective, inevitable laws of history. For that reason, he was criticized by the 3rd International. Lukács in the 1950s, when he wrote *The Destruction of Reason* (1954), changed to a position in defense of rationalism (Kant, Hegel, et al.) and critical of all kinds of "irrationalism" philosophies (Nietzsche, Schopenhauer). He retained his previous views in his literary critic works. His fellow disciples such as Heller went in a more unequivocal direction. When I was studying at the Faculty of Humanities, ELTE, Hungarian Marxist humanists had been banned from teaching.

Part II⁴⁵⁴

Lei: I wonder if there is an English translation of *Marx in the Fourth Decade*.

Kovács: There is no English translation of the collection as a whole. However, several chapters have been translated into English and German and published elsewhere.

Lei: Did Haraszti Miklós write for *Marx in the Fourth Decade*?

Kovács: I invited him, but I received his response only after the deadline. His response was then published separately, not as part of the collection.

⁴⁵² "What is your understanding of the term Marxism and what is your own present position vis-à-vis Marxism? (If you were a Marxist in the past, are you still a Marxist today and if you either were or are a Marxist, what does Marxism mean to you?) Can you give reasons which, in your opinion, make Marxism particularly relevant or irrelevant for contemporary Eastern Europe?"

⁴⁵³ The interview was conducted remotely on 11th April 2023.

⁴⁵⁴ The interview was conducted in Room 517, Nádor u. 11, Budapest, on 28th March 2024.

Lei: His case is particular. He was for a while in close contact with the Chinese embassy in Budapest. I could think of a Chinese version of him – Yang Xiaokai (1948-2004).

Kovács: There was a wave of Maoism, especially in Western Europe, such as West Germany, but not much in Hungary, in the late 1960s. Haraszti was part of the Maoist movement in Hungary. We were all laughing at him. They were a small group of people, to whom you do not need to pay too much attention. For them, the dark side of the Maoist experiment was negligible. The Kádár regime arrested him to somehow show its difference from Stalinism. During the 1970s and 1980s, Haraszti became part of the democratic opposition.

Lei: Indeed. I would not classify Haraszti as a figure of Marxist humanism in Hungary. He was for sure in opposition to the official interpretation of Marxism, and I believe there is truth in the Maoist discourse – the Soviet-type society was not classless. Opposition to the official interpretation of Marxism shared this view. However, he was in favour of a radical solution – Commune de Paris-style democracy, instead of a liberal solution of it – protection of human rights, rule of law, etc.

Kovács: *Marx in the Fourth Decade* was composed at a time when “Marxism” as the official ideology became increasingly irrelevant. The collected works of Marx and Engels were stored in the library, but nobody was reading them. “Marxism” was still there, but the actual ideology justifying the regime was different. It was about satisfying people’s demand for better livelihood and economic growth. Hungary was advantageous within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), as it was able to import cheap resources and agricultural products from the Soviet Union and Cuba and sell its products to the West at a higher price. People were given a limited amount of freedom, as long as they did not participate in oppositional politics. Accompanied by that was also a hidden nationalism – Hungary was considered (economically) better than other countries in the Eastern Bloc due to its economic liberalization marked by the New Economic Mechanism [Új gazdasági mechanizmus].

Lei: What you described reminds me of Havel’s term “post-totalitarian” and contemporary China, where, apart from a few intellectuals specializing in Marxism, most people do not read the works of Marx, and the ideology justifying the party’s leadership is also based on improvement of people’s livelihood. In fact, I think the nominal presence of “Marxism” is not important; what is important is the institutional exclusion of other ideologies – there is only one correct way of thinking, as for what that way of thinking is named, “Marxism” or anything else, is unimportant. For example, North Korea replaced “Marxism” with “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” as the official ideology, but nothing substantially changed there.

Kovács: The question is why there is such an official ideology that is exclusive to other ideologies. In the 19th century labour movement, it was never the case; Marxism went hand in hand with anarchism, unionism, reformism, etc. The official ideology that “guides” all and everybody has to abide by came with the Bolsheviks. Why do the Soviet-type societies need such an official ideology?

Lei: I found Adam Michnik’s analogy between “Marxism” (*Bible*) and the institution in charge of it (Church) relevant. Before these societies became “Soviet-type”, they were mostly societies with such an institutional exclusion mechanism. In Tsarist Russia, it was the Eastern Orthodox Church; in imperial China, it was Confucianism. In a state like this, as long as the official ideology is not yet replaced with ideological pluralism, those who want to change and reform the status quo have to reinterpret the official ideology; the same is true for those opposing the reform, who need to defend the existing interpretation of the official ideology.

(2) With Feng Yuan⁴⁵⁵

Feng Yuan (1962-) graduated from Fudan and the Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. As a journalist, she first met with Wang Ruoshui in 1983 and married him in 1987. As Wang's widow, she edited *The 80th Anniversary of Wang Ruoshui's Birth* (2007), which was not officially published (with ISBN), but a samizdat publication. She is an activist for gender equality in China.

Lei: Did Wang first get acquainted with Soviet and Eastern Bloc Marxist humanist literature during the early 1960s instead of the late 1970s?

Feng: Indeed. His paper "On the Concept of Alienation" was written in 1964 though it was published only until the late 1970s.

Lei: In my research, I argue that "Marxism" in Soviet-type societies is subject to the power of interpretation by the reformist-humanist and conservative-antihumanist factions. The literary meaning of their texts may not reveal their intentions.

Feng: The anti-Marxist humanist discourses were complicated on the surface, but it was a kind of word game aiming to delegitimize the Marxist humanist discourses and make Marxist humanists politically disadvantaged.

Lei: While Wang was known for his views on humanism and alienation, was epistemology also an academic interest of his?

Feng: Yes, his article "The Philosophy of a Table" (1963) in the *People's Daily*, was subtitled with "A Dialogue on Epistemology". He read and wrote on epistemology in his late years as well.

Lei: I found the 1980s usage of "left" as the opposite of reformism confusing. To me, they (Deng Liqun, Hu Qiaomu, et al.) were not leftist in the sense of, e.g., Yang Xiaokai in 1968, but quite the opposite.

Feng: It has been widely observed that the "left" in China seems to be the right in the West, and vice versa. What "left" in the 1980s refers to is a conservative, orthodox position, not an egalitarian position.

Lei: There are different views regarding the relationship between the 1980s New Enlightenment and Chinese Marxist humanism, were they of the shared nature of Enlightenment or "bourgeois liberalism" or essentially different from each other?

Feng: The two are not essentially different; Marxist humanism in the name of Marxism was also criticized by the regime. The Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign occurred in 1987 but the 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign against Marxist humanism was also one against bourgeois liberalization.

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(3) With Kis János

⁴⁵⁵ The interview was conducted remotely on 6th May 2024.

Kis János (1943-) was a member of the Lukács kindergarten, namely, a student of the Lukács school, members of which were students of Lukács. He held a Lukácsian view and turned to left-wing liberalism during the 1980s. From 1990 to 1991, he was the first President of the Alliance of Free Democrats.

Lei (12th December 2022): The first question I would like to ask is who are, in a very broad sense, the members of the Budapest school. I know some would even argue that the school does not even exist, but I do think it is self-evident that there has been such an intellectual movement of humanist Marxism in Hungary inspired in one way or another by Lukács. My current list includes Lukács György, Heller Ágnes, Fehér Ferenc, Márkus Mária, Márkus György, Mészáros István, Vajda Mihály, Hegedüs András, Eörsi István, Kis János, Bence György, Almási Miklós, and Hermann István.

The second question is about the Budapest school's position on market economy or capitalism in short. I know different members, and in their different stages of intellectual development have had very different positions. You wrote that you are now more of "left-wing egalitarian liberalism" (J. Rawls) in the Preface you sent me. But I have also noticed that SZDSZ is based on not left-wing liberalism, but liberalism (centre). Therefore, I assume that it is impossible to give a general answer to this question. My perception is that the mainstream of humanist Marxism in the Eastern bloc is in defense of market economy and economic liberalism (even Rawls is not against them), which did not exist or fully exist in "really existing socialism". Yes, there have been certain critiques of "consumerism" in Budapest school and Praxis school, but I doubt the significance of this critique: the critique of consumerism in Western Marxism (e.g., *One-Dimensional Man*) emerged in a context of materialistic "affluence"; it is strange to observe the same critique of consumerism in a context of widespread "shortage" (considering 1980s Poland). Of course, the situation in the 1950s and 1960s was better (due to certain economic liberalization reforms).

Kis (17th February 2023): The thing is that the Budapest School is often confounded with a loose network of people that was called the Lukács School. In some way, all the scholars whom you list have been identified (and identified themselves) as belonging to the Lukács School, except for András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus. The Budapest School emerged as a much smaller and more closely organized group within the wider Lukács School, and it comprised just four philosophers: Fehér, Heller, Márkus and Vajda.

Some members of the Lukács School you failed to mention: Dénes Zoltai and Vilma Mészáros of the original generation, Sándor Radnóti, Mária Ludassy and Ágnes Erdélyi of my generation.

As far as SZDSZ is concerned, I am afraid you are a victim of a fairly widespread memory distortion. SZDSZ defined itself as „a liberal party, the party of freedom and solidarity”. Its original economic program and the policies it pursued in the 1990s were closer to Social Democracy than to neo-liberalism. But SZDSZ is a different story anyway...

Lei (8th March 2023): Thank you for your clarification of the party's initial platform (you defined "solidarity" as social-democratic, although the word "solidarity" could also be easily used in a conservative-corporatist way). I am interested in the Budapest school's alternative (vis-a-vis "Soviet-type planned economy") economic platform because I see a dilemma here: they, on the one hand, advocate for "marketism" against the "dictatorship over (economic) needs" and on the other hand call for "democratic socialism" (against "autocratic socialism"), but the two are not the same. Ideally speaking, "democratic socialism" is more desirable than marketism, but in reality, the

choice is not between “Soviet-type planned economy” and “democratic socialism”, but between “Soviet-type planned economy” (“autocratic socialism”) and marketism. In this choice, which one did the Budapest school stand for?

Kis (8th March 2023): You are right that “solidarity” props up in conservative thought, too. But nothing was farther from SZDSZ than conservatism. Its initial position, held basically until the 2000s, took the Nordic Social Democratic model for an ideal.

It is correct that there are two separate (although not unrelated) contrasts: one between a centrally planned and a market-oriented economy, and another one between autocratic and democratic socialism. (The two distinctions are related because there is an affinity between all-out central planning and autocracy.) On both issues, the BS took the second position: market-oriented economy and democracy. You may want to consult Chapter 8 of the book written by Márkus, Bence, and myself between 1970-1972, and published last year in English: György Márkus, János Kis, and György Bence: *How Is Critical Economic Theory Possible?* Brill, 2022.

Lei (2nd May 2023): I have completed the translation of the preface of *How Is Critical Economic Theory Possible?* I learned a lot from it but there are some remaining questions for me.

I was impressed by the intensity of the economic argument in the text, but the overall conclusion in defence of a market economy is not surprising. I would say it is a mainstream position in Marxist humanism. The Prague Spring also involved a short-lived economic reform attempt.

My first question, a question I also raised to Kovács András, is how similar the second international orthodox Marxism and Marxism as the Soviet official, state ideology are. I think the difference is huge. First, as you pointed out, there was a break between the second and the third international, between social democrats and communists, and secondly, what I would suggest, is that there was another break, between the third international (at least during the revolutions of 1917 to 1923) and what happened afterwards – a restoration, or in Huntingtonian term “the second democratic backsliding”, marked by Stalin’s consolidation of power. I cannot see any political similarity between the 1960s and 1970s Soviet-type regimes and the countries where social democrats ruled during that period of time. In the Soviet-type regime, very importantly, there is no, in the Marxist term, bourgeois democracy. While the social democrats work within bourgeois democracy. So, the second international orthodox Marxism and the Soviet ideology were not compatible. In fact, the Eastern European reformists (Dubcek included) were denounced as “revisionist” in the sense of the second international “revisionism”.

Another question, not unrelated, is of course the similarity of contexts of the Prague Spring and the New Left movement. To me, it is also rather clear, that the two movements had vastly different contexts, in terms of economic, political systems, ideology (pluralism or monism?), etc. I would like to also add here that the New Left occurred in the narrowly defined West – Spain, Portugal, and Greece were not included; we may describe a New Left movement in Japan, but not South Korea and Taiwan, because in these late-developed places, there was no bourgeois democracy or full degree of ideological pluralism either during the late 1960s. The situation in Soviet-type society is neither bourgeois democracy/ideological pluralism nor market economy. How can it compare with the very opposite of it? If we agree that contexts matter, then it is very difficult to come up with the very idea that Eastern European reformism and the New Left were in the same boat.

Regarding alienation. According to my readings, alienation is used much more often than reification in Marxist humanist texts, and it is expressed in this way: alienation also exists in “socialism”. This expression is very different from how the New Left thinkers used the term alienation. To me, the true meaning of alienation is that exploitation exists. But the exploitation may not take the form described by Marx’s theory of surplus value; pre-capitalist society also has alienation. For example, slavery is a system in which the slave owner takes the labour of the slave unconditionally and bluntly, which of course means that the labour as a human cannot fully own itself due to the dependency, and this is also alienation. In Soviet-type society, the bureaucratic class was privileged vis-a-vis the working people, and this is of course alienation for the working people. Therefore, the market leads to alienation, but alienation is not only caused by the market.

Regarding alienation and reification in capitalism, I would like to also add that the solution is not necessarily radical or forward-looking – as suggested by the Frankfurt school, but regressive or backwards-looking, that is to say incorporating certain elements of social and cultural conservatism. For example, family values could be argued as a good way to avoid the negative effects of alienation and reification.

I am also curious about Bence’s position later on. I think Arendt is not conservative but a liberal of a neo-republican kind. Schmitt could be categorized as an autocratic, authoritarian conservative. But what would be the position in between?

Kis (14th May 2023): Many thanks for translating the Preface to *How Is Critical Economic Theory Possible?* I hope you will find a review that is willing to publish it.

As to your questions, here are some quick ideas:

1. How similar are the second international orthodox Marxism and Marxism as the Soviet official, state ideology?

The similarity is not political. Kautsky, for example, was as critical to the Bolshevik rule as Rosa Luxemburg. What Soviet Marxism has taken over was the conception of Kautsky et al of dialectical and, especially, historical materialism.

2. I was impressed by the intensity of the economic argument in the text, but the overall conclusion in defence of a market economy is not surprising. I would say it is a mainstream position in Marxist humanism.

Well, from a birds-eye view, or position was the same as that of Marxist humanists in general: it belonged to the same family. But it also had some special features that are explained in Chapter 8 of the book.

3. Similarity of contexts of the Prague Spring and the New Left movement. The situation in Soviet-type society is neither bourgeois democracy/ideological pluralism nor market economy. How can it compare with the very opposite of it? If we agree that contexts matter, then it is very difficult to come up with the very idea that Eastern European reformism and the New Left were in the same boat.

Neither the context nor the views were similar. The starting point of our book was precisely the fact of deep conflict between the two movements that troubled us because we were in sympathy with both.

4. Regarding alienation. To me, the true meaning of alienation is that exploitation exists. But the exploitation may not take the form described by Marx's theory of surplus value; pre-capitalist society also has alienation.

I don't think Marxian alienation is reducible to exploitation. It is a long story, but the key idea of Marx seems to have been that alienation is the estrangement of the individual from their own activity, the product of their activity, and the users of the product. He believed that in this particular form, alienation is special to capitalism.

5. According to my readings, alienation is used much more often than reification in Marxist humanist texts.

Correct, although, interestingly, Lukács in his 1923 book focused on reification rather than alienation. Our book is unique in that it operates with both concepts and tries to reconstruct the way Marx brought them together. Very briefly: reification is the fact that the social processes are regulated by impersonal mechanisms that escape the control by humans as individuals or as a society. Alienation is, then, seen by Marx to be a product of reification.

6. I am also curious about Bence's position later on. I think Arendt is not conservative but a liberal of a neo-republican kind. Schmitt could be categorized as an autocratic, authoritarian conservative. But what would be the position in between?

This is a long and separate story. Arendt was not conservative, but neither was she a mainstream liberal: her views were closest to what is now called republicanism. Schmitt was not a conservative either, he was a right-wing radical. (Curiously, nowadays he is embraced by some left radicals, while right-wing radicals try to appropriate Gramsci.)

So much, for the time being.

Lei (22nd May 2023): Thank you for your detailed reply. I understand that you and others sympathized with the New Left movement and the Prague Spring. Marx also supported the French Revolution and the 1848 Revolution, although he was unsatisfied with the bourgeois revolution for its "limitations".

I generally agree with the idea that Marxian economics is utopian, which explains why Marxian economics is considered "non-orthodox economics" in present-day economics as a discipline. I can think of a Chinese intellectual, historian Qin Hui, whose intellectual trajectory may be similar to yours. Qin Hui is also considered a left-wing liberal.

Lukács in his 1923 book focused on reification rather than alienation because the context was not a planned economy or autarky in 1950s Hungary but a society of hypermodernity. In Soviet-type society, the commodity is insufficient, of course, reification is not important. In Soviet-type society, the most typical expression of alienation is that "alienation also exists in socialism". For this expression, alienation is not about capitalism or market economy, although it "also" exists in capitalism – but exploitation in socialism. That is to say, under socialism was also a "class society" in the Marxist term.

Regarding the interchangeability between left-wing populism (Gramsci) and right-wing populism (Schmitt), I agree with Qin Hui's view that left-wing utopianism would lead to oligarchy restoration. For example, Leninism was a populist form of social democracy, and Stalinism was "oligarchalization" of left-wing populism. Left-wing populism is utopianism, when the utopia fails in reality,

it turns into an oligarchy. Right-wing populism is an oligarchy manipulating populism (Napoléon-Louis Bonaparte).

(4) With An Yanming

In 1983, An Yanming (1955-), then a master's student at Fudan, co-authored *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, which challenged the mechanistic epistemology in the orthodox interpretation of Marxist philosophy and heightened the roles of human subjectivity and individual freedom.

Lei (16th April 2023): What are the specific ideological origins of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*? If it is convenient, could you disclose the activities of the “Six Gentlemen at Fudan” in the political movements after 1983 (1986 student protests, 1989 pro-democracy Movement, etc.)?

An (16th and 17th April 2023): The current situation of the ten Fudan participants at the Guilin Conference in the photo is as follows:

- Xie Xialing and Chen Kuide: lived with Wang Huning in the same dormitory for two or three years, Chen and Wang in bunk beds. Chen currently lives in the United States, and Xie is a retired professor at Fudan.
- Zhou Yicheng: retired and now lives in the United States.
- Yu Wujin: now deceased.
- Wu Xiaoming: currently a distinguished professor at Fudan and president of the Shanghai Philosophical Society.
- Li He: currently a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and executive deputy director of the Cultural Research Center of the Academy.
- Ding Xueliang: currently a professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.
- Yang Xiaomei and Shang Geling, and An Yanming: now professors at American universities.

In 1980, when I was a junior at Fudan, Wu Xiaoming and I published our first paper “On Plekhanov’s Theory of Geographic Environment” in *Philosophical Research*. In 1983, we published “Issues in Piaget’s Genetic Epistemology” in the same journal. What really brought together several Fudan students at that time was an effort to combine Marx’s view of practice with Piaget’s genetic epistemology to criticize and deny the dominant orthodox epistemological views at the time. This can also explain why it received such strong criticism in the future.

Lei (18th April 2023): Where did the “dominant orthodox epistemological views at the time” come from?

An (19th April 2023): The six drafters of the Outline each had different philosophical backgrounds. Xie Xialing: Kant; Chen Kuide: Whitehead; Zhou Yicheng: Soviet and Eastern European contemporary philosophy; An Yanming/Wu Xiaoming: Young Marx; Yu Wujin: Hegel. At that time, we were divided into five groups, and each drafted its own part, and Chen Kuide finally took charge of the draft. The specific content and even ideas were not consistent, but the object it challenged was completely clear.

The “orthodox epistemology of the time” was an interpretation of Chinese Marxism based on Ch. 4: §2 of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. Its representative works were *Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism* edited by Ai Siqu, as well as its additions and retellings of Xiao Qian and Li Xiulin after the Cultural Revolution.

(5) With Zhou Yicheng

In 1983, Zhou Yicheng (1946-), then a doctoral student and teacher at Fudan, co-authored *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*, which challenged the mechanistic epistemology in the orthodox interpretation of Marxist philosophy and heightened the roles of human subjectivity and individual freedom.

Lei (19th April 2023): Was *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* influenced by the 1954 Theses on Epistemology by Evald Ilyenkov and his colleagues? I noticed that by the time when *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* was written, Ilyenkov’s thoughts had been introduced to China (mainly through translations by Jia Zelin, Ma Jihua and others who studied in the Soviet Union in the 1950s). Most of the authors of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* were relatively familiar with German philosophy. You seem to be the only one who studied Soviet philosophy and dialectics of nature and translated articles by Bonifaty Kedrov, Pavel Kopnin, et al. During the discussion and writing process at that time, did you mention Ilyenkov and his “epistemological school”? Were epistemological issues advocated in agenda setting? I have also noticed that the mention of praxis in the eighth point of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* seems to have been influenced by the Yugoslav Praxis School, and the formulation of humanism also goes beyond Ilyenkov’s scientism. So, what are the ideological origins of *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)*?

As far as you know, were there any translations of unorthodox Marxism in Eastern Europe at that time that were directly translated from the original texts in Eastern European languages from Chinese? As far as I know, most of them were translated from Russian, English, German, and French. There were even translations of Japanese Marxist researchers’ research on Eastern European neo-Marxism to Chinese, but there was almost no translation into Chinese directly from Czech-Slovak (Kosik et al.), Serbo-Croatian (Praxis school), Polish (Kołakowski et al.) or Hungarian (Budapest school). However, in the 1980s, there were also scholars who went to Yugoslavia to study (for example, Ja Zelin studied at the University of Ljubljana for two years), and they could be proficient in Serbo-Croatian.

In your opinion, to what extent were the discussions on “humanism and alienation” in the early 1980s and “praxis materialism” in the late 1980s influenced by the translation and introduction of unorthodox Marxism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe? To what extent was it affected by the political atmosphere of reform and counter-reform in China at that time? If it is convenient, could you disclose the activities of the “Six Gentlemen at Fudan” in the political movements after 1983 (e.g., 1986 student protests and 1989 pro-democracy movement)?

The synthesis of Piaget’s epistemology and Marx reminds me of Habermas’s communicative action theory. I have yet to find similar efforts in the Eastern European neo-Marxist literature.

Where did the “dominant orthodox epistemological views at the time” come from? I think it does not come from the Gang of Four and its members who have been criticized and tried, but from the “conservatives” formed by the split of the Qiushi faction and opposed to the “reformists”, represented by Deng Liqun in the theoretical circles. Their proposition is definitely not to reverse the

verdict of the Gang of Four, the Cultural Revolution, especially the “rebels” and “ultra-leftists” during the Cultural Revolution, but to return to the line of the “first 17 years” (1949-1966), especially the “first 7 years” (1949-1956), and this line, in fact, was very similar to the Soviet model. On 30th April 1960, Mao Zedong concluded: “From 1950 to 1957, basically China’s condition was copied, that is, copied from the Soviet Union.” Economically, they advocated the planned economy established by China in the 1950s; theoretically, they advocated the Marxist philosophical textbooks established by China in the 1950s (Mao not only used mass movements to disrupt the planned economy, but also believed that the Soviet Union was revisionist). It is not difficult to explain why the dynamics of the Chinese ideological circles in the 1980s (from 1978 to 1992) were highly similar to the dynamics of the Soviet and Eastern European ideological circles from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Zhou (23rd April 2023): You said that you are researching the history of China’s reception of Marxist humanism in the 1980s. I wish you success. If you refer to the ruling Communist Party, I am afraid that it has never accepted humanism, including liberal leaders such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. If you refer to China’s academic circles, you may be able to find some figures who advocate humanism such as Wang Ruoshui.

The *Opinions on Epistemology (Draft)* at that time were written by six people. Each of them had different experiences and ideas. It may not be possible to say who was influenced by which school of theory. At that time, I paid attention to the process from abstract to concrete, from philosophical epistemology to empirical cognitive science. I had read some articles by Kedrov, Kopnin, and Frolov, but Ilyenkov (Ильёнков) and his “epistemological school” were not specifically mentioned in the discussions or articles. In June 1985, I attended a Soviet philosophy seminar held in Nanning. Someone mentioned Ilyenkov and classified him as an epistemologist. There may be an introduction to Ilyenkov in *Contemporary Soviet Philosophy* edited by Jia Zelin in 1986.

An Yanming and Wu Xiaoming thought more about the Praxis school. Wu Shikang from the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences received a doctorate in Yugoslavia. He came to our department at Fudan to introduce the Praxis school. I had a private discussion with him. He had relatively positive comments about the Praxis school. However, Chinese academic circles were interfered with the diplomatic relations between the two parties and countries of China and Yugoslavia.

At that time, the translation and introduction of unorthodox Marxism in Eastern Europe did not seem to have been directly translated from the original Eastern European languages. From this point of view, Wu Shikang was an expert in the Yugoslav Praxis school.

Lei (23rd April 2023): My understanding of Marxist humanism is a liberal interpretation of Marxism. The most important document in China in the 1980s is probably “Discussion on Several Theoretical Issues of Marxism” by Zhou Yang (Wang Ruoshui, Gu Xiang, Wang Yuanhua) in *People’s Daily* on 16th March 1983. Opposing this trend was represented by Hu Qiaomu’s “On Humanism and Alienation Issues” in *People’s Daily* on 27th January 1984. After 1985, a series of literature debating “praxis materialism” appeared. The anti-humanist trend also exists in other Soviet model countries. In the Soviet Union, there was the epistemological school, as well as the orthodox “ontological school” that opposed it; in Yugoslavia, there was the Praxis school, as well as the orthodox “Materialist Dialectic school” that opposed it, and so on. Broadly speaking, I believe that Su Shaozhi, Ding Xueliang, Guo Luoji, et al., although their majors may not be philosophy or literary theory, should also be on the list of Chinese Marxist humanists.

Gorbachev himself and his wife were “Sixtiers”, and the roots of the 1985 reforms can indeed be traced back to 1956 or even 1953. I recently read Jia Zelin’s memoirs and discovered that his dormitory during his studies at Moscow was where Gorbachev and his wife got married. According to the memoirs of Jurist Jiang Ping, who was in law school with Gorbachev at the time, the two got acquainted with each other in the Youth League Committee. Jiang Ping takes the rule of law in China as his career, and advocates replacing “socialism with Chinese characteristics” with “constitutional socialism”. He is a close friend of Li Shenzhi (1923-2003), who advocates political liberalism, and Wu Jinglian (1930-), who advocates economic liberalism. They can be called China’s “Sixtiers”. However, after Brezhnev came to power in 1964, and especially after 1968, the entire Soviet Union and Eastern Europe entered Stagnation (with the slight exception of Yugoslavia). This did not change until Gorbachev came to power. Academician Frolov, whom you mentioned in “Contemporary Soviet Philosophy’s Study of Humanity,” is said to be the main contributor to *Pere-stroika and New Thinking* (1987) and single-handedly promoted humanism in late Soviet philosophy.

Zhou (24th April 2023): I once said that in the Soviet philosophical circles, even conservatives such as Konstantinov acknowledged the positive significance of Marxist humanism, which was incomparable with the situation in Chinese academic circles; before the “New February Revolution”, the Soviet society no longer had the party-state atmosphere of China. It is good that you consider the international background of China’s academic openness in the 1980s. When Wang Ruoshui passed by New York, we agreed to meet at a restaurant in Manhattan. After a simple meal, we conducted the interview as planned. The two-hour conversation was very enjoyable. Unfortunately, the place was too noisy. Later, when I was sorting out the recording, I found that the background noise was too loud, making it difficult to hear the conversation. The interview record was not written in the end; there was no chance to explain it to him afterwards. It was deplorable. Otherwise, an interview with Wang Ruoshui in *Interviews with Exiles* (2005) will be what you need.

You mentioned Su Shaozhi and Guo Luoji. I am very familiar with them. Their interviews were included in the book *Interviews with Exiles*. I later became estranged from Guo and have not been in contact for a long time. I wish him good health and a long life. It suddenly occurred to me that this interview may contain content that is helpful to your research on writing topics. For example, you can’t help but touch on Gao Ertai, who played an important role in the debate on alienation and humanism.

Jia Zelin is my senior teacher. Once when I went to Beijing, he invited me to his home. Mr. Jia is knowledgeable and thoughtful. He organized the Nanning Soviet Philosophy Symposium. Academician Frolov (Фролов) once sent me New Year’s cards and letters. The Chinese political stage has no such role.

Lei (24th April 2023): I wonder what your “New February Revolution” specifically refers to. Khrushchev’s Thaw, Gorbachev’s Reform or the collapse of the Soviet Union? I wonder what the opportunity for you was to learn Russian at that time.

Wang Ruoshui is indeed an iconic figure of Chinese Marxist humanism. My classification of Chinese Marxist humanists roughly follows Cui Weiping’s classification: (1) people who have been criticized for advocating humanism in aesthetics and literature include Zhu Guangqian, Qian Guorong, Gao Ertai, Hu Feng, et al., (2) Wang Ruoshui, Zhou Yang, Ru Xin, Wang Yuanhua, Gu Xiang, Xue Dezhen, Su Shaozhi, Guo Luoji, Qing Qinghai, et al. of younger generations, (3) participants of the Guilin Conference, Ding Xueliang, Li Guiren and other graduate students and young teachers at the time.

Cui did not mention the many people who translated the Marxist humanitarian literature from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe behind the scenes, such as Ma Jihua (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences), Jia Zelin, Zhang Bolin (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), et al.

Zhou (25th April 2023): In February 1990, under the leadership of Gorbachev, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union decided to give up the leadership position of the Communist Party, and later revised the constitution, cancelling the original Article 6 that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is the leading and guiding force of the country. This was a revolution, hence the term “New February Revolution”, relative to the February Revolution of 1917.

In Shanghai’s middle schools in the 1960s, about half of the students studied English and half studied Russian. I was assigned to the Russian class, which was not my choice. I have almost forgotten Russian now.

Your research is very meaningful. The merit lies in the present time and the benefit lies in the future. My interviews with Su Shaozhi, Guo Luoji and Gao Ertai are attached.

Lei (30th April and 5th May 2023): I suppose there should have been some signs of drastic changes in Ukraine in 1988-1989. There is indeed some intrinsic connection between the Spring of 1957 and the 1980s reforms in China. An Yanming told me that Xie Xialing, Chen Kuide and Wang Huning shared the same dormitory for two or three years, Chen and Wang in bunk beds. At that time, it may be difficult to imagine that Wang would become the chief theoretician of the CCP after Hu Qiaomu and Deng Lique.

Zhou (8th May 2023): Xie, Chen and Wang slept in the same dormitory for three years, but there may be a mistake that Chen and Wang were in bunk beds. Wang’s bed is next to the door, Xie and Chen’s beds were next to the window. At that time, there were six graduate students in one room. My dormitory was opposite theirs, and I slept on the upper bunk behind the door. Wang’s bed was visible to me at a glance. At that time, mosquito nets were used all year round. There was a big hole in Wang’s mosquito net, and he went in and out of the hole every day. I often had meals in their dormitories.

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