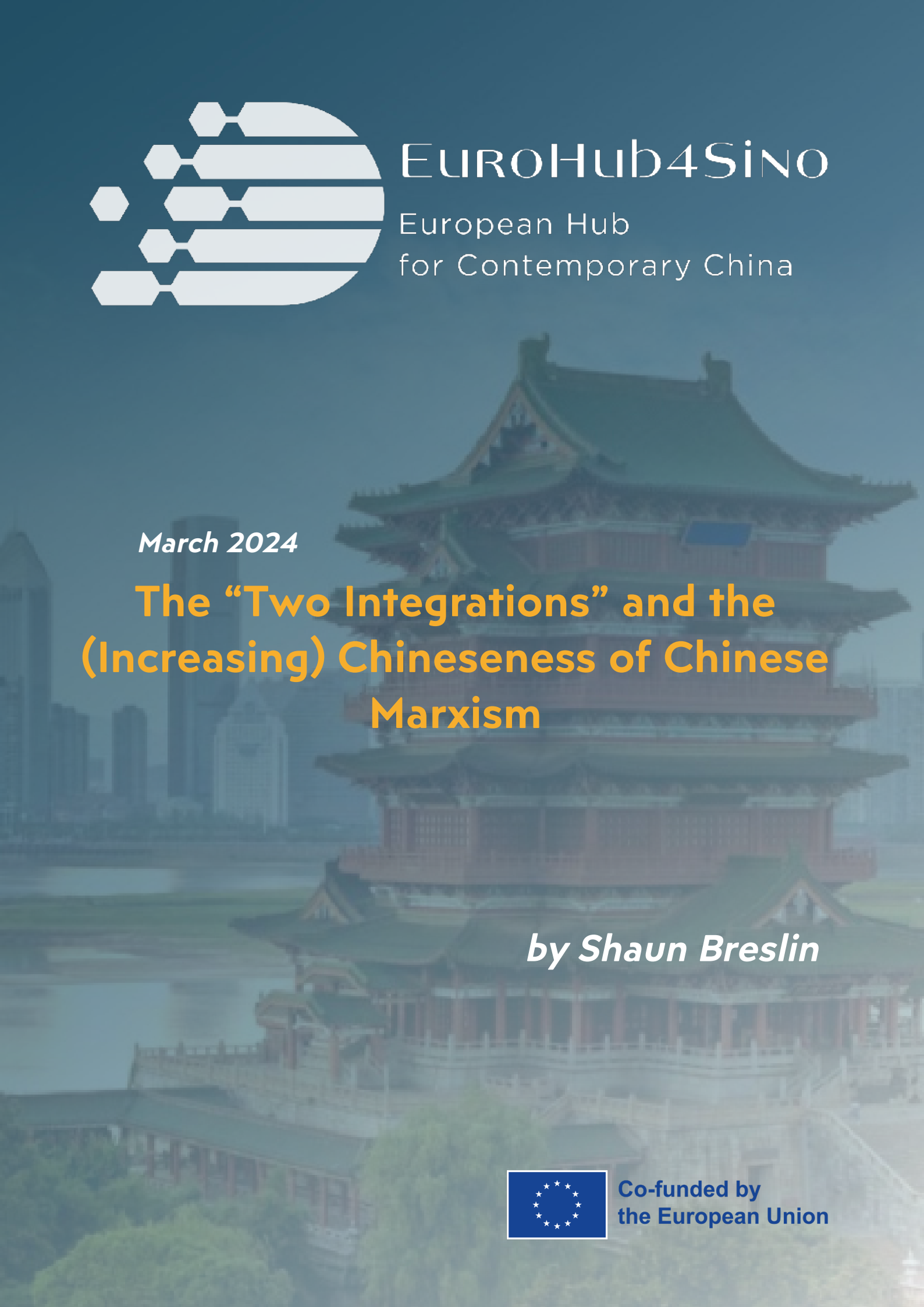

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The "Two Integrations" and the (Increasing) Chineseness of Chinese Marxism

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Executive Summary

- Ideology matters in China; and matters more than it does in many political systems. Not least because it is made to matter by the way that it is disseminated and promoted by the party.
- Changes in the nature of the party's guiding thinking are an essential pre-requisite for key policy changes, and establish new objectives and benchmarks that the party wants to be judged against.
- Studying ideological changes helps us understand the party's preferred direction of travel.
- Even radical changes are explained as representing a form of continuity with the past, by emphasising the supposed methodology of theorising, with Marxism needing to be integrated with practical national conditions to become a usable guide to action. As times and circumstances change, so Chinese Marxism needs to change too.
- Attaining national goals and protecting national interests, have long been an important component of Chinese Marxism. So too has a focus on China's pre-revolutionary past as a source of Chinese greatness and of a distinct and unique way of thinking. However, Xi has taken this emphasis on China's traditional culture to a new level.
- The Two Integrates formally establishes the need to integrate Marxism with not only China's specific national circumstances at any given moment in time, but also China's traditional culture, thinking and values. Xi's version of Chinese Marxism seems to be much more influenced by his understanding of China's pre-revolutionary past than it is by the writings of Marx and Engels.
- Xi has identified what he argues are core elements of Chinese culture. One consequence is an increasing focus on China's uniqueness, exceptionalism and fundamental difference from other countries and societies; a focus and argument that is likely to increase in the future.
- From the Autumn of 2023, Xi's speech on *"Cultural Inheritance and Development"* (originally given in June 2023) has been widely reported and re-printed, and represents that start of a new emphasis on the importance of China's pre-revolutionary past for its present and future.

Keywords

Ideology

Sinification of Marxism

Cultural inheritance

Xi Jinping

Two Integrations

Traditional culture

Marxism

Introduction

Although Mao Zedong's revolutionary strategy differed considerably from the sort of proletarian revolution foreseen by Marx and Engels, he was very clear that his strategy was a *Marxist one* (actually, usually a Marxist-Leninist one). So too was his conviction that *class struggle* should continue after the creation of the socialist state; a conviction that resulted in the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. After his death, the abandonment of his radical policies and a new emphasis on economic reform was also explained as being fundamental Marxist. More than that, it was explained as being the natural *continuation of Mao Zedong Thought* rather than the rejection of it. How can this be the case? How can both what Mao argued and did, and what was subsequently done to overturn what Mao did, both be result of the same guiding ideology? And how is the work of Marx and Engels reflected in any of these incarnations of Chinese Marxism?

The answer lies in the way that the CCP explains what it thinks of as its methodology of ideological innovation to make Marxism relevant for different settings and changing times. Marxism-Leninism, so the argument goes, only provides the theoretical starting point, and not a blueprint or fixed guide to action. To make it have salience and actual real-world applicability, then it needs to be applied to specific and real world practical contexts. In the Chinese case, this entails imbuing it with specific Chinese characteristics; a process often referred to in English as the *"Sinification of Marxism"*. And as times change, then so the guiding ideology needs to change as well.

This "methodology" in effect can be used to justify pretty much anything and any turn in direction that the party leadership wants to do and take. It allows for things to be done by the ruling CCP that don't seem to have much to do with things written and said by Marx and Engels. Or more latterly, things done and said by ear lier CCP leaders like Mao himself. As we shall see, it is thus important in allowing

for change – and at times quite radical change - to be explained as representing continuity rather than a fundamental rupture with the party's (sometimes failed) past.

All CCP leaders have used the same justification to explain and justify their own ideological innovations and additions to guiding theory. And this includes Xi Jinping who has placed a particular emphasis on developing new thinking for a new era following the *"spirit of Mao Zedong Thought"*. Given that this justification for theoretical malleability has been used to justify very different policy preferences, then it is easy to dismiss it as sloganeering; do we really need to know how Xi justifies the way he has derived at his new way of thinking?

It is hard to disagree with the argument that what Xi actually does is more important than how he explains the process at arriving at new ideological positions. Nevertheless, understanding the argument does no harm when trying to work out the sort of benchmark of achievements and goals that the party wants to be judged against as it shifts the basis of its legitimacy away from an over-reliance in the past on generating growth.

In addition to changing the context of CCP ideology, Xi has broken away from his predecessors in explaining the way in which he arrived at his new thinking and where the ideology comes from; where its origins lie. During the Cultural Revolution, any manifestations of old thinking and old practices were subject to vilification and violent attacks. Exhorted to "destroy the *four olds"*, radicalised youth attacked any symbol of this past; temples, monuments, books and also people who were accused of upholding the four olds or in some ways representing them.

The transition from seeing the past as the problem and something to be rejected to lauding it as a source of China's successes and greatness did not originate with Xi. In the 1990s, there was a concerted attempt to use *nationalism* as a unifying and legitimating force, as the party portrayed itself as the defender of China's proud national interests, struggling to return the country to its rightful place in the global order in the face of an often-hostile international environment. And much of what Xi has said about integrating Marxism with China's great cultural traditions builds on what was said and debated under his predecessor, *Hu Jintao*.

That said, Xi places an even greater emphasis on China's past than his predecessors did: its ancient pre-revolutionary culture, thinkers, philosophies, practices, world views and so on. Moreover, he has formalised the relationship between Marxism and China's long, distinct and exceptional past through the adoption and promotion of what is variously translated into English as the Two Integrates, Two Integrations or Two Combinations (两个结合). In order to understand the nature and significance of this change, we have to begin by going back to basics to understand of how the CCP previous explained how it derived at its guiding ideology, and how this explanation allowed for considerable flexibility and change within a framework of continued one party rule.

The First Integration: Integrating Marxism with China's Concrete Circumstances

The Marxism that Marx and Engels wrote about was a theory of post-industrialisation; an industrialisation that was only at best in its infancy and not geographically widely spread in China when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed in 1921. Indeed, fit was for this reason that a number of this new party's members and leaders thought that a socialist revolution would be a long time coming.

Mao was not alone in coming to a different conclusion. One of the co-founders of the CCP in 1921, *Li Dazhao*, had already written about the importance of developing a form of Marxism that worked in China by incorporating China's unique and specific cirumstances and history even before the establishment of the party. And earlier Marxists were not the only source of ideational inspiration for Mao and other early Chinese Marxist thinkers. *John Dewey's* emphasis on the importance of pragmatic experimentalism, for example, was particularly influential at the time. But in the way the party retells its history and builds an explanation for ideological transformations, Mao's thinking and convictions take on a special role. And the influence of earlier Marxist thinkers and practitioners are highlighted when it comes to explaining the evolution of Mao's thinking.

China did not, *Mao argued*, have to wait to go through the same processes of political and economic change that Marx and Engels had observed in Britain and Germany before revolution would occur. After all, neither had Russia in 1917. And yet a successful revolutionary had occurred there. This was not because Russia's revolutionary thinkers and leaders treated the works of Marx and Engels as some sort of blueprint that had to be slavishly followed, but rather because "Lenin and Stalin integrated the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Soviet revolution and thereby developed Marxism".

Once more recognising that the real source and flow of ideas is not always the same as how history is later explained, the foundations of this approach to theorising are typically explained as having their roots in *Marx's own belief* in the need to "prove" the truth "of his thinking in practice". The specific focus on dogma – and the errors of being dogmatic - comes from a relatively short letter written by *Engels* to the German born American labour leader, Friedrich Adolph Sorge. In it, he criticised those who approached theory in "a doctrinaire and dogmatic way, as something which has got to be learnt off by heart" rather than as a more abstract "guide to action". This idea became shorted to the principle that "Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action", and was used by *Lenin* and *Stalin* to explain and justify why their thinking, practices and policies differed from the original revolutionary expectations of Marx and Engels; and in the latter's case, also to justify his attacks on other Soviet leaders (like Zinoviev). Both in the Union and in China, being the wrong sort of Marxist at times was a bigger sin than not being a Marxist at all. So explaining why a certain way of thinking was truly Marxist (and another was not) became an important political tool

in either attacking political opponents or subsequently justifying such attacks (or both).

It is not clear that the origins of Mao's own theoretical innovations were directly influenced by studying the evolution of this line of argument, rather than independently emerging from his own personal experiences (and indeed, the influence of non-Marxists like Dewey). Indeed, in his *1927 Report* on an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan – a report that established his conviction that a correctly lead peasantry could become a potent revolutionary force - he places the emphasis on the time he spent living with the peasants in the countryside. Certainly, though, once he became the effective leader of the CCP,[1] he specifically placed himself as inheritor and continuer of this tradition in developing a new practice-based revolutionary thought that worked for China. In doing so *he criticised* both "empiricists" (who built their understanding solely on their experiences without any Marxist knowledge or guidance, and also the dogmatists who only studied the works and words of previous Marxist thinkers and "cut themselves off" from the real world around them. This included those who were overly influenced by the experience and trajectory of the Soviet Revolution in Russia, and who thought that this provided the guide for China's own revolution.

For Mao and his followers, if Lenin's and Stalin's logic of adapting Marxists truths to fit the reality of the Russian situation was ideologically correct, then it would be ideologically wrong to expect that experience to be germane for China. On the contrary, China must instead develop revolutionary thought that was built on integrating the universal truths of Marxism with China's own very specific set of circumstances. As perhaps most clearly expressed in *"On Practice"* in 1937 – a paper that refers to practice some 93 times (98 including the foreword) – "the truth of any knowledge or theory is determined not by subjective feelings, but by objective results in social practice. Only social practice can be the criterion of truth".

After Mao

As with XI's Thought, the actual content of Mao's Thought and what it meant in practice does not concern us here. The key is the way in which this process of theorising was first explained at the time, and then more important, subsequently explained by China's post-Mao leaders as they too sought to innovate. This is because exactly the same logic that Mao used to justify his ideological innovations – including the need to wage class war during the Cultural Revolution – was used by the post-Mao leadership to theoretically justify their abandonment of his policies. And it has been used ever since too. It has become a foundational truth of developing and evolving the CCPs guiding ideology.

Those who wanted to take a new direction under the effective leadership of Deng Xiaoping even used Mao's own words and thinking to justify the new turn against him after his death. Mao's 1940 call to Seek Truth From Facts" (as

used in *"On Democracy"* in 1940) and his arguments about the relationship between practice and truth – now typically described as "Practice is the Sole Criterion of Truth" – became the ideological justification of the urgent need to turn away from his policies.[2] More than that, those who wanted to continue Mao's policies (as his immediate successor Hua Guofeng did) were actively abrogating Mao Zedong Thought not following it. Their emphasis on wanting to emphasise continuity even though times had changed, so the argument went, was a new form of dogmatism that "violates Comrade Mao Zedong's principle of seeking truth from facts and the principles of dialectical and historical materialism".

This quote is from a speech made by *Deng Xiaoping* in 1978, when he asked how the party should " Hold High the Banner of Mao Zedong Thought"? His answer was to focus on repeating the method of theorising rather than the policies that this theorising led to at different times. This was because "the fundamental point of Mao Zedong Thought is seeking truth from facts and integrating the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution". Mao Zedong Thought, then, became defined as the process of theorising rather than the actual content and consequences of Mao's theories themselves.[3] As times had changed, new thinking was required to reflect these changes and provide new theoretical guidance for new times.

Identifying the Principal Contradiction

Mao supposedly using this method of theorising in the 1960s Mao to identify class conflict as the *Primary or Principal Contradiction.* This refers to uncovering the single most important challenge facing the party and the revolution at any given time; a contradiction that could lead to the end of the party (and thus the CCP led political system in general) if not correctly dealt with. The existential nature of this challenge thus justifies doing *whatever it takes* to defeat it. So in the Cultural Revolution, this provided a theoretical justification for defeating class enemies. After he died, supposedly using the same theorising method, Deng and other reform minded leaders undertook a new process of integrating the scientific truths of Marxism-Leninism with China's new and changed specific national circumstances, which included thinking through the impact on the party and the people (and on the economy) of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. This led to the identification of a *new Principal Contradiction* for a new Post-Mao era.

At the core of what was after Deng's death officially designated *Deng Xiaoping Theory[4]*, was a focus on China's level of underdevelopment and the need to "improve the people's material and cultural life and broaden their outlook"; if these development based issues were not dealt with, then the party and the one-party state would be lost. Once again, this justified doing whatever it took to deal with this new primary contradiction, including using the sort of capitalist means and methods that were anathematic to Mao. And also eventually becoming a key actor on the (capitalist) global economy too.

Again, it is not the content of policy that is relevant for this discussion as the way in which this new direction was justified. The development of Socialism with Chinese Charac teristics after Mao represented the "second historic step in adapting Marxism to China's conditions". When Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin argued in 1997 that "The fundamental task of socialism is to develop the productive forces", he was basically talking about promoting the sort of industrialisation and economic growth that Marx and Engels thought would have happened before the revolution and the seizure or power in the first place; and indeed, would have been a cause of that revolution. Moreover, they were trying to do this in the wake of the impact on the economy (and potentially the people's support of the party) of the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution.

For Deng, Jiang and other post-Mao leaders, there was no contradiction between socialist and Marxist principles and thinking on the one side, and the use of markets, the private sector and other capitalist forms on the other. They are two parts of a bespoke and specific form of socialism with Chinese characteristics that worked for China precisely because it is based on China's unique and specific circumstances at the time.

After Deng

All of China's leaders have used the same justification in making their own ideological innovations and contributions as they reflect on changes in China's concrete (and unique) national circumstances, or as they seek to leave a theoretical mark on history (depending on your point of view). In Jiang's case, this was manifest in The Theory of the Three Represents, which officially became part of the CCPs guiding ideology in 2004. This took an even greater step away from the class basis of politics under Mao by stating that the party now represented China's advanced productive forces, advanced culture, and "the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people"; not just workers and peasants but everybody including capitalists (or perhaps that should be capitalists with Chinese characteristics). Again, this was explained as being entirely appropriate (and entirely Marxist) as it simply reflected the integration of Marxists truth with the new and changed realities of the day in China.

Subsequently, at the 17th Party Congress in 2007, Hu Jintao announced that his Scientific Outlook on Development was a new addition to "Theories of socialism with Chinese charac teristics" and represented "the latest achievement in adapting Marxism to Chinese condi tions". This was explicitly in part inspired by the impact of SARS, and more broadly by the emerging negative consequences of the pursuit of rapid economic growth above all else. In the same year at the annual meeting of the National People's Congress (China's parliament), Premier Wen Jiabao painted a not particularly rosy picture of the health of the economy, captured by the idea that it was "unstable, unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable".[5] Hence the need to move to a new growth mode built around "comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development".

The new emphasis was captured by two major concepts, backed up by a propaganda campaign to promote them; "put people first" and build a "harmonious society". It might seem odd that these needed to be promoted as new initiatives given that most governments of most complexions would probably say that this was what they were doing, and this was their aim. But the implication here is that people had not previously been put first; overall growth and development had instead been prioritised. And this dash for growth had resulted in disharmony and the sort of structural problems outlined by Wen Jiabao. Stressing the need to *"Put people first*, exercise governance for the people and always maintain close ties with them" – as Hu did at the 18th Party Congress – also suggests that previously the party had been losing touch with the people too.

Continuity, Criticism and Change in a One-Party State

This points to the problems of moving on from the past in a one-party state. In a competitive electoral system, a new government often comes to power precisely because it has highlighted the failings of the incumbents and promised a better new future. It is harder (or maybe more dangerous) to do this, though, in a one party state because the previous ruling party that might have made mistakes is the same as the ruling party that now wants to move in a new direction. Moreover, the same party that used its extensive propaganda tools to promote and extol the wisdom and successes of previous leaders now needs to extol the wisdom of doing something different to overcome existing problems too.

Mistakes can be and are acknowledged. As *Goodman* notes, one of the reasons that the CCP argues that it is the "guarantee of China's future [is] not because it has always acted perfectly but precisely because it is a learning organisation". This is a party, so the argument goes, that is always vigilant and looking for any error or any sort of change that needs a response. When something does change, then by applying the universal ideological truths of Marxism to the new changed circumstances, the party comes up with new thinking that generates new policies to deal with the new reality. The focus then turns to the new and the solution rather than the past and the sources of the problems that need resolving. And to make sure the message gets across, the party uses its extensive propaganda machinery and control over the media to ram the message home. The extensive exegesis that typically often takes place in academic works helps as well.

The massive transitions that took place after the death of Mao are a clear example of trying to build support for something new and acknowledging past errors without totally undermining the party with a wholesale rejection of the past. Even though "chief responsibility" for the error of the Cultural Revolution were blamed on Mao in the party's 1981 *review* of its own history,[6] and this was an "error comprehensive in magnitude and protracted in duration", the report was largely positive in its evaluation of Mao's revolutionary contribution. Even the Cultural Revolution was explained as "the error of a great proletarian

revolutionary", and only partially Mao's fault with the Gang of Four taking most of the rest of the blame. And as we have seen, turning away from Mao was explained as actually maintaining his tradition (of theorising if not of policy) rather than abandoning it.

The shift to putting people first was considerably less dramatic and less extreme than the post-Mao transition. It was also incomplete, with something of a consensus emerging that Hu's presidency was unable to break through the various *vested interests* that were happy with an unreformed status quo. Given what Xi has subsequently done to impose himself on the party and to centralise power around himself, then it would seem fair to suggest that he had reached the same conclusion about obstructions and bottlenecks within the party too. And part of the process of moving to a new stage entailed Xi making his own theoretical contribution to the party's guiding ideology.

Xi Jinping Thought: From One to Two Integrations

Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook on Development was formally adopted as part of the party's guiding ideology at the CCP's 18th Party Congress in 2012; the Congress that saw the end of Hu's tenure and the beginning of Xi Jinping's. So as Xi became party leader, the *CCP's constitution[7]* stated that:

> *The Communist Party of China takes Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of Three Represents and the Scientific Outlook on Development as its guide to action.*

Marxism-Leninism in itself is the result of adapting the original to the specifics of the Russian/Soviet case. And everything after the word Leninism has been at various times explained by the CCP as resulting from integrating Marxist truths with practical Chinese national contexts of the time. While the following quote, also from the party constitution, is rather long, it is worth repeating here in part to explain the supposed method in the party's own words. And also in part to show that at its very fundamental starting point, the method of theorising (and the justification for doing it this way) remains unchanged from Mao's arguments in On Practice in 1939:

> *To uphold and develop Marxism, we must integrate it with China's specific realities. Taking Marxism as our guide means applying its worldview and methodology to solving problems in China; it does not mean memorizing and reciting its specific conclusions and lines, and still less does it mean treating it as a rigid dogma.... We must base everything we do on actual conditions and focus on solving real problems arising in our reform, opening up, and socialist modernization endeavours in the new era. We must keep responding to the questions posed by China, by the world, by the people, and by the times; in doing so, we should find the right answers suited to the realities of China and the needs of our day.*

In truth, it is often difficult to immediately see what the Marxist elements actually are, but the supposed methodology of theorising is clear.[8]

The nature of Xi's theoretical contribution is significant in four main ways. First, it was added to the party constitution as guiding Thought while Xi was still General Secretary rather than as (in Hu's case) or after (in Jiang's) he stood down; or after he was dead in the case of Deng Xiaoping. Second, the designation of Xi's thinking as Thought (思想) is important, as only Mao's thinking was previously called Thought(and only Mao and Deng previously had been mentioned by name). Third, and following directly from this, Xi Thought is presented as a much more substantive addition than those made by Jiang and Hu. It is not a modification or tweaking of the status quo ante within an existing framework (as happened under Jiang and Hu). Rather, it was a move to a new frame work – a new era – because of the identification of a change in the principal contradiction.

The main challenge for the party and the regime was no longer China's levels of underdevelopment as it was throughout the previous post-Mao era. Now:

> *The principal contradiction in Chinese society is that between the ever-growing needs of the people for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development.*

This is not to say that the task of promoting development was over. Far from it. China was still in the primary stage of socialism and would be "for a long time to come". Old challenges remain. Indeed, even class struggle has not totally disappeared according to the party constitution.[9] It's just that these are no longer the most urgent and pressing existential challenges for the party. While Hu's people centred preferences might have also pointed in a similar direction, the designation of a new Principal Contradiction represents an entirely different degree of change in the basic orientation of CCP policy under Xi.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, Xi's process of theorising differed from previousinnovations. Like his predecessors, his Thought was said to have emerged from integrating Marxist truths with the concrete circumstances of China in this new era. However, he added to this a second integration; integrating Marxism with China's traditional culture, thinking and practices.

Making the Past Serve the Present

The way in which Xi's ideas are words are presented can make it sound if all that he says and does is a new and original contribution. In reality, though, a number of his supposed innovations build on what has gone before. To be sure, where there is continuity, then in pretty much every case pre-existing trends have been intensified, accelerated and concentrated under Xi. This includes when it comes to theory building.

Xi was not the first Chinese leader to refer to the historical origins of contemporary China. As the party leadership looked for new sources of legitimacy after Tiananmen in 1989, they increased the focus on national goals and national(ist) aspirations. Providing more "patriotic education" was seen as being one way of inculcating a sense of common purpose across society (and particularly among the young) and also fostering a sense of gratitude and support for the party in delivering these national goals. This included looking back to periods of previous Chinese greatness when it was a global innovator and regional leader (and the goal of returning China to where it belongs in global hierarchies).

Hu Jintao's emphasis on harmonious development and building a harmonious world explicitly referred back to Confucian principles and objectives. Indeed, in his speech to the Party Congress in 2007, Hu effectively laid the foundations for Xi to build on when he argued that

> *Chinese culture has been an unfailing driving force for the Chinese nation to keep its unity and make progress from generation to generation. We must have a comprehensive understanding of traditional Chinese culture, keep its essence and discard its dross to enable it to fit in with present-day society.*

As is typically the case in China, this was followed by an increased scholarly interest in integrating Marxism and traditional culture. In addition, a 2009 Central Committee meeting was specifically devoted to the promotion, sinification, modernisation and popularisation of Marxism. Foreshadowing the formal adoption of the Two Integrates a decade and a half later, China's traditional culture was included alongside China's changed practical circumstances as an essential component of a distinct and usable new form of Chinese Marxism. At this stage, there was no clear identification of any specific elements of this traditional culture – the detailed features of it that informed and influenced the present. This was to come later under Xi.

The transition from the Hu to Xi in 2012 was accompanied by the establishment of a set of new Core Socialist Values. These values represent an aspirational ethical and moral code for the nation (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony), Chinese society (freedom, equality, justice, rule by law), and individuals (patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship). [10] Although they are called socialist values, none of these immediately leap out as being specifically socialist ones; or put another way, they are all values that many non-socialist nations, societies and individuals could associate with and aspire to manifesting. It is probably easier to discern traditional Chinese and Confucian concepts in these 12 values, rather than socialist ones.

Indeed, in explaining the genesis of these values at a politburo study group in 2014, Xi was explicit about their Chinese origins:

> *by etching these values in our minds can we forge ahead, and only by carrying forward what our ancestors have left us can we learn to be more creative.*

Equally as significant, in a document that was all about the origins of China's core socialist

values, he did not refer to Marxism once.

At *his speech* to the 19th Party Congress in 2017 – when Xi Thought was added to the Party Constitution – Xi referred to the great civilization built over 5,000 years, and the party's task of completing national rejuvenation; returning China back to the great power status it had before the arrival of the British in the Opium War. Four years later in commemorating the centenary of the CCP in 2021, Xi placed this past alongside China's present (its practice circumstances) as an additional *second integration*; the need "to adapt the basic tenets of Marxism to China's specific realities and its fine traditional culture". There was no further detail explanation or elaboration in this speech. This occurred the following year at the 20th Party Congress. Once more, the *following quote* is quite long. But as it is meant to fundamentally change the way in which Chinese Marxist theorising takes place, it deserves to be repeated in full:

> *To uphold and develop Marxism, we must integrate it with China's fine traditional culture. Only by taking root in the rich historical and cultural soil of the country and the nation can the truth of Marxism flourish here. With a history stretching back to antiquity, China's fine traditional culture is extensive and profound; it is the crystallization of the wisdom of Chinese civilization. Our traditional culture espouses many important principles and concepts, including pursuing common good for all; regarding the people as the foundation of the state; governing by virtue; discarding the outdated in favour of the new; selecting officials on the basis of merit; promoting harmony between humanity and nature; ceaselessly pursuing self-improvement; embracing the world with virtue; acting in good faith and being friendly to others; and fostering neighbourliness. These maxims, which have taken shape over centuries of work and life, reflect the Chinese people's way of viewing the universe, the world, society, and morality and are highly consistent with the values and propositions of scientific socialism.*

This formalised the process of placing an ever-greater emphasis on tradition and the past that had been evolving over a number of years. In fact, Hu Jintao might have a claim to be the originator of this understanding. You would not realise this, though, if you only read the things written by and about ideology in the Xi era, as any influence that Hu might have had has been drowned out by the focus on Xi's innovative thinking. In this respect, the specific announcement is probably less important than the evolution of the idea more generally over a longer gestation period. But formally changing what had supposedly been the foundation of CCP theorising over the previous century is not insignificant. In addition, there is more substance to this focus on the past that before; Xi now identifies specific elements and manifestations of this traditional culture that have salience for today. Establishing the second integration also lays the foundations for even further changes in the future.

Although the 2022 party congress marked the formal origin of the Two Integrations, it was not immediately given a huge amount of emphasis. It was a year later that it began to be pushed. As is often the case in China, a previous speech by a leader - in this case *Xi's speech* at the Meeting on Cultural Inheritance and Development in June 2023 - is subsequently published and promoted. This speech (rather than the announcement at the party congress) in many ways acts as the foundational document on this new approach to theoris-

sing. In this case, although the speech was reported at the time, the subsequent publication of the speech in the party's theoretical journal, Qiushi, in September was the key moment. The decision to publish it was widely reported in the press in advance, underlining its significance, and it was followed by discussions in the People's Daily on how best to implement Xi's thinking, which were later collected in book form at the end of the year.

There are probably five key takeaways from what is a relatively long document given that it started life as a speech. The first is that this is not about finding a specific historical period or single philosophical source of this wisdom, but rather distilling an essence of Chineseness from the entire sweep of history. One of what Xi calls "the defining characteristics of Chinese civilization" is the "philosophical thoughts of seeking truth from facts and combining knowledge with action". And the second key takeaway is that while the methodology of theorising has always previously been explained as a product of Marxist theoretical innovation, it is now established to be a product of China's past. Presumably the inference is that it has both Marxist and Chinese precursors and precedents rather than just a Chinese one alone. But the third takeaway is that this traditional culture is **at least** on an equal footing with Marxism when it comes to theorising.

Indeed, when you read what Xi Jinping says about the importance of this cultural tradition, then you begin to ask if it has become the single most important source of contemporary ideology. Statements like:

> *without the 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization, where would the Chinese characteristics come from? If it wasn't for these characteristics, how could we have charted the triumphant path of Chinese socialism? Only within the context of more than 5,000 years of Chinese civilization can we genuinely comprehend the historical necessity, cultural significance, and unique advantages of the Chinese path.*

do not necessarily mean that it is the pre-Marxist Chinese past **alone** that is the key source of what the party and the country is today. But it can certainly be read that way.

Fourth, as noted above, there is nothing about the core socialist values that seems to be unique to China. The same is true for the specific crystallisations of Chinese wisdom that Xi has clarified. Yet the intention certainly seems to be to establish China's difference from others and even its uniqueness. China's 5,000 years of "uninterrupted civilization" are a starting point for understanding what China is today. As argued in the June 2023 speech:

> *If not through the prism of its extensive history of continuity, one would not be able to understand ancient China, contemporary China, let alone China of the future.*

This longevity and also continuity over time represents the first of what Xi argues are China's distinctive features. In listing these features the English language version uses the term "distinguished by" to refer to this and four other distinctive characteristics; creativity, unity, inclusiveness and peacefulness. While distinguished on its own might simply refer to emi-

nence or famed, the addition of "by" means that it is different from others. The Chinese version uses 突出特性 which also points to being distinct and unique. It seems pretty clear that China's traditional culture is not just noteworthy, but fundamentally different from others; and in much of what is said, morally superior to those others too. As *argued elsewhere,* students of different parts of Chinese history might question some of the assertions of this distinctive Chinese culture, such as "the intrinsic peacefulness of Chinese civilization". But once more the actual content of theory is not the focus of interest here. Rather it is how theorising takes place, and the potentially huge significance of now having two rather than just one element of Chineseness to integrate with Marxism in developing new theoretical innovations.

The fifth takeaway, already hinted at above, is that there is no mention of Hu or those who had previously pointed to the significance of traditional culture in applying Marxism to China. Rather, *in the words of The Global Times*, this is based on Xi's own personal "profound understanding" of Chinese culture. This is very much a document that is all about Xi.

Going Forwards

Pretty much from the outset, then, Chinese Marxism has always had a distinct and specific Chinese nature to it. Without "sinifying" Marxism to make it relevant to the reality of China at the time, then Marxism might well have largely remained a subject of intellectual debate rather than part of a real-world political movement. And without subsequently then re-applying it to a new set of changed conditions after Mao's death, who knows, the party might not even have survived.

This malleability of Marxism has become entrenched as a fundamental validation of a certain way of theorizing and part of the CCPs DNA. It provides the basis for the ideological justification and rationale for all the things that the party has done, particularly when it decides to do something different; even when it does things that on the face of it at least look like the antithesis of Marxist thinking or what a Communist Party should be doing (like developing quasi capitalist practices and the private sector). It is a methodology that provides a form of continuity even in times of quite radical change, and the ability to respond to problems and failings with new innovations. Or at the very least, that is how it is argued and explained.

What Xi has done, then, by introducing and formalising the second of the Two Integrations represents both an end and also probably a beginning at the same time. It is the endpoint of a process of gradually establishing elements of China's pre-revolutionary past as a source of present and future thinking and practice. The introduction of the second integration also affirms what was already a process of establishing China's essential and fundamental difference from other civilisations and polities; particularly (but not only) western liberal ones. There is now a rather strong formal assertion that an essentialised

Chinese difference that has emerged over centuries is now a core part of establishing a form of Chinese Marxism that increasingly looks more Chinese in origin than Marxist.

In terms of a beginning, the Two Integrations had a relatively quiet early life and was rather crowded out by other things that Xi was saying and doing in 2021 and 2022. But from the Autumn of 2023, they took on a greater profile, and seem destined to be increasingly important in the future. To some extent they have been captured and rolled into the somewhat bigger and grander focus on *Xi Jinping Thought on Culture* since October 2023 which included the call to "to advance the protection and inheritance of fine traditional Chinese culture, and extend the reach and appeal of Chinese civilization".

This is an ideology that is also increasingly presented as morally superior to others too (rather than just different); the idea of China's essential pacifism being a case in point. Given the direction of travel, including Xi's focus on ancient Chinese wisdom before the Two Integrates, then it is likely that there will now be an ever-greater focus on China's fundamental difference, exceptionalism, uniqueness, and moral and ethical superiority across a range of policy areas. Xi's interest in *archaeology* as a means of understanding the origins of "Chinese civilization, history and national spirit" also suggests that there is much more to come in terms of looking to the past to explain the present and the future.

In truth, the long term objectives and goals of the CCP long ceased to be revolutionary ones. For quite some time now, they have very clearly been replaced by national ones. The Two Integrations is the latest step in imbuing Chinese Marxism with increasing amounts of Chineseness, and Chinese uniqueness. Clearly, understanding the organizational structure of the Chinese Communist Party remains essential in trying to comprehend how the Chinese political system works. But if you want to understand the nature and future of Chinese Communism, then despite the frequent references to scientific socialism, it is worth spending more time studying the way that China's history and civilization is now understood and explained than studying the Marxist classics.

[1] Despite Mao's rise to ascendency at the Zunyi Conference on the Long March in 1935, Zhang Wentian was the elected General Secretary of the CCP until replaced by Mao (as Chairman) in 1943.

[2] The party's theoretical journal, Qiushi or Seeking Facts, takes its name from the second part of this term in Chinese (實事求是). It replaced the previously more revolutionary focused theoretical journal, Red Flag, in 1988.

[3] And also not just the result of what Mao alone thought. In 1981 Mao Zedong Thought was defined as emerging from the *"collective struggle of the party and the people"* and not just by Mao alone.

[4] At the 15th Party Congress in September 1997.

[5] This specific comment was not made in his speech as often reported, but at a subsequent press conference.

[6] Formally titled the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China".

[7] This is a link to the current constitution rather than the 2012 one and includes the addition of Xi's Thought and other amendments in 2017 and 2022.

[8] There may be other reasons why the works of Jiang, Hu and Xi are not available on Marxists.org which has a massive collection of works by a wide range of not just avowedly Marxist thinkers, but those influenced by elements of Marxist thought as well.

[9] According to *the constitution*, "Owing to both domestic factors and international influences, a certain amount of class struggle will continue to exist for a long time to come, and under certain circumstances may even grow more pronounced, however, it is no longer the principal contradiction".

[10] These echo Jiang Zemin's promotion of a *Socialist Spiritual Civilization* in the 1990s, which was in turn influenced by Deng's use of the term in the 1980s.

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