Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of Its Past, circa 1980

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> China's present leaders have turned their backs upon revolutionary solutions to the problems of socialism. Are they also prepared to abandon the quest for socialism? As revolutionary will surrenders to social necessity, the future loses its immanence in the present. We must ask once again if socialism can survive the extinction of the socialist vision and, if it does, what kind of society it is likely to produce. The Chinese themselves have no convincing answers to these questions. In an interview in 1980, Deng Xiaoping upheld socialism but refused to predict if it would prevail in the future.[1] His response is typical of the uncertainty over the future of socialism in China that permeates Chinese political thinking today.

These lines were written in 1981. In the nearly three decades that have elapsed since then, much has changed in China and the world. Inter-

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1. Interview with Felix Greene, broadcast in Hong Kong, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (hereafter *FBIS*), January 11, 1980, 16.

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estingly, however, the "uncertainty" has refused to go away, and neither has the wishful thinking, pro- or antisocialist, that inevitably colors the evaluation of China's present and future both within and without the country.

It is the evaluation of this continued uncertainty that is the major task undertaken by this discussion. One way to do so is to place contemporary China against the past of which it is the product. Where socialism as practice and vision is concerned, it is useful to judge how far China has traveled by placing present-day commitments against that moment in the past when the Communist Party embarked upon the path captured by the slogan of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," at least as that moment appeared to this author at the time. The first part of the present essay is a reprint of an article published in 1982 that began with the introductory paragraph above.[2] The second part offers a commentary on that article from the vantage point of the present. Each part, I hope, reflects upon and illuminates the other. If the essay in the end refuses to answer the question with which it begins, it is because developments over the last three decades, however radical in some sense, have in another sense thrown up challenges, the resolution of which may depend on the ability of the party to draw upon the revolutionary legacy that has shown remarkable resiliency against its tacit renunciation—and for good reason, as the questions addressed by the century-long Chinese Revolution were not just the products of revolutionary whimsy but were responses to real problems of the real world of the capitalist world-system. Rather than render those questions irrelevant, the dramatic changes that have accompanied China's incorporation into global capitalism since the 1980s have instead dramatized their continued urgency, which may be why the revolutionary past refuses to stay in the "dustbin of history" to which it has been consigned by its detractors.

To continue where the epigraph left off . . .

Policies since 1976 have engendered both hopes and fears that the new leadership might renounce socialism. There are those in China who would like to see the retreat from the Cultural Revolution culminate in the creation of a capitalist society; contemporary writings refer frequently to those who hold that "socialism is not as good as capitalism." At the same time, even a superficial reading of publications from China reveals the anxiety felt by those who sense in the present policies a betrayal of the promise of socialism. These feelings are shared by foreign observers who, for economic or political reasons, have more than a passing interest in the

2. Arif Dirlik, "Socialism without Revolution: The Case of Contemporary China," *Pacific Affairs* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1981–1982): 632–61.

course of Chinese politics. On the other hand, China's leaders and policymakers continue to profess socialist commitments, proclaim that "only socialism can save China," and argue that their policies offer a better guarantee for the achievement of socialism than those of their disgraced predecessors. It would be naive to take their claims at face value, but neither can we dismiss them as spurious rationalizations. From all appearances, their policies are based on an analysis of Chinese society that takes better account of orthodox Marxist premises regarding the prerequisites of socialism than that of their predecessors. Secondly, the reasoning that underlies their policies has too long a standing in Chinese socialist thinking to be dismissed as a cover for cynical manipulation. Finally, while they have been critical of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution policies, they have been reluctant to reject his legacy. Selected ideas of Mao now serve to legitimize the new policies.

There is no compelling reason to judge the socialism of present-day Chinese leaders against the criteria established by the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution did not provide a viable means to achieve socialism, even if it raised illusory hopes about its imminence. There is no ignoring the sense of relief that has accompanied the termination of the Cultural Revolution. It is not possible to deny all validity to current charges that the leaders of the Cultural Revolution pursued oppressive policies, or even that their egalitarianism would only have guaranteed an "equality in poverty."[3] Their revolutionary fervor may even have set back the cause of socialism in China by the hostility it provoked. Any effort to create a new society must of necessity be experimental. Present-day China is engaged in another such experiment, albeit one more sensitive to the limitations imposed by material necessity and, therefore, different in strategy from the Cultural Revolution. Rather than reject the socialism of Chinese leaders because of their departures from Cultural Revolution policies, it is best to listen closely to what they say, and judge their goals and strategy on their own merits.

On the other hand, we cannot afford to accept uncritically the official interpretation, which portrays the two decades between 1956 and 1976 as an aberration in China's march to socialism. It is fashionable nowadays to focus on the failures of Cultural Revolution policies and leadership, and ignore its basic message. The Cultural Revolution provided a new model of development to socialism that captured the imagination not of Chinese revolutionaries alone but of revolutionary socialists around the world. More

3. Jin Wen, "Egalitarianism Is a Major Enemy of Distribution According to Work," *Guangming Ribao* (hereafter *GMRB*), June 16, 1979 (*FBIS*, June 29, 1979, L16).

importantly, it addressed a basic problem of socialism in power: that socialist societies are as vulnerable as any other to producing structures of power that attenuate the revolutionary vision of freedom and equality. It was not simply a mindless pursuit of revolution, but an effort to resolve the ossification of the socialist power-structure that underlay the Cultural Revolution, as well as the conviction that continued revolution was fundamental to achieving socialism.

What contemporary Chinese leaders have abandoned is not socialism but revolution. While they continue to uphold socialism, they have redefined it in such a way as to deprive it of its revolutionary content. The present "economistic" interpretation of socialism has turned it into an ideology of economic modernization under the guidance of the Communist Party. "Economism," to quote Ralph Milliband, is "the attribution of an exaggerated—almost an exclusive—importance to the economic sphere in the shaping of social and political relations, leading . . . to 'economic determinism'; . . . it also involves a related underestimation of the importance of the 'superstructural' sphere."[4] Chinese leaders acknowledge the persistence of inequality in China, but attribute it to China's economic backwardness, not to endemic features of the present political system—and certainly not to its "superstructure." For the same reason, they believe that economic development will guarantee the achievement of socialist egalitarianism and, indeed, that it is the only way to achieve that end.

The question is not whether or not China should pursue rapid economic development—it obviously must—but whether a socialism defined exclusively in terms of economic development can remain faithful to its revolutionary goals. Socialism is revolutionary not because it brings socialists into power but because it seeks to transform social relations and attitudes in order to abolish economic and political inequality. A developed economy is a condition for socialism; it is neither a substitute for egalitarian social and political relations, nor does it guarantee the achievement of such relations. The latter, however, is precisely what an economistic definition of socialism implies. The economistic view obviates the need for any significant systemic change once socialists have come into power—especially change in the realm of social relations, which in turn lie at the heart of political relations. Indeed, when the rate of economic development becomes the measure of the success of socialism, it is possible to condone—even to praise—inequality in the name of socialism, as the Chinese are doing at the

4. Ralph Milliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 9.

present. If Chinese leaders are contemplating any changes in social relations, it is in the direction of greater, not less, inequality.

Chinese leaders tell the world that the social and political system that exists in China today (having come into being in 1956) is nothing short of a socialist system—except for the poverty of the country. Once the latter has been overcome, they claim, China will be truly socialist. Such a claim may move the faithful and those who benefit from the existing system, but it has little basis in fact or theory. China today is not a democratic or egalitarian but a hierarchical and increasingly elitist society with the Communist Party at its center. The dictatorship of the Communist Party, as Maurice Meisner has pointed out, is not the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat—and, I might add, a party dictatorship is a party dictatorship no matter whom the party claims to represent.[5] A strong political leadership for China may be justifiable in terms of the need to prevent restoration of the status quo ante (a possibility that is presently minimized), but it does not in itself provide a basis for socialism. Economic development on its own is unlikely to terminate hierarchical bureaucratic rule. On the basis of available historical experience, the more plausible alternative is that economic development will serve to consolidate the power of the existing structure. This is the ultimate meaning of the claim that once a "socialist" system has been established, there is no further need for revolution—in other words, systemic change, violent or otherwise, is ruled out.

The distinction between socialism and revolution, which is the point of departure for the analysis below, is needed to understand not only contemporary politics but the role socialism has played in Chinese politics since around the turn of the century. The two have been interrelated historically: as socialism revolutionized politics, revolutionary moments increased receptivity to the socialist promise. But they are not identical. Socialism has served revolutionary as well as antirevolutionary purposes. Many socialists in China, including its first proponents, were attracted to socialism precisely because they saw in socialism a way to develop the country without creating social divisions that might lead to revolutionary upheaval. The advocates of antirevolutionary socialism often combined their advocacy with the apologetics that there was no significant inequality in Chinese society. The revolution proved necessary to launch China on the road to socialism. What Chinese leaders today believe is that socialism can be achieved without

5. Maurice Meisner, "Chinese Marxism and the Concept of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," unpublished paper presented at the Wilson Center Colloquium, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., June 26, 1981.

further social transformation. On certain crucial points (such as the role of interest in society, the allocation of political power to different interest groups, relations between China and foreign capitalism, and even the idea of "using capitalism to develop socialism"), their views are reminiscent of the socialism of Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and his followers in the Guomindang left. Sun's social program was also a source of inspiration to Mao Zedong in his formulation of the idea of "New Democracy." Ironically, as Mao the Cultural Revolutionary has come under attack and been repudiated, Mao the proponent of New Democracy has gained greater prominence in Chinese consciousness.

If abandoning revolution does not necessarily mean abandoning socialism, neither is it without consequence for the future of socialism. As the experience of the Soviet Union first disclosed, to take revolution out of socialism it is necessary to depoliticize socialism. This is what the leaders of China have been doing for the past few years. As in the Soviet Union earlier, the problem of socialism in China appears more and more as an administrative and technical, rather than a political, problem. China's leaders may be socialist in the sense that they do not want to be capitalist; what relationship their socialism bears to the socialist vision of political and economic equality is another matter.

The developmental strategy the new leadership intends to pursue was articulated during the period from the third plenary session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party (December 18–22, 1978) through the spring of 1979. The third plenary session has come to be viewed as a historic turning point in official policy. It terminated the two-year-old campaign to "criticize and expose" Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four," and called upon the people to shift their attention to the achievement of the Four Modernizations. As the official communiqué put it, "The plenary session calls on the whole party, the whole army and the people of all nationalities to work with one heart and one mind, enhance political stability and unity, mobilize themselves immediately to go all out, pool their wisdom and efforts to carry out the new Long March to make ours a modern socialist country before the end of the century."[6] The underlying theme of this document was national unity in the cause of development. It described the development of the productive forces as the major challenge facing China. It pointed to the need to pay attention to "economic law and the law of value—which translates into the need to create a commodity economy

6. *FBIS*, December 26, 1978, E4–13.

and to remunerate labor according to work. Finally, it called for changes in social and political relations to meet the needs of production.

The most important—and problematic—shift in policy concerned the issue of class struggle. In accordance with its underlying theme of national unity, the communiqué proclaimed that, though class struggle would continue in China for some time to come, exploitation and, therefore, classes were things of the past. Over the next few months, the party continued to stress the importance of a united front to achieve socialism in China. In January 1979, Ulanfu, the head of the Central Committee United Front Work Department, announced the party's decision to rehabilitate the national bourgeoisie and to return to them their economic assets as well as to restore interest payments on confiscated property that had been suspended since 1966.[7] Official spokesmen explained the new policy as one of "buying out" the bourgeoisie, which was the most efficient way of eliminating the bourgeoisie as a class while converting its members into loyal followers of socialism. One document described collaboration with the bourgeoisie as a unique characteristic of the Chinese revolution past and present—a policy that had the blessings of Mao Zedong.[8] Hua Guofeng's speech to the second session of the Fifth National People's Congress in June 1979 clarified the reasoning underlying the new policy. Hua pointed out that exploiting classes had vanished in China as of 1956 with the socialist transformation of property ownership; capitalists themselves had been redeemed and "transformed into working people who earn their living in a socialist society."[9] These ideas were echoed by Deng Xiaoping in a speech to businessmen and industrialists during the same month.[10]

The rehabilitation of the national bourgeoisie, as well as of landlords and rich peasants, may not in itself constitute proof that the revolution has been abandoned; after all, it is true that in a technical sense the former ruling classes are no longer ruling. However, the ideological justification given for the new policies reveals an outlook which, while still within the parameters of Marxism, is clearly antirevolutionary in character. The Marxist idea of class, reinterpreted in accordance with this outlook, now legitimizes not revolution but the restoration of privilege and inequality.

7. *FBIS*, December 26, 1978, E4–13.
8. Research Office of the United Front Work Department, "Correctly Understand and Seriously Implement the Party's Policy toward the National Bourgeoisie," *Renmin Ribao* (hereafter *RMRB*), February 15, 1979 (*FBIS*, March 1, 1979, E1–7).
9. *Xinhua*, June 1, 1979 (*FBIS*, June 22, 1979, L5–7).
10. *Xinhua*, June 20, 1979 (*FBIS*, June 22, 1979, L9–11).

The authors of an article published in *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) in June 1980 observed that "those who regard Marx's theory on the development of socialist society as the process of uninterrupted revolution will never find any evidence in the works of Marx and Engels to support their arguments."[11] This, I think, represents the underlying thrust of official ideology in China since the formulation of the new policies. The point of departure for all defenses of these policies is that the "principal contradiction" in Chinese society has changed from the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the contradiction between "the people's needs for rapid economic and cultural development" and "the current economic and cultural conditions which fail to satisfy the people's needs." This transformation, the current line holds, had occurred by 1956, but was distorted by the "ultraleftism" that prevailed for the following two decades. It was not recognized again until after the overthrow of the "Gang of Four."

Mao's analysis of contradictions, which is the basis of contemporary social analyses, requires that the nature of all contradictions in society change when the principal contradiction has been transformed. Since development rather than class struggle is now the basic contradiction, conflict between different social interests must take a form that serves the resolution of the problem of development. Accordingly, divergence of interest between different social groups in China has now been redefined as "contradictions among the people," which means that persuasion and mediation rather than coercion and conflict must be employed to resolve them. Official policy holds that there is no "fundamental" divergence of interest between the proletariat and the national bourgeoisie, or between peasants and landlords or rich peasants, as long as all are committed to the "patriotic" effort to develop the nation. As Hua put it in his June 1979 speech, with the completion of the transformation of ownership in 1956, exploitation had come to an end, and "socialist workers, socialist peasants and socialist intellectuals and other patriots who support socialism" had become "masters of socialist society."[12]

Still, the communiqué of the third plenum, as well as later pronouncements on the subject, maintained that while classes and exploitation had disappeared in China, class struggle must continue for a long time. This

11. Xin Zhongqin and Xue Hanwei, "How Can One Interpret 'Socialism Means Declaration of Uninterrupted Revolution'?" *RMRB*, June 19, 1980 (*FBIS*, June 27, 1980, L10–11).
12. Wei Jianlin and Jia Chunfeng, "On the Transformation of the Principal Contradiction," *RMRB*, August 28, 1979 (*FBIS*, August 31, 1979, L12).

idea of "class struggle without an exploiting class" has caused a good deal of theoretical confusion. Why China's leaders would deny the existence of classes is evident. The policies of the Cultural Revolution were based on the premise that classes continued to exist even under socialism. This basic premise has had to be rejected in order to deny validity to the "ultra-leftism" of the Cultural Revolution. The obliteration of class distinctions has been carried to the point where one author could argue, without any hint of facetiousness, that the proletariat and the peasantry in the conventional sense had also disappeared, since in the absence of exploiting classes it was meaningless to speak of the exploited. In their place remained "socialist workers and socialist peasants"![13]

More problematic was the insistence on the need for continued class struggle. This possibly reflected a compromise with those in the Communist Party (including its former chairman Hua Guofeng) who were reluctant to renounce the Cultural Revolution in its totality. On the other hand, even those who would reject class struggle must recognize the theoretical and political impasse created by such a position—at least so long as they uphold Marxism and the continued political supremacy of the Communist Party. According to Marxism, classes must continue to exist until communist society has been reached. So far, no one in China has claimed that China is anywhere close to the achievement of communism. On the contrary, current policies are based on the premise that the country is very far from the communist ideal, and the exclusive emphasis on economic development is justified on the grounds that a mature economy is the prerequisite for communism. The same premise justifies the continuation of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and, therefore, the rule of the Communist Party: once communism has been achieved, the state must disappear along with all other organs of coercion in society. The Communist Party must exist only so long as there is need for class struggle.

The response to this dilemma created by the need for class struggle even after the exploiting classes have been abolished has been twofold. One has been to argue that, though classes have disappeared, vigilance must be maintained over remaining counterrevolutionaries. Hua's speech referred to the need for struggle against counterrevolutionaries and enemy agents, criminals, and political degenerates, "remaining" elements of the "Gang of Four," and "what remained of the old exploiting classes." An

13. Qiu Tian, "How Should We Understand Socialist Working Class and Peasantry?" *GMRB*, November 14, 1979 (*FBIS*, December 4, 1979, L2).

important policy statement published about the same time in *Hong Qi* (Red flag) gave a concise reason for continuing the dictatorship of the proletariat: "Though large-scale tempestuous mass struggle in the country has basically been completed, class struggle has not ended. There are an extremely small number of counterrevolutionaries and criminal elements in society. New bourgeois elements may also be generated from among working personnel of state organs. The class struggle with them is unlike past struggle (they cannot possibly form an open and complete class), but remains class struggle of a special kind."[14]

Theoretically more significant has been the redefinition of "class" as a category of analysis. While stressing the need for struggle against remnants of former exploiters and their ideology, Chinese leaders have had to make sure that the persistence of remnants was not taken to imply the persistence of classes. Underlying the policies of the Cultural Revolution was an equation of the persistence of bourgeois ideology with the persistence of the bourgeoisie, which meant a definition of class in terms of political and ideological attitudes. This definition legitimized continued revolution against landlords and the bourgeoisie, as well as against those in state organs and the Communist Party who held "bourgeois" ideas.

Since 1979, writings on the problem of classes have attacked the Cultural Revolution definition of class as a distortion of the Marxist concept of classes. They have, on the one hand, separated ideology from the class whose interests it articulated. In this view, though ideology is the product of a class, it can continue to lead an independent existence even after that class has disappeared. To identify class and ideology, one article noted, is to confound an object with its reflection.[15] (The authors of this unfortunate metaphor did not seem to notice any problems in a reflection without a reflector!)

More important has been the depoliticization of the definition of class. Hua's conclusion that exploiting classes had ceased to exist, wrote a contributor to the *Renmin Ribao*, contained "a significant theoretical viewpoint!"—namely, that "classes fall in an economic category and not in an extensive 'social category'" (the latter referred to the ideological-political

14. Commentator, "Shixian sige xiandaihua bixu jianchi sixiang yuanze" [To achieve the Four Modernizations, it is necessary to uphold the Four Principles], *Hong Qi*, no. 5 (1979); also translated in *FBIS*, May 22, 1979, L1–6.

15. Li Xiulin and Zheng Hangsheng, "Are Classes Really a Broad Social Category?—Replying to Comrade Wang Zhengping," *RMRB*, January 24, 1980 (*FBIS*, February 8, 1980, L17–21).

definition of classes).[16] This new definition was informed by a statement of Lenin which defined class in terms of the place a social group occupied in the economic structure of society. Once the economic structure had been transformed, so was the nature of classes. A basic implication of this definition has been to reject political means (suppression of classes) in favor of economic means in the resolution of the problem of interest-conflict in society. What is required for the final abolition of classes, in this view, is not further political struggle but rather economic development to create a structure suitable to communism. Accordingly, politics is now defined simply as a function of the economy. An editorial in the *Renmin Ribao*, noting that all political work must serve the Four Modernizations, explained: "Producing more oil means politics on the petroleum front, producing more coal is the coal workers' politics, producing more grain is the peasants' politics, defending the border areas is the fighters' politics and studying hard is the students' politics."[17]

Implicit in the new definition of classes and politics is an interpretation of Marxist theory that differs radically from the Cultural Revolution interpretation. The minimization of the significance of class divisions in China is ultimately informed by a highly attenuated view of the role class conflict played in history.[18] The view that prevails at present holds that it is not the relations but the forces of production that determine the social as well as the political-ideological structure. By the same token, it regards social change as a function of changes in the forces of production, which is measured in turn by the scientific-technological level of a given society. This "technological determinism" makes the relations of production a function of the forces of production, rather than a vital component of the organization of production itself. It therefore renders superfluous any attempt to transform the relations of production in order to advance production—which was a basic conviction of official ideology during the Cultural Revolution. On the contrary, present orthodoxy holds that relations must be brought into correspondence with the forces of production as they exist, because of the underlying premise that the relations of production hamper the development of the forces of production if they are either too backward or too

16. Li Xiulin and Zheng Hangsheng, "Class Struggle without Exploiting Classes," *RMRB*, October 31, 1979 (*FBIS*, November 14, 1979, L3–5).

17. "Modernization Is the Most Important Political Issue," *RMRB*, April 11, 1979 (*FBIS*, April 13, 1979, L15).

18. See the discussion "What Is the Motive Force of Historical Development?" *Beijing Review*, no. 35, September 1, 1980.

advanced vis-à-vis the latter.[19] The priority given to the forces of production is evident in the following statement by Yu Guangyuan, a leading economic theoretician and vice president of the Academy of Social Sciences: "The basic Marxist approach to socialist ownership is: anything that can best promote the development of the productive forces, yes, and it may count on the support of Marxists; anything that does not, no, and Marxists will not support it; anything that actually impedes the development of the productive forces will be firmly opposed."[20]

What kind of society is likely to emerge from this antirevolutionary socialism? Compromises with capitalism reveal some ambivalence toward socialism, but it would be wrong to see in the new attitude a desire to restore capitalism. A sense of self-interest if nothing else ties the Chinese regime to the preservation of the socialist system. It would be equally wrong, however, to ignore the implications of the new policies for Chinese socialism. The abandonment of the revolutionary strategy of socialism does not mean merely a return to political relaxation and orderly development, as apologists for the new policies would have us believe. It also means indefinite postponement of the pursuit of universal political and economic emancipation, which is the fundamental promise of socialism as an idea.

China today pursues a path of development between socialism and capitalism. While the economic organization of the country is still not significantly different from what had existed earlier, Chinese leaders have chosen to promote, rather than to curtail, the capitalist elements in the economy. They believe that socialist planning and party leadership, combined with ideological education, can contain their concessions to capitalist methods of development—in other words, that capitalism can serve to achieve socialism and socialism to control capitalism. Can they succeed?

The idea of a third way of development between capitalism and socialism has a long pedigree in Chinese socialist thought. When Sun Zhongshan first incorporated "people's livelihood" into the program of the Revolutionary Alliance in 1905, his aim was to lead China into socialism peacefully, avoiding the social revolution that he thought must be the fate of European society, torn asunder as it was by the ravages of the marketplace. Sun thought that a state-directed capitalism would serve to achieve this goal. Capitalism was necessary, he believed, because competition

19. Interview with Xue Muqiao, "More on Economic Reform," *Beijing Review*, no. 36, September 8, 1980.

20. Yu Guangyuan, "The Basic Approach to Socialist Ownership," *Beijing Review*, no. 49, December 8, 1980.

released the forces of development—as the experience of Europe demonstrated. State direction was necessary, on the other hand, to keep class interests in check so that no class oppressed others, creating the potential for social revolution. In the 1920s, Sun came to believe that his goal could be achieved by the Guomindang leading an alliance of all the progressive classes in the country's development.

More importantly, it was this same idea that underlay Mao's program for "New Democracy," which guided Communist Party policy during the last decade of the revolution and in the early years of the People's Republic. When he published his essay "On New Democracy" in early 1940, Mao consciously stressed the resemblance of his "Chinese way to socialism" to Sun Zhongshan's Three People's Principles. His idea, too, was to pursue a course of development between capitalism and socialism. The one important difference was, of course, that it was now up to the Communist Party to lead the alliance of classes necessary for China's liberation and development. He also emphasized the need for the party to safeguard the interests of workers and peasants (the foundation of the alliance) so as to make sure that development would be in a socialist direction.

One Russian author has noted the essential similarity between current assumptions and the presuppositions of Mao's New Democracy.[21] He has labeled these policies "Fascist," conveniently overlooking the fact that Chinese policies now are not very different from the policies the USSR has pursued since the 1960s—and that Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) was actually a source of inspiration for Mao's idea of New Democracy (Sun Zhongshan earlier had seen the NEP as a vindication of his own ideas of development!). Chinese writers on New Democracy in the 1940s believed that the only distinction between New Democracy and Lenin's New Economic Policy was that the latter had been temporary, while New Democracy would last for a long time.[22]

The similarity of current policies in China to those of the New Democracy program involves more than presuppositions. Current analyses take as their model the analyses of 1956, when transformation of ownership had been completed, rather than the period of New Democracy, when

21. D. Smirnov, "The Maoist Concept of 'New Democracy': A Right-Wing Revisionist Variant of 'National' Socialism," *Far Eastern Affairs*, no. 1 (1980): 77–89. For Soviet ideas on economic change in the 1960s, see the discussions in Leonid Pekarsky, *Soviet Economic Reform* (Moscow: Novosti Press, 1968).

22. Xu Dixin, *Xin minzhu zhuyi yu Zhongguo jingji* [New Democracy and the Chinese economy] (n.p.: Xin minzhu zhuyi chuban she, 1948), 11.

there were still clear class distinctions based on ownership of the means of production. Chinese leaders do not intend to resuscitate classes by going back to the period before 1956. On the other hand, they do stress the need to make room for divergent interests within an overall framework of national unity.[23] They believe that the mixture of capitalism and socialism they advocate will prevail for the foreseeable future. The mixed economic organization that they uphold is no different in outline than that envisaged in the New Democracy program.[24] These similarities are not very surprising. The architects of current economic policy are economists who first achieved prominence as spokesmen for New Democracy. Though they have had to make some adjustments in their thinking to take account of changes in Chinese society, their basic premises have not shifted.

Sun Zhongshan thought that the "third way" would transcend the deficiencies of both capitalism and socialism. Mao Zedong viewed it as an eclectic method necessitated by China's backwardness. Contemporary Chinese thought on development is in some ways closer to Sun's views than it is to Mao's. Recent suggestions in China that greater attention be paid to Sun's economic thought may be an indication of this tendency.[25] The problem with this third way of development is the difficulty of balancing the forces of capitalism against the demands of socialism. The choices Chinese leaders face today are reminiscent of the choice that faced Alice with regard to the caterpillar's mushroom in Wonderland: if she ate of one side, she would get taller; if she ate of the other, she would get shorter. And so it is with the effort to pursue a course between socialism and capitalism. That may be why Chinese leaders have made an effort to match every bite into capitalism with a bite into socialism.

Especially problematic in this respect is the party's class policy. The Cultural Revolution leadership, in keeping with Mao's ideas, saw the party as the representative of the proletariat and the peasantry, which it identified with the national interest. Now the party sees itself as the representative

23. See Xu Dixin, *Xin minzhu zhuyi yu Zhongguo jingji*, for the New Democracy approach to this question.

24. Mao Zedong et al., *1950 nian Zhongguo jingji lunwen ji* [A collection of essays on the Chinese economy, 1950] (Beijing: n.p., 1950). See, especially, the essays by Chen Yun and Xue Muqiao.

25. Lo Yaojiu, "Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Views on Accelerating the Development of the National Economy," *GMRB*, December 31, 1978 (*FBIS*, January 11, 1979); and Chen Koqing, "Shi lun Sun Zhongshan di jingji jianshe sixiang" [Discussions of Sun Yat-sen's thinking on economic construction], *Jingji Yanjiu*, no. 2 (1980): 45–51.

of the national interest, which it identifies with the interests of all "patriotic" supporters of the socialist state—much in the spirit of Sun Zhongshan and later of Mao during the period of New Democracy. Rather than representing class interests of the working classes, therefore, it seeks to mediate among divergent interests so that all can serve the nation "with one heart and one mind."

Whether or not China has exploiting classes in a conventional sense, there are different interests competing for economic and political resources. The Cultural Revolution, in its haste to realize the egalitarian vision of revolutionary socialism, sought to suppress the pursuit of interest by any group in society. The new leadership believes that the pursuit of interest must be allowed in order to release the productive energy in society. Its intention, however, is not to give free play to the pursuit of interest—to establish a politics of the marketplace. Rather, the party seeks to serve as the broker of interests—to permit the pursuit of individual and group interests but keep them under control so that they do not undermine the general interest of the nation or lead to the revival of classes.[26] That is why party leaders have taken pains to distinguish "socialist democracy" from "bourgeois democracy," and have insisted on the subordination of partial interest to the interest of the whole and short-term to long-term interest. As Deng told his interviewers in 1980: "We cannot encourage individual freedom which is in conflict with the interests of the state and the majority of the people or with the freedom of the broad masses of the people."[27]

The underlying assumption here is a corporatist one.[28] The corporatist ideal is to transcend the deficiencies of both capitalism and socialism. Its appeal lies in the promise of eradicating the chaos of the market without resorting to the stagnant order of a managerial bureaucracy. Unlike under socialist regimes—at least as they have existed so far—corporatism explicitly guarantees the organized articulation of interest to secure dynamic economic growth. And unlike within the capitalist market economy, it seeks to achieve general welfare and order through the administrative regulation of interest.

The problem with corporatism is basically the problem of balancing

26. Heilongjiung Provincial Service (*FBIS*, February 1, 1980, S1).

27. Deng Xiaoping interview (see note 1 above). Also see Xinhua Commentator, "Keep to the Correct Orientation of Socialist Democracy" (*FBIS*, January 22, 1980, L5–13).

28. The remarks on corporatism that follow are based on the discussions in P. C. Schmitter and G. Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979).

the forces of capitalism and socialism. While the corporatist promise is to transcend both socialism and capitalism, and to create a society that is both democratic and just, corporatist reality is an uneasy blend of the two systems: a capitalist economic content within a socialist political form. With such a fundamental tension built into its very structure, the corporate state must rely heavily on organized consensus, as well as on the ability of its component organizations to control their constituencies. Inequality as a social condition is the underlying premise of corporatism, as it is of capitalism; ultimately, the corporate state only serves to render capitalism more efficient by keeping inequality within bounds. On the other hand, as with existing versions of socialism, it seeks to convert politics into administration—or at best restricts the role of politics through administration. Corporatist administration substitutes hierarchical organization for class, and the organized mediation of interest for market competition. The trade-off for the security and stability thus gained is the relinquishing of autonomy in the pursuit of individual or class interests. As a result, the corporatist order guarantees welfare only to institutionalize inequality, and offers order in exchange for democracy. Its political consequence is a hierarchical society ruled by an elite that represents different functions and interests as leaders of organizations.

Mediation among competing interests, if it is to operate without the use of outright coercion, requires a delicate tuning of the forces involved in its operation. There must be a balance of power among constituent social groups, otherwise there would be little reason for any of them to compromise with the others. The system must preserve the stability of power relations, even as it develops within a global context over which the system has no control. A high level of organization is essential to ensure that the gap between state and society is sufficiently narrow to make representation and control meaningful. There must be confidence on the part of the population at large—especially those placed strategically in the economy, such as workers—that the organizations responsible for articulating their interests are indeed doing so. Above all, the system must be capable of guaranteeing welfare and order, the major justifications for its existence.

Some students of European politics have observed that the de-revolutionized socialism of the social democratic parties in Europe has led to a corporatist resolution of the problems of capitalism.[29] Their ana-

29. Schmitter and Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation*, 53–61, 185–212.

lyses point to the conclusion that a sophisticated trade union movement (which presupposes an advanced economic base) is the precondition of corporatist politics. As Lenin also recognized (without approving of it), an organized trade union movement defuses revolutionary socialism by compelling the bourgeoisie to recognize the basic rights of the working class, while at the same time binding the working class to its own organizationally determined imperatives. The result is not socialism, but the corporatist welfare state.[30]

This precondition is obviously lacking in precapitalist societies or in societies in the initial stages of capitalist development—such as Russia or China before the revolution. The question as to whether revolution emerges as a political solution only when there is little or no organized articulation of workers' interests is an intriguing one. In the case of China, there is no doubt that, before 1949, class-based organizations were too weak to perform the function of interest intermediation. It may very well be, therefore, that efforts to establish class alliances through party intermediation were frustrated in the past by China's political and economic backwardness. The Guomindang experience showed that class alliance in practice was essentially a recognition of the existing structure of power. The Communists discovered that they could not promote the interests of peasants and workers without undermining the class alliance they proposed. Mao resolved the contradiction by consistently returning to revolutionary solutions that favored the working classes. The present leadership has ruled out that solution in its reaction to the consequences of the Cultural Revolution. Its response to the strains created by the new policies has been to reaffirm the necessity for a "united front" in China's development. Even as China's leaders nibble on the socialist side of their mushroom, however, they return to take big mouthfuls on the other side.

This is readily evident in their attitudes toward the question of equality—which is central to the problem of socialism. Inequality is not only implicit in the new economic policies but has been widely advertised as a condition of socialism. Deng Xiaoping said in his 1980 interview that inequality would exist in China for a long time to come. Policy-makers do not explain inequality simply as a compromise with necessity; they actually glorify it. Xue Muqiao, quite contrary to Marx's intention, praises "bourgeois right" (broadly, remuneration according to contribution) as a "lofty"

30. John Logue, "The Welfare State: Victim of Its Success," *Daedalus* 108, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 69–87, esp. 73–74.

principle of Marxism.[31] Xue, and other economists of like mind, are responsible for the idea that the regime should pay greater attention to the consumption needs of the populace on the grounds that socialism exists to serve the people. And yet it is not clear who benefits from increased consumption. While Coca-Cola and American tobacco make inroads into the Chinese market, economists such as Xue attack what he has popularized as the "iron bowl principle"—that is, the remuneration of workers regardless of productivity. Another author, more direct, described egalitarianism as the major enemy of progress—even of equality—and ascribed it to the persistence of "small producer mentality."[32] Those who complained about the extravagance of the bourgeoisie were warned by the *Gongren Ribao* not to "treat lightly" the regime's policy of rehabilitating the bourgeoisie.[33] At the same time, those who advocated improving living standards were told that "using available financial and material forces unwisely for improving the people's living standards would amount to killing the chicken to get the egg."[34]

Unlike the Soviet Union, China went through a second revolution. Whatever else it was, the Cultural Revolution expressed the conviction that in order to keep alive the socialist vision, it is necessary to continue the revolution even after the establishment of a socialist regime. Its targets were not simply habits and practices left over from the past, but included the inequalities and social divisions that had been generated by the socialist system itself. Mao believed that if division and inequality were not restrained, China would move away from, not toward, the socialist promise. The Cultural Revolution may best be remembered for its radical egalitarianism: the attack on hierarchy as well as on economic inequality. Its major achievement, however, was not in abolishing inequality and its institutional bases but in encouraging release from obedience to hierarchy. This achievement, however superficial, was not without consequence as long as the Cultural Revolution lasted. For a while, the people of China appeared to have overcome deeply ingrained habits of hierarchy and inequality to

31. Qiu Jian, "Xue Muqiao: Innovative Economist," *China Reconstructs* 29, no. 10 (October 1980): 23.

32. Jin, "Egalitarianism Is a Major Enemy of Distribution According to Work," L15.

33. Wang Chao, "To Pay Back Fixed Dividends to Capitalists Is to Implement the Party's Policy Toward Capitalists," *Gongren Ribao* [Workers' daily], July 31, 1979 (*FBIS*, August 14, 1979, L3).

34. Heilongjiang Provincial Service, "Take the Interests of the Whole into Account," *FBIS*, April 18, 1979, S1.

participate equally in the making of revolution. The attack on inequality discouraged expression of partial interest, licensed assertiveness on the part of the social underdog, and inspired the immersion of the self in the service of social goals. The vision of community seemed to be close at hand.

Close at hand, that is, if one overlooks the price paid for these accomplishments. It is evident in hindsight that, while the Cultural Revolution disclosed the problems of socialism, it could not resolve them: the socialist system, such as it was, could not transform the existing power structure without undermining its own foundation. As the revolutionary movement seemed to bring utopia close to hand, revolution itself was made into a utopia. The effort was bound to be a failure, if only for the fact that most people do not find ceaseless revolution to be a particularly utopian existence as the widespread response of the Chinese to the Cultural Revolution has shown. When the precarious nature of existence makes tenuous even the hopes for welfare and security, the promise of liberation from material and social necessity appears as an atavistic escape from reality. Now that the excitement generated by the Cultural Revolution has been dissipated, the image of atavism dominates our memories of it.

This image has been reinforced by the failure of the Cultural Revolutionaries to create lasting institutions to articulate their egalitarian aspirations. The "revolutionary committees" designed to ensure popular participation in politics, the only significant institutional products of the Cultural Revolution, lost their political significance as they were turned into administrative organs dominated by the military almost as soon as they had been established. In spite of their attacks on "bourgeois right," the Cultural Revolutionaries were unable to devise any means of abolishing economic inequality. Even the attack on the entrenchment of party bureaucrats in power lost its significance as the attack on the bureaucracy degenerated into the glorification of the leader, accompanied by an effort to substitute for the old bureaucrats new ones who were more amenable to following new leaders. It will be some time before the strands that went into the making of the Cultural Revolution are unraveled; it would seem clear, however, that having failed to achieve their professed goals, the leaders of the Cultural Revolution resorted to sordid factionalism in order to salvage for themselves what benefits they could of a revolution that had failed.

More seriously, in terms of the socialist promise of liberation, a revolution orchestrated by those in positions of absolute authority is a contradiction in terms, more likely to result in totalitarian manipulation of power than in political and economic liberation. Where the individual

is denied autonomy, selfless service to society—as the Cultural Revolution demanded—readily degenerates into political slavery. Indeed Mao, as anarchist as any Bolshevik could be, himself turned against the Cultural Revolution when it assumed anarchist overtones.

There is little need in this context to belabor the point that the policies of the Cultural Revolutionaries (including Mao) betrayed the very ideals that they professed. The starting point of the Cultural Revolution was a critique of the power of the Communist Party bureaucracy as a potential obstacle to socialism. Unable to overcome the already entrenched power of the party and the military, or conceive of a viable alternative to party rule, the Cultural Revolutionaries merely converted the party into an arena of struggle. The result was not to curtail party rule but to enhance its arbitrariness.

The Cultural Revolution's critique of the role of the party in socialist society represented a radical break with a tradition in socialist thought that goes back to Lenin. The perversion of the attempt to resolve the problem of the party does not discredit the critique itself, nor negate its historical significance. Yet this is precisely what China's current leaders have set out to do: to use the failures of the Cultural Revolution, especially the individual failures of its leaders, to discredit the critique of party rule. In denouncing the Guomindang suppression of revolution in 1927, Song Qingling demanded that "for revolutionary mistakes, revolutionary solutions must be found." This might indeed have been the attitude of former party chairman Hua Guofeng and his followers, for which Hua has already paid the price. The leaders that are in power today seek not to salvage the revolution by correcting its mistakes, but to eradicate the very memory of the Cultural Revolutionary critique of party rule. While they speak of revolution in a vague sense, they are obviously more interested in preserving and strengthening the status quo than in either considering possible alternatives to the existing system, or encouraging political creativity that might breathe new life into the quest for socialism.

The case of China at present only confirms what the Russian experience first revealed: an antirevolutionary socialism promises little but institutionalized inequality and coercion, which is itself a negation of the socialist vision. Socialism, divorced from revolution, settles into the rut of its own assumptions, always moving away from the vision that once vitalized it. Whether Chinese leaders genuinely believe that their anti-egalitarian policies can bring about the economic and political emancipation of the working classes is impossible to say. What is clear is that the achievement of equality is no longer on their political agenda. The socialist vision of equality

that formerly revolutionized Chinese politics has been an inevitable casualty of the renunciation of revolution.

Equality is not the only casualty. It is impossible to abandon the egalitarian goals of socialism without also undermining the promise of community. Chinese leaders still profess loyalty to the socialist vision, but the vision no longer has relevance to present policy. On the contrary, their policies progressively subvert the ideal of community. It may well be that policies promoting the pursuit of interest will contribute to greater efficiency and faster development; but they are also destined to render impossible the creation of those bonds of social cohesion that are essential to the constitution of community. Mechanical organization, not organic community, is the promise of socialism in China today.

What is at issue here is not simply loyalty to a vision regardless of its practical costs. Chinese leaders themselves acknowledge readily that faith in the socialist promise provided the people with "common ideals" in the past—and is essential to the present effort to develop China "with one heart and one mind." By their own logic, if the people lose their faith in socialism, so will they lose the motivation to work "with one heart and one mind." This may be China's most serious problem today.

The dominant impression to be gained from Chinese politics at the present is a pervasive feeling of uncertainty. In order to obviate the need for revolutionary solutions, Chinese leaders have relegated the socialist promise so far into the future that it has ceased to serve as a guide to the present. What remains is a faint hope that China will somehow stumble into a socialist future: "Socialist construction has its own objective governing law which cannot be understood beforehand. We can only learn socialist construction and step by step grasp the law of socialist construction in the practice of socialist construction."[35] This attitude that socialism is something to be learned as one goes along is an idea that Mao, too, often voiced. The difference is that Mao was guided by a vision which turned him toward revolution whenever the future was in doubt: however far beyond reach, the vision was immanent in the present. What is missing today is this sense of immanence.

The gap between future promise and present reality is critical for any society informed by a sense of the future. As long as faith in the future is

35. Wang Ruoshui, "On Condition," *RMRB*, June 27, 1979 (*FBIS*, July 11, 1979, L5–10). This article, reportedly written in 1961, was first published in *Zhexue Yanjiu*, no. 6 (1979), and reprinted in *RMRB*.

maintained, awareness of the gap is as much a source of creativity as it is of disillusionment. Chinese leaders' ambivalence toward socialism threatens to extinguish the sparks of socialist faith that have survived past disappointments. This is evident in the crisis of confidence in socialism among Chinese, especially young Chinese. While they themselves display uncertainty about the future of socialism in China, Chinese leaders deplore the apparent lack of purpose among the population—as if the one had nothing to do with the other.[36] They complain about the unwillingness of young people to study Marxism, but do not seem to notice any connection between that and their policies—much as Zhang Zhidong was puzzled by the unwillingness of an earlier generation to read Confucian classics once the examination system was abolished. They refuse to predict whether China will be socialist in the future, and yet they exhort the populace not to "lose faith in socialism" or the "future of socialism." They are uncertain about the path they follow, but expect unflagging commitment to their policies.[37]

"Only Socialism can save China." The words ring with pathos when we confront the dilemma of socialism in China. In them, we hear not a confident assertion of socialist faith but a plea to overcome the loss of confidence in socialism. China's problems are very real. Whether one agrees with the current policies or not, it is difficult (not to say arrogant) to begrudge Chinese leaders their decision to experiment with a new model of development to resolve those problems. But it is also necessary to recognize present-day socialism for what it is. Much of the current disillusionment with socialism in China arises out of the gap between socialist promise and socialist reality. The promise of socialism is used now to legitimize a social reality that is but a distorted shadow of the socialist promise—which only serves to enhance the disillusionment.

It is tempting to blame the fate of socialism in China upon incorrigible "capitalist-roaders" who have betrayed the promise of socialism. Unfortunately, that is no less simplistic an explanation than is the current official line which holds Lin Biao and the Gang of Four responsible for China's problems. Easy explanations that blame individuals for systemic problems merely sidestep the accumulating evidence of history. The experience with socialism in China thrusts upon us a very basic question: is the socialist promise possible?

36. "Confidence Crisis over Marxism," *Wenhui Bao* (*FBIS*, January 30, 1980).
37. Special Guest Commentator, "Marching into the 1980's Full of Confidence," *Gongren Ribao*, January 19, 1980 (*FBIS*, February 4, 1980).

The question is not just China's to answer. It is true that the socialist promise was not intended for precapitalist societies such as China—and all the other regimes that describe themselves as communist. But that only begs the question as to why the promise remains as remote as ever in societies for which it *was* intended. Levels of economic development may account for the different paths socialism has taken in history: revolutionary dictatorship versus social democracy. But neither path leads to the socialist promise. To the extent that socialists have been successful in economically advanced societies, they have achieved the corporatist organization of power, not egalitarian community. As I suggested above, it is possible that, with economic advance, revolutionary dictatorship will also assume a corporatist character, though the exact formulation of politics should differ according to the particular circumstances of each society.

As effort after effort to achieve socialism has led to the creation of political forms evidently at odds with the socialist promise, it is only at the risk of self-delusion that we may continue to view the historical development of socialism as an aberration that can be explained through the failure of individual socialists. And if the past is any guide to the future, the socialist promise of universal liberation is no more convincing than the capitalist promise of abundance and democracy for all. Though both Marx and Kropotkin attempted in their different ways to show that the possibility of egalitarian community was scientifically demonstrable, their analyses remain implausible because of the basic political and economic questions they ignore. As Stanley Moore has recently observed of Marx's views, the promise of socialism is based not on "scientific prediction" but on "moral prescription."[38] However attractive, the socialist promise is more political myth than political possibility.

Unless this is recognized, it is impossible to confront socialism as a historical or a political problem. Too much enthusiasm for the vision has made the practitioners of socialism forget on occasion that human beings do not exist so that socialism shall exist. It is the other way around. Socialism exists so that the human condition can be improved. Unless the socialist vision is tempered with a sense of humaneness, the vision itself becomes a source of oppression—as it did during the Cultural Revolution in China.

To recognize the socialist promise as political myth does not negate its value or detract from its power to shape political effort. What keeps the

38. Stanley Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 87.

myth alive is not a revolutionary conspiracy but the deficiencies of human life. If the socialist promise is more "moral prescription" than "scientific prediction," it is all the more a reminder of the moral protest socialism voices against a social existence founded upon exploitation and oppression. It also provides us with a critical perspective from which to evaluate not just capitalism but claims to socialism as well. If the promise is to retain its power, socialists must match their criticism of capitalist society with equal resistance to efforts to confound socialism with its distorted shadows in history.

University of British Columbia, Canada, June 1981

The article from which this excerpt is derived was written in the winter of 1980–1981, shortly after the launching of the "Reform and Opening" (*gaige kaifang*) thirty years ago. Within and without the People's Republic of China, the world of 2011 is a vastly different world than that of 1978. What relevance might an essay written three decades ago have to the retrospective evaluation of a society that has undergone one of the most phenomenal transformations the world has ever seen during this period?

There are two reasons for retrospection. First, the very enormity of change over the last three decades makes it easy to forget the uneasy beginnings of the reforms and the difficult ideological and political terrain that the Communist Party of China has negotiated to bring the country to where it is presently. Secondly, these difficulties are by no means over, as the new developments have brought with them new problems. And contrary to those who would wish away the memories of the revolution that has made China what it is today, the legacies of the revolution are an indelible part of the Chinese political consciousness and are available for recuperation in the face of new difficulties. The questions that guided the essay above have by no means gone away, even as some of the uncertainties that provoked them have been cleared away by subsequent developments.

In 1980–1981, most of the changes that have come to identify contemporary China still lay in the future. The redirection of development policies after 1978 was greeted enthusiastically or condemned heatedly, depending on one's politics, as signaling the end of socialism and an imminent turn to capitalism, while others, mostly members of China Friendship Societies, who unquestioningly followed whatever Chinese leaders claimed, abandoned an earlier enthusiasm for Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution to hail Deng Xiaoping's policies as the way to an even better, improved socialism. Signs of uncertainty among Chinese leaders and the population

at large were easily dismissed as products of factional struggles rather than as the generalized uncertainties across factional divides of a society turning its back on more than half a century of revolution to accommodate the world of capitalism that the revolution had sought to challenge. It was these uncertainties that my original essay sought to capture by drawing a distinction between revolution and socialism, and arguing that the abandonment of one did not necessarily mean the abandonment of the other—not yet, anyway. The goal was to bring to existing discussions some measure of critical sobriety.

To be sure, certain things were quite clear by 1980 and seemed to be widely shared across factional divides. One was to leave behind as quickly as possible the radical upheaval of the two decades, 1956–1976, and overcome the political and social divisions it had exacerbated or created. This applied, most importantly, to issues of class and class struggle. The revolution, in other words, was over. Socialism was to be achieved through orderly and rapid development, as had been laid out already by the now deceased prime minister Zhou Enlai in 1975 in the call for "Four Modernizations" (industrial, agricultural, scientific/technological, and military). Translated into Marxist terms, this meant turning away from an emphasis on "the relations of production," with class relations at their heart, the transformation of which had been the professed goal of the cultural revolutionaries, to an emphasis on the transformation of "the forces of production." A corollary of the latter, with profound long-term implications, was to open up to the world outside to benefit from the technologies of advanced capitalist societies, including technologies of management, and possibly to involve them in China's development. Shenzhen, the first "special economic zone" intended to achieve these goals, was established in 1980, and others quickly followed.

Equally certain was that the turnabout in socialism, to what would soon be dubbed "socialism with Chinese characteristics," was to take place under the direction and control of the Communist Party of China. As the prominent writer Han Shaogong suggests in a recent essay,[39] one of the ironic consequences of the Cultural Revolution was to foster a sense of political participation among mobilized youth, which would culminate in demands for democracy first against the Cultural Revolution leadership in April 1976 (on the occasion of Zhou Enlai's death), and subsequently in the enthusi-

39. Han Shaogong, "Why Did the Cultural Revolution End?" *boundary 2* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 93–106.

asm engendered by the reform agenda of December 1978. The response of the party under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping was to proclaim "the four cardinal principles" in March 1979: maintaining the socialist road, upholding the dictatorship of the proletariat (the people's democratic dictatorship), following the leadership by the Communist Party, and continued loyalty to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. The calls for democracy in the late 1970s were not necessarily antisocialist but rather called for a different kind of socialism, a democratic socialism.[40] The party's response, which has been reaffirmed repeatedly since then, was to make clear that it intended to preserve its monopoly not just over the political system but over the very definition of socialism.

Nevertheless, contradictions in party statements and policy kept alive uncertainties that would not be alleviated until the 1990s and have refused to go away completely even thirty years later, when Chinese society, to all appearances, has been integrated almost totally in global capitalism. Perhaps the most fundamental contradiction to appear with the reforms, as their premise, was the simultaneous affirmation of socialism, and of inequality as the means to realizing its fulfillment. Interestingly, in its repudiation of Cultural Revolution egalitarianism, the party decision seemed to be to return to the status quo ante before it could move forward again. While it might be far-fetched to suggest that reform policies sought to create (or re-create) a bourgeoisie, which would hardly be in the interest of the Communist Party, they nevertheless were intended to approximate a bourgeois society to develop the forces of production before any further moves could be undertaken toward progress to socialism. I suggested in the earlier essay that policies in the early 1980s were reminiscent of New Democracy, which the ideology of the Communist Party since the 1940s had substituted for the Old Democracy of the bourgeoisie to accomplish the developmental tasks of bourgeois society to prepare the ground for socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party leading an alliance of classes. Policies of New Democracy had brought the party to power in 1949 and guided development in the early years of the regime. It is probably more accurate, in hindsight, to suggest that the return in 1978 was to the terminal stages of the New Democratic phase of the revolution, summarized in the Eighth National Party Congress of 1956, when the class problem had been declared solved and the primary contradiction in Chi-

40. See the essays collected in *China: Crossroads Socialism*, ed. Chen Erjin, trans. Robin Munro (New York: Schocken Books, 1984).

nese society had been identified as the contradiction between backward forces of production and an advanced socialist formation: a transitional phase between New Democracy and socialism, late New Democracy, or early socialism, depending on one's perspective. It was necessary in this phase to backtrack from the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution years and decollectivize the economy as required by the necessity of the development of the forces of production, but without re-creating a class society.

This strategy also enabled the Deng Xiaoping leadership to call on the legacy of Mao Zedong in the legitimization of its policies. What to do with Mao was a problem then, as it has been a problem in the years since. While the Cultural Revolution could be blamed on the "Gang of Four," it was clear to most people in and out of China—supporters as well as opponents of the Cultural Revolution—that the condemnation of the Cultural Revolution must implicate Mao directly or indirectly. On the other hand, given his unequaled status in the history of the revolution, Mao could not be repudiated without calling into question the legitimacy of the Communist Party itself. Besides, Mao still had his supporters in the party. An interesting document that became available after the above essay was published offers interesting insights into the kinds of negotiation that went into the evaluation of Mao, and probably the making of the new policies. This document, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party,"[41] was published under Deng's name in 1981 and reveals how the leadership negotiated the evaluation of Mao. Top leaders offered their own amendments and commentaries in revisions to the draft; these were incorporated into the finished history, which presented the conventional numerology of the party: that Mao had been correct 70 percent of the time and wrong the remaining 30 percent. It was possible, then, to salvage Mao for the party and the revolution while repudiating his role in the Cultural Revolution. Remember that Deng himself drew on Mao in pushing the slogan Seeking Truth from Facts, which was to become a fundamental premise of the reforms. In the same manner, it was possible to repudiate the Mao of the Cultural Revolution to return to the Mao of New Democracy.

Nevertheless, New Democracy itself could serve only as a temporary solution, as it still suffered from structural contradictions that had led to its instabilities earlier in the 1950s. These contradictions led to inconsis-

41. Deng Xiaoping, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" (1981), in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1982–1994* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994).

tencies that characterized policy statements of that period: that socialism had already eliminated classes, but socialism remained to be achieved with the advance of the forces of production; that China was already a classless society, but class struggle needed to continue for a long time; that socialism existed for the workers and peasants, but bourgeois right was essential to its realization; that inequality had to be reestablished so that equality could be achieved; and so on. It is clear in hindsight, as it was not in 1980, that what distinguished the reform policies from policies under Mao Zedong was a commitment to deepening not revolution but New Democracy. New Democratic policies, based on assumptions of class alliance, were subject to destabilization if not ongoing contradictions. Under Mao, the response to the contradictions of New Democracy had been to reassert the priority of revolution, which had led inexorably to the revival of revolutionary class struggles in the 1960s. Under Mao's successors, the response took the opposite course: the contradictions generated by reform policies led to further loosening of the hold on the privatization of the economy as first the urban and then the rural economies were decollectivized in the course of the 1980s. The result socially was indeed the generation of a new bourgeoisie, or at the least the bourgeoisification of the party, while ever more repressive and exploitative policies were instituted to keep the working classes and rural population under control. If social divisions had persisted beneath the egalitarian rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, they became increasingly open under the reforms, with the party dedicated not to their abolition but to their perpetuation in the name of development.

These contradictions were visible in the unrest that seemed to be an endemic characteristic of the first decade of the reforms, culminating in the upheaval of 1989. The 1980s witnessed sharpening conflicts over the new policies and contradictory demands upon the party, from calls for the abolition of socialism to protests against inequality, from speeding and deepening the reforms to include greater democracy to the restoration of some measure of social justice. Moreover, given the progressive opening to the outside world, these conflicts now played out in the open, bringing outside forces, especially the forces of capital, into the debates over the future of the country. By 1987, Premier Zhao Ziyang was already advocating converting all of coastal China into a special economic zone. In spite of the initial suppression of the Democracy Movement, the "cries for democracy" did not cease. In the meantime, a culture of consumption was already becoming visible among Chinese youth, who became a force for change in their demands for the expansion of new career opportunities promised

by the reforms. Arraigned against them were those within and without the party who remained suspicious of the reforms, as well as of the "bourgeois" influences that seemed to contaminate youth. The latter included, most importantly, the ranks of the People's Liberation Army.

The party's response to unrest created by the contradictions of the new policies was a mixture of repression and depoliticization. The Twelfth National Party Congress in 1982 deemed it necessary to add to reforms in the economy a call for "socialist spiritual civilization" to police and control the cultural accompaniments of the economic turn to capitalism. The following year, the party launched a "Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month," which sought to mobilize the population for mass behavioral improvement.[42] Trivial as this campaign seemed, it was quite significant as the first manifestation of the party's efforts over the years to depoliticize the population, especially youth. Official explanations of the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month grounded that event in the campaign to promote the Five Stresses and the Four Beauties and, therefore, in the ideological mobilization that had been under way since 1982.[43] During the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month, "Learn from Lei Feng" and other public service activities were widely publicized. An issue of the *Beijing Review* reprinted an August 1981 speech by Hu Qiaomu to the Party Central Committee Propaganda Department. Hu warned against "defilement by foreign bourgeois ideology" and observed that "if we only engage in building a socialist material civilization and do not work hard to foster socialist spiritual civilization at the same time, people will be selfish, profit-seeking and lacking in lofty ideals."[44] Even more threatening was an editorial in *Renmin Ribao* on March 15, 1982, which pointed out that the gravest danger facing China "at the present" was a belief in "peaceful evolution." The editorial did not elaborate, but its message was clear: the official rejection of Cultural Revolution leftism did not mean endless toleration of dissent from party leadership and ideology.[45]

If the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month is viewed within the

42. This discussion draws on another essay published in 1982, Arif Dirlik, "Spiritual Solutions to Material Problems: The 'Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month' in China," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 359–75.

43. These referred to stressing civility, politeness, order, morality, and hygiene, and advocating the beauty of the spirit and of language, behavior, and environment. The Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month added public activities such as sweeping the streets.

44. "Questions on the Ideological Front," *Beijing Review*, January 25, 1982, 15H8.

45. "Zuo chingxing di Makesi zhuyizhe" [Be sober-minded Marxists], *RMRB*, editorial, March 15, 1982.

framework of this overall ideological mobilization, it loses much of its apparent triviality. As the *Renmin Ribao* editorial of March 15 observed, the question of socialist education had become a matter of "life or death" for the party, since "in the ideological and cultural arenas and in social morality, the influence of decadent bourgeois ideas and feudal remnants and the phenomena of worshipping foreign things [had] grown on a scale rarely seen since the birth of New China."

This campaign in 1982–1983 is best described as a political mobilization without politics. A historical precedent helps us better understand the political thrust of the campaign. In 1934, Chiang Kaishek, trying to cope with problems of Communist Revolution at home and Japanese aggression abroad, launched a spiritual mobilization campaign called the New Life movement.[46] The New Life movement was intended to create a new kind of Chinese through hygienic improvement and behavioral modification. Its goal was to mobilize in support of Guomindang policies a population, especially its youth, that had grown indifferent to the Guomindang out of repeated frustration.

There was much in the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month that is reminiscent of the New Life movement. Its behavioral stress is strikingly similar to the earlier campaign. So is its assumption of a connection between behavioral improvement and spiritual beautification. Both movements shared a faith in the possibility of achieving political ends through an apolitical, administrative mobilization of the population. Finally, as in the case of the New Life movement, the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month campaign sought to mobilize support for policies that were themselves responsible for popular frustration and indifference.

The New Life movement was clearly counterrevolutionary. It was designed to counteract Communist influence and to defend the existing social and economic hierarchy of power. Its spiritual mobilization was a march in place, intended to foster willing compliance with an exploitative and oppressive political system. Whether or not the policies of the early 1980s may be described as counterrevolutionary in the same sense, they were nevertheless also a response to the revolutionary upheavals of the previous two decades and addressed a similar dilemma: how to mobilize

46. Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34 (August 1975): 945–80; and Stephen Averill, "The New Life in Action: The Nationalist Government in South Jiangxi, 1934–37," *China Quarterly*, no. 88 (December 1981): 594–628.

the population in support of the reforms without having the mobilization turn into calls for political change.[47]

Like its predecessor, the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month campaign carried the strains of a march in place. Whether in China or elsewhere, spiritual solutions to material problems have a way of ending up as parodies of their underlying intentions. The representation of material problems as spiritual ones accomplishes little more than mystification of the popular consciousness of those problems. Spiritual campaigns may suppress, or postpone, dissent over the resolution of social problems; they rarely resolve the problems themselves. The campaign of 1982–1983 did not resolve the contradictions of the new policies, as is clear in hindsight in the many minor disturbances of the decade, and several major disturbances, which finally erupted in the student-worker-townspeople uprising of 1989 that had to be suppressed with bloody violence.

The Tiananmen tragedy was indeed a tragedy, not only because of what transpired the night of June 4, 1989, but also because it was the product of the seemingly inexorable sharpening of the contradictions in the course of the decade that the reforms had given rise to, culminating in the fateful events of that night.[48] It seemed like these contradictions controlled the party leadership as much as they controlled the progress of events. The party almost lost that control in May–June 1989, a tumultuous period in the global context, for 1989 marked the end not just of socialism as we had

47. I would like to add a personal note here. I was in the PRC during some of this campaign, from summer 1983 to the end of spring 1984. The winter of 1983 witnessed the intensification of the campaign for ideological correctness, one casualty of which was the flourishing interest in unorthodox currents in Marxism ("Western Marxism"). Works on or by authors such as Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, and Jean-Paul Sartre disappeared from bookstores during the winter of 1983–1984. Interestingly, at least on the campus of Nanjing University where I was, the campaign against "spiritual pollution" did not interfere with the new interest of college students in public forms of entertainment such as dancing. Nanjing University was also the site of a minor student upheaval in May 1984, which was provoked by the university's demotion in Ministry of Education rankings, creating anxieties among the students about their ability to compete in the new marketplace for jobs. The "upheaval," minor as it was, also created considerable anxieties among campus leaders, vigilant against any revival of "cultural revolution" activities; in other words, uncontrolled and spontaneous student politics. The students, in their turn, were quick to name their day-long protest "the May 28th movement" (*Wuerba yundong*)!

48. For further discussion, see Arif Dirlik and Roxann Prazniak, "Socialism Is Dead, so Why Must We Talk About It? Reflections on the 1989 Insurrection in China, Its Bloody Suppression, the End of Socialism and the End of History," *Asian Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (July 1990): 3–25.

known it ("actually existing socialism," as it had come to be called) but the era of revolutions in modern history. Whether or not the leadership in China perceived it in these historical terms is beside the point.

But the event that June 4 has come to symbolize was to prove every bit as profound in its consequences as the turn to reform ten years earlier. Sometime between 1989 and 1992, when Deng Xiaoping's decade-long enthusiasm for global capital turned into condemnations that made him into a villain second only to Mao Zedong, the Communist Party leadership made a decision to put an end to the contradictions that had brought about June 1989, not by any dialectical resolution that pointed to a higher socialist future but simply by abolishing the entrapment between socialism and capitalism by opting for capitalism as the choice for China's immediate future. Deng Xiaoping's visit to the south in 1992, described in imperial terms (*nanxun*, or "progress to the south"), was followed by a reaffirmation of what had been accomplished in Shenzhen, when he suggested that it was no longer necessary to worry about whether the path followed was socialist or capitalist, so long as it worked. The statement echoed his statement of the early 1960s, that "it did not matter whether a cat was black or white so long as it caught mice," which had gotten him into trouble for two decades as a "capitalist-roader." In 1992, his statement had the same electrifying effect, albeit in a politically antithetical direction, as Mao's simple statement back in late 1957 that "people's communes are good," which had led to the communalization of the country within months. This time around, the message was to jump into the sea of capitalism (*xiahai*, or "going to sea," as it was colorfully described), and many followed his advice. The party also made a conscious decision at this time that consumption might well serve as a substitute for politics, so that there would be no repetition of Tiananmen in the future. The "spiritual solutions to material problems" of a decade earlier were now to be replaced by material solutions, at least for those sectors of the population prone to demands for political participation, whose desire for political participation might well be replaced by desires for the good life. There was something of an important bargain here: so long as the party delivered the goods, there was no need to challenge its leadership. Freedom to consume against the "cries for democracy."

The turn to a culture of consumption was accompanied from the early 1990s by a revival of the "traditionalisms," symbolized by the term *Confucianism*, that sort of completed the circle by bringing together modernity and tradition, which had been an aspiration going back to the origins of the Chinese Revolution—except that it was neither the modernity nor

the tradition that the revolution had sought to achieve. Indeed, it was quite clear by the mid-1990s that Confucianism was subject to the same instrumentalization (and commodification) as socialism had come to be.[49] To be sure, the revival of traditions came as a relief to those who had mourned its passing all along. But official commentators were also quite explicit that the revival of the Confucian tradition was intended to supply values of order and ideological unity at a time when the population had lost faith in socialism or its promises. Confucianism also held the promise of orderly development, as had been promoted since the early 1980s by cheerleaders of the authoritarian developmentalist regimes of Eastern Asia. The late 1980s had witnessed, side by side with the calls for democracy and "civil society," the promotion by some of so-called "new authoritarianism," inspired by the likes of right-wing political scientists in the United States, such as Samuel Huntington. The Confucian revival was entangled in these various efforts to find remedies to the contradictions created by efforts to articulate socialism to capitalism.[50] In the end, however, it was the offer of consumerism (of commodities, socialism, Confucianism, or allowing the world in) in exchange for the abandonment of political democracy that mattered the most. By 1993, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, even Chairman Mao would become an object of consumption and the subject of many a karaoke tune!

The bargain worked. And the circumstances were auspicious. China's turn to full-scale incorporation in global capitalism coincided with the globalization of capital and the fall of socialism. The PRC would emerge by the end of the decade as one of the motors of globalization. A labor force, trained by a socialist revolution carried out in its name, was now rendered into a forcefully submissive force of production for a global capitalism, in the name of a socialism that was postponed further and further into the future. The oppression and exploitation were there, to be sure, but they could be pushed to the background as passing abnormalities to be alleviated in short order as the forces of production advanced and the country had a genuine basis for socialism. In the meantime, consumer goods were made widely available to a population starved for them by decades of revolutionary puritanism.

49. Arif Dirlik, "Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," *boundary 2* 22, no. 3 (November 1995): 229–73.

50. See the recent study of Confucian discussions in the contemporary mainland in John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Deng Xiaoping was the architect of these policies in a very real sense, but he was also a product of the Chinese Revolution and, despite efforts to make him into a Chinese capitalist saint, retained not only a faithfulness to the goals of the revolution but Bolshevik tendencies toward state capitalism.[51] His successor, Jiang Zemin, would complete the revolution commenced by Deng.[52] By the early part of the twenty-first century, under Jiang's leadership, China had come to claim a place for itself among the ranking powers of the world—not by virtue of ideological priority as a socialist state but as a country on which global capital had come to depend. It also had come to emulate other capitalist societies in the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and welfare between classes, genders, and between urban-rural areas, as well as its contribution to pollution that threatened not just its own future but that of the globe as a whole.[53] Jiang Zemin's "thought" of "Three Represents,"[54] something of a joke even among Communist Party circles, sought to make the Communist Party itself into an instrument of development—development that would serve the most "advanced" sectors of the country, which translates readily into the making of the party into a party of the urban economic ruling classes. More contradictions, not of socialism this time around but of successful incorporation in global capitalism. What makes the contradictions persist, however, is the refusal to go away, in spite of the neoliberal drift under Jiang Zemin, of memories of revolution, and what it promised to the people at large.

The contradictions of our day are not the contradictions of 1981, but they resonate with them in remarkable ways. In her recent history of social-

51. For these tendencies, see Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978–1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

52. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Harvey includes Deng Xiaoping among the leaders (others being Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Augusto Pinochet) who were responsible for the neoliberal turn. If Deng played a crucial part in turning the PRC toward a market economy, however, it would be more accurate to say that it was under Jiang Zemin that neoliberalism was consolidated in party ideology.

53. For a recent analysis, see Mingqi Li, *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

54. The "Three Represents" refers to the necessity for the Communist Party to always represent "the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people." The most important consequence of the "Three Represents" was the admission into the party of the new bourgeoisie and business people (along with intellectuals as representatives of culture).

ism in the PRC, Lin Chun suggests a periodization of postrevolutionary China that more or less follows the three decades marked by three different kinds of leadership.[55] The Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao leadership since 2002 marks the third phase in the unfolding of socialism. This third phase is a phase of reflection and taking stock of the achievements as well as the failures of the previous decade. While policies under Deng and Jiang brought enormous benefits to the country, and to the population at large, they also brought with them tremendous difficulties and unprecedented problems, especially in the realms of the environment, urban-rural inequalities, and, most importantly, class divisions. The new leadership made a commitment to address these problems. Whether or not they can do so remains to be seen. The future of socialism in China depends on their ability to do so.

It is tempting to suggest that while in the first decade of the reforms capitalism was invited to resolve the contradictions created by Cultural Revolution socialism (which itself had been a response to the contradictions of New Democracy), socialism is now being invited back to resolve the problems created by successful incorporation in global capitalism. Lin Chun's analyses, and the hope she invests in the Hu/Wen leadership, are shared by many in the PRC, including the so-called New Left, which includes intellectuals in and out of the party. Speaking personally, I myself share in these hopes, without necessarily being too hopeful of the outcome, and believe that the efforts of the new leadership need to be supported, as they are important not just for China but also, considering the weight of China in the world economy, for global welfare as well. Still, such hopes are no reason for avoiding the contradictions that the leadership faces and the contradictions its own policies generate. The PRC is once again at a crossroads, and it remains to be seen whether or not the problems it faces can be overcome so as to move in a socialist rather than a capitalist direction, especially when socialism itself is in dire need of redefinition. This time, it seems, the crossroads of the PRC may well be the crossroads for us all.

While Chinese leaders still refer to the present as an early stage of socialism, and socialism (with "Chinese characteristics") remains the ultimate goal of development, there has been a proliferation of terms that reveals a more complicated and ambivalent understanding of socialism: *xiaokang shehui* (literally, "minor well-being society"), which invokes native utopian ideals of *datong* (literally, "Great Unity," translated on occasion as

55. Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

the "Great Commonweal"); *hexie shehui* ("harmonious society"), which, as President Hu Jintao's innovation, is the current orthodoxy; and, most recently *shengtai wenming*, or an "ecological civilization."

The proliferation of names for socialism may be taken as a sign of the regime's recognition of the complex realities it faces, which may not be captured by the single term *socialism*, which now reveals itself as a multifaceted project that involves not just social amelioration but also attentiveness to the ecological context of social life. In expressions of concern, if not always in deed, the Hu/Wen leadership has repeatedly drawn attention to problems of social inequality, uneven development (rural-urban as well as regional), and environmental degradation created by rapid development. Since 2004, the regime has moved toward action to resolve the "three agrarian issues" (*sannong wenti*), referring to the peasant, the village, and agriculture, with at least some success in areas of health and education.[56] The advocacy of "ecological civilization" is an indicator of the concern for the environment, although efforts to minimize the damage inflicted on the environment by rapid development are hampered both by a continued uncompromising commitment to development and the restricted ability of the center to impose its will on the localities. The same may be the case with efforts to move toward more democratic governance without undermining the authority and prestige of the existing power structure, what has been described by a prominent party political scientist as "incremental democracy."[57]

These contradictions are visible in the outline for the "Scientific Outlook on Development" (*Kexue fazhan guan*), which, since the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2002, has been touted as the Hu Jintao leadership's contribution to further advancing "the thought on development of Marx-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the important thought of 'Three Represents.'"[58] The Scientific Outlook on Development (SOD) takes as its fundamental

56. Wang Shaoguang, "The Great Transformation: The Double Movement in China," *boundary 2* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 15–47.

57. Yu Keping, *Globalization and Changes in China's Governance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008).

58. Hong Ren et al., *Kexue fazhan guan xuexi duben: zhuanti jiangzuo* [Reader on the Scientific Outlook on Development: Discussions on special topics] (Beijing: Hongqi chuban she, 2006), 2. See also Theoretical Unit, Central Propaganda Bureau, *Kexue fazhan guan xuexi duben* [Reader on the Scientific Outlook on Development] (Beijing: Xuexi chuban she, 2006). This text was translated into English by the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau.

premise humans as the beginning and end of development. It calls for "comprehensive" (*quanmiande*) development with economic development at its core. It underlines the necessity of "balanced" (*xietiao* or *pinghengde*) development, that is, the balancing of urban, rural, regional, economic, social, human, natural, and domestic development with an opening up to the world. Finally, it stipulates the necessity of "sustainable development," attentive to harmony between humans and nature, and between development and resources. These are the requisites of the "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*) that the leadership seeks to create. Reform and Opening has achieved the first step of "small welfare society," and must now proceed to the second step of raising standards of welfare and achieving comprehensive and balanced development. The SOD is the ideological necessity of this second step in the country's advance and is crucial to achieving the third step of a modern country by the middle of the twenty-first century.[59]

Discussions of SOD recognize that some of the current problems are products of Reform and Opening. The issues raised concerning "balanced development" are reminiscent of, and at times openly recall, Mao Zedong's seminal 1956 discussion "On the Ten Great Relationships." When pressed on the issue, party ideological workers are willing to acknowledge that the idea of a "harmonious society" may be open to conservative (covering up the fractures and disharmonies of the present) or radical (seeking to bring those fractures and disharmonies to the surface to deal with them) interpretations. There has also been some debate over how to interpret the status of "human" (*ren*) in the SOD: whether it includes everyone (as in the "Three Represents") or is close in intent to "the people" (*renmin*) of more radical days with its class significations.[60]

What is missing from these discussions, nevertheless, is any

59. Hong Ren et al., *Kexue fazhan guan xuexi duben*. See also Ku Guisheng and Yan Xiaofeng, eds., *Zai Kexue fazhanguande tonglingxia: Shiliuda yi lai dangde lilun yu shijian xin jinzhan* [Under the lead of the Scientific Outlook on Development: Party theory and practice since the Sixteenth National Congress] (Beijing: Renmin chuban she, 2006).
60. These observations are products of conversations with party ideological workers during the two months I spent as a visiting professor at the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (*Zhonggong zhongyang bianyi ju*) during the summer of 2006. I am grateful, in particular, to the vice-secretary of the bureau, Professor Yang Jinhai, for sharing some of these problems with me. Professor Yang has been a prominent figure in philosophical discussions on the concept of "human" (*ren*) and is the author of many published and unpublished papers on the subject. For one example, see "Cong 'wei renmin fuwu' dao 'yiren wei ti'" [From "serve the people" to "make 'human' into the basis"], unpublished paper.

acknowledgment that a change of course may be necessary if problems caused by the reforms are to be resolved. Instead, party documents insist on the necessity of adhering to the course set in 1978, which was deepened under the Jiang Zemin leadership in the 1990s, that reaffirms the priority of the forces of production in the development to socialism, makes economic development into the core task for the foreseeable future, and places a great deal of faith in technological fixes, most importantly, "innovation."[61] Since the late 1990s, "opening" has also come to be identified with "globalization."[62] The practical necessities of political compromise with the legacy of Jiang Zemin in the party may be an important factor in this inability to go beyond the economism of Reform and Opening, but whatever the case, the current leadership has been unable to address deep-seated obstacles to socialist development in any meaningful sense created by the policies of the last three decades.[63] The current regime needs to be recognized for its efforts to bring socialism as an economic, political, social, and cultural project closer to the present than it had been under its immediate predecessors, to make it into more of a guiding principle of policy. But it is equally important to recognize that these very efforts are contradicted by its commitment to developmental policies that contribute further to social inequality, and a seemingly inexorable incorporation into global capitalism economically, politically, and culturally. These policies draw the enthusiastic approval of transnational capital, which has come to depend on Chinese labor and increasingly looks to the market potential of the country as it pulls out of poverty, without regard to its social and environmental consequences.[64] But the issue is no longer the global corporate push to drive the Chinese economy deeper into capitalism, as it might have been in the 1980s, in the early days of reform. Much more important as a

61. Wu Chunhe and Feng Bing, *Shengbu zhang tan kexue fazhan* [Government officials talk on scientific development] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chuban she, 2005).

62. For a comprehensive review of Chinese discussions of globalization in English, see Nick Knight, *Imagining Globalisation in China: Debates on Ideology, Politics and Culture* (London: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2008).

63. See Ching Kwan Lee and Mark Selden, "China's Durable Inequality: Legacies of Revolution and Pitfalls of Reform, *Japan Focus*, http://japanfocus.org/-C_K_-Lee/2329. For an excellent discussion of the reluctance to deal with issues of class inequality, see Pun Ngai, "The Subsumption of Class Discourse in China," *boundary 2* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 75–91.

64. See the responses of foreign business representatives to the decisions of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party in October 2007, "Policy Moves Music to Business Leaders' Ears," *China Daily*, Friday, October 19, 2007, 5.

force is the new Chinese elite, increasingly integrated into the structure of the Communist Party itself, that is the primary force behind a neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics of which it is the chief beneficiary. Against the cheerleaders of capitalism in China, we might be well advised to take note of the successive waves of social dislocation and environmental crisis that have become an integral aspect of China's development, symbolized most recently (in late January 2008) by the severe winter storms that hit the country, leaving millions stranded in railroad stations, and hundreds of millions without access to energy, while exposing the vulnerability of the society as a whole as it comes ever closer to depleting energy resources. What episodes such as this forcefully highlight is the need to consider the meaning and course of development itself, but that has yet to receive the attention that it deserves in the making of policy.

This issue of development has an international dimension as well, as development and developmental needs have brought the PRC more closely into world affairs. We need to avoid the China-bashing that characterizes the responses to Chinese global activity of right-wing U.S. policymakers who rightly see in this activity a challenge to U.S. domination of the globe, which is not necessarily a bad thing, or of European powers who bemoan Chinese advances into their former colonies in Africa. Nevertheless, if the issue is socialism, and the search for a more humane world, these activities need to be viewed critically. The current leadership on occasion extends globally the idea of a "harmonious society" in speaking of a "harmonious world" (*hexie shijie*). This, too, can be radical or conservative in its implications, depending on whether "harmony" serves as a cover for reaffirming a global status quo of uneven development, inequality, and oppression, or a motivation for overcoming them in the creation of a genuinely just and harmonious world. Here, too, there is considerable ambivalence in Chinese policies. In their dealings with "Third World" societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Chinese leaders on occasion recall the common historical experience that China shares with them in having been subjected to racism, humiliation, and imperialism. On the other hand, Chinese leaders are programmatically anxious to be included among the first-rank powers globally and find it expedient more often than not to remain silent in the face of the resurgence of U.S. imperialism and the depredations of the Israeli government against the Palestinians, or of the Sudanese government against its people. Chinese leaders themselves are not above hiding behind slogans of "terrorism" during their own colonial activity against their internal ethnic minorities. Neither are Chinese transnational

companies (such as mining or construction companies, mostly government connected) any less destructive in their activities at home or abroad than transnational corporations elsewhere.[65]

It is with these contradictions in mind that we need to perceive some recent ideological activity initiated by the current leadership to rejuvenate Marxism. In early 2004, the leadership launched a "Marxist Theoretical Research and Development Project" (literally, "Basic Research and Construction," *Makesi zhuyi jichu yanjiu he jianshe gongcheng*).[66] The goal of the project was to reexamine Marxism with a view to what Marxist classics had to say about socialist construction, rather than revolution, which had been the primary focus in the past. The project was also to be restricted to the works of Marx and Engels, and Lenin, to avoid the interpretations of later Marxists and to overcome past dependence on Soviet Marxism in the understanding of the classics. When it was initiated, it was assigned five tasks: to strengthen study of the "sinicization of Marxism" in Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the "Three Represents"; to retranslate and explain Marxist classics, to establish a Marxist system appropriate to the times; to produce higher-education texts in political economy and philosophy, with Marxist characteristics, as well as texts on modern history, imbued with the spirit of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the "Three Represents"; and to create new institutions of Marxist research. The latter included the establishment of a new Marxism Research Institute in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The project itself involved, in addition to the Compilation and Translation Bureau and Marxist Research Institutes, university departments as well as party

65. For further discussion, see Arif Dirlik, "'Beijing gongshi': Shei chengren shei? Mudi hezai" ["Beijing consensus": Who recognizes whom and to what end?], in *Zhongguo moshi yu "Beijing gongshi": Chaoyue "Huashengdun gongshi"* [China model and the Beijing consensus], ed. Yu Keping, Huang Ping, Xie Shuguang, and Gao Jian (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2006): 99–112. An English version of this article is available in Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Press, 2007), chap. 9.

66. The Central Compilation and Translation Bureau is at the center of this project. The discussion here is based on materials that colleagues in the bureau were kind enough to share with me. Most important are Yang Jinhai, "Introduction to Marxism Research in China" (August 2006), unpublished paper; "Makesi zhuyi gongcheng jiaocai meiben zhishao touru baiwan yuan" [Each volume of textbooks for the Marxism project will cost one million yuan]; "Youguan shishe Makesi zhuyi lilun yanjiu he jianshe gongchengde duihua" [Dialogue (with Yang Jinhai) on the Marxism theoretical research and reconstruction project], *Henan ribao* [Henan daily], September 17, 2004.

schools across the country. One aspect of the project was to cull from the works of Marx and Engels the meaning they had assigned to a selected list of eighteen terms and concepts that are worth listing here because they are revealing of current concerns: democracy and political civilization; capitalism, socialism, and communism; social development; agriculture and peasants; social development in economically and culturally backward societies; problems of globalization and "epoch" (*shidai*); ownership and distribution; political parties; war and peace; labor theory of value and surplus value; class, class struggle, proletarian revolution, and dictatorship; religion; nationality (*minzu*); ideology, progressive culture, and morality; human (*ren*); dialectical and historical materialism; principles of political economy; and military.

This project, personally supported by Hu Jintao, is revealing of the regime's seriousness about questions of Marxist ideology, but it is not quite clear what purpose it might serve in the context of a society gripped by fevers of "getting rich" and consumerism, especially among youth. The party obviously seeks to establish a new Marxist orthodoxy that leaves behind the revolutionary past and provides justification for the course that has been followed for the last three decades—a task that has taken three decades to get around to. The project may be most important for bringing some ideological coherence to the party; whether or not it can resolve the contradictions between socialist goals (however they are defined) and capitalist immersion is another matter. The textbooks that the project aims to produce are obviously intended to take the new orthodoxy to the educated youth at large. What fate they might meet in that context is even less certain.

In the meantime, the regime has also sought to confront issues of culture and morality at the more popular level by launching an ethical and behavioral modification movement that is very much reminiscent of past movements discussed above, from the New Life movement under the Guomindang to the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month campaign of 1982–1983. Like its predecessors, the *Barong bachi* (Eight Maxims of Honor and Disgrace) movement ought to instill in youth, in particular, values of patriotism, service to the people, and respect for science, hard work, mutual aid, honesty, laws, and clean living, while dissuading an attitude of complete disregard for the motherland and a disdain for the people, and discouraging ignorance, laziness, self-seeking profiteering, the unprincipled search for gain, the violating of laws, and extravagant living. The movement this time around was in many ways reminiscent of the New Life movement of

the 1930s in blending together socialist and "Chinese" values.[67] And by all available evidence, it has not been any more successful than the New Life movement, or its successor movements in the 1980s. Its injunctions sound more than anything like pedantic efforts to keep in check an everyday urban (if not just urban) culture shaped increasingly by the pursuit of commodities and capital, which ironically is the product of the regime's own mobilization of the people in the pursuit of wealth and power at the political level.

Equally subversive of the socialist professions of the regime is the crude nationalism, both popular and official, that at the extreme carries fascist overtones. Socialism in China all along has been entangled in nationalism. The language of revolution during the Cultural Revolution consistently betrayed a militant nationalism. But whereas this earlier nationalism could be explained (or explained away) as a necessity of anti-imperialist struggle, it is more difficult to do so at a time when the PRC has become part of a global establishment of power. Since the 1980s, with the foregrounding of nationalist over socialist goals in the rewriting of revolutionary history, the leadership has promoted nationalism not as part of but as a substitute for socialism. If the glorification of the national past was earlier a response to imperialist humiliation, moreover, it presently draws its inspiration not from weakness but from newfound strength within global economic and political relations.

Most visible is the obscurantist mob nationalism in response to perceived slights to Chinese dignity and sovereignty that has found a new medium of expression in the Internet. But while Internet nationalism may be dismissed for the juvenile exuberance of its protagonists caught in the instantaneous provocations of a medium that seems to invite knee-jerk reaction, other, less visible expressions of nationalism spring from deeper sources of national pride mixed with heavy doses of nationalist chauvinism. The revolutionary search for national identity in the revolutionary process and its foundation in popular culture has been replaced in official and elite intellectual ideology by the revival of the authoritarian Confucian culture of the prerevolutionary imperial elite, which now also provides a resource for the projection of Chinese "soft power" globally. The deceptive manipulation of sound and sight in the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympics in the name of achieving "perfection" showed how far officials, and the celebrated director Zhang Yimou (who may have been inspired by a similar if light-

67. See, for example, the illustrated parables collected in Shanghai Spiritual Civilization Reconstruction Committee, *Zhi Rongru, jiang wenming, shu xinfeng* [Know honor, stress civilization, establish new habits] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she, 2006).

hearted deception in the movie *Singin' in the Rain*), were prepared to go in demeaning those they are supposed to govern and represent. Zhang's own complicity in the deception came upon the heels of his movie *Hero*, which one critic has described as "fascist" for its anachronistic nationalist portrayal (and celebration) of the first emperor of Qin and the founding of imperial China.[68] But perhaps the most eloquent testimonial to fascist elements in contemporary nationalist thinking may be the popularity of the fictional memoir *Wolf Totem*, by Jiang Rong (pen name for Lu Jiamin), which was also the recipient of the first Man Asian Literary Prize. *Wolf Totem*'s naturalization of Mongols may be read as an ecological defense of nomadic against agrarian society, but what is most remarkable about it is its glorification of a primitivist social ethos that celebrates the military virtues of wolves and humans in their natural state against the softening corruptions of "civilized" life. The "novel" offers a sustained critique of Han Chinese for being a nation of peasants who, by their sedentary agrarian way of life, have become destroyers not only of external nature but also of their own warlike natures, easily brought to their knees by one conqueror after another.[69]

Jiang's celebration of the wolf-nature of nomads reverses the Confucian disdain of "barbarians" for the same reason, but his celebration of warlike militancy may nevertheless offer clues to militaristic strains in contemporary cultural revivalism, including the militarization of the philosophically very unwarlike Confucianism. Judging by popular media, Confucianism presently would seem to owe at least some of its popular appeal to its confounding with martial arts traditions. The militancy resonates with popular sentiments concerning ineradicable differences between "Chinese" and other cultures—especially "the West"—that, rather than disappear, have acquired a new significance with the economic and political integration into global capitalism. This concern with Chinese differences is paralleled at a more rarefied philosophical level with the attraction among some intellec-

68. Evans Chan, "Zhang Yimou's *Hero*—the Temptations of Fascism," *Film International*, no. 8 (2004): 1–31. It is difficult to say, without the director's evidence, whether this celebration of the First Emperor had in mind Mao Zedong, as parallels were drawn between Mao and the First Emperor during the Cultural Revolution.

69. Jiang's celebration of wolf-nature is disturbingly reminiscent of the Pan-Turkist Turkish author Nihal Atsiz (1905–1975), who, in a series of novels written in the 1940s and 1950s (including *The Death of the Gray Wolves* and *The Resurrection of the Gray Wolves*), narrated the betrayal of nomads (in this case, Turks of the Gokturk Empire during the Tang) by wily "civilized" Chinese. Atsiz had explicitly Nazi sympathies and believed that Turks, too, were a "master race."

tuals to the ideas on politics of the German legal philosopher, and sometime Nazi, Carl Schmitt, to whom the "political distinction" between friend and enemy constituted the distinctive characteristic of "the political"—just as good/evil and beautiful/ugly characterized the moral and aesthetic spheres, respectively. This attraction has manifested itself in the shift of attention away from the social toward the state, and the resulting preoccupation with the sovereignty of the nation-state over both social problems and social relations across political boundaries, which have been the fundamental issues driving socialism—at least in theory.[70]

What could socialism in China mean under these circumstances, material as well as cultural and ideological, which would seem to be at odds with any serious conception of socialism? In the heyday of the Chinese Revolution in the 1960s, the People's Republic of China appeared as the harbinger of the future, which promised a revolutionary socialist society that could overcome the limitations both of capitalism and the seemingly defunct socialism of the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, as the PRC left revolution behind to open up to the world, it was welcomed with great enthusiasm by many who long had harbored hopes for it as a market, who now viewed Deng Xiaoping as a success for capitalism. Presently, there is widespread speculation that, barring some natural or human catastrophe, China may well end up as the next stopping place for an evolving capitalist world-system.[71]

It is also arguable, however, that dreams of a capitalist China have been as elusive as the revolutionary visions of an earlier day. The revolution is now a distant memory. While China has succeeded in capitalism beyond the wildest dreams of cheerleaders for capitalism, becoming a force of globalization first as the workshop for global capitalism and increasingly at the present as a market for capital, it has done this on its own terms, drawing strength not only from its long historical legacy but from the legacy of the

70. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26. Schmitt, criticizing liberal pluralism (as well as legal universalism), found in this distinction the key to a modern secular politics against religious fundamentalism or Enlightenment universalism. For a foremost Chinese proponent of Schmitt's ideas, see Liu Xiaofeng, "Shimite lun zhengzhide zhengdangxing—cong 'zhengzhide gainian' dao 'zhengzhide shenxue'" [Schmitt on the legitimacy of the political—from "the concept of the political" to "political mythology"], in *Shimite: zhengzhide shengyu jiazhi* [Schmitt: The surplus value of politics], ed. Liu Xiaofeng (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she, 2002), 2–155, esp. 66–76, for the primacy of the state.

71. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007).

socialist revolution as well. The insistence on "socialism with Chinese characteristics" often sounds quite vacuous, and yet it is a constant reminder of the Chinese resistance to dissolution into capitalism and the continued reaffirmation of one kind of socialist past in the search for another kind of socialist future. The will to difference still finds expression in the language of socialism in this postsocialist society that has confounded the meaning of socialism and yet has managed to keep it alive as a political myth. As I wrote in the earlier essay nearly thirty years ago, to describe socialism as a political myth is not to degrade it but to endow it with a different kind of power, the power of inspiration against the rigid blueprint of a utopianism that claims scientific validity. The myth in this case also manages to draw strength from a history that the leaders of the Communist Party have turned their backs on without quite abandoning it. A history, therefore, that can serve at once as a guide to the future and a burden that holds the society back. One might observe that this is what is at the crux of disagreements over China's future presently, just as it was three decades ago.

That the question has refused to go away in spite of the momentous changes of the last thirty years is remarkable, but it is also a cause for some hope. China's development through incorporation in global capitalism has brought enormous benefits as well as unprecedented problems. As a major player in the globalization of capital, the case of China may provide the most dramatic proof of the impossibility of sustaining capitalist development as we have known it for the last two centuries. The limits are no longer just social and political; they are terminally ecological. Socialism may serve as a reminder under the circumstances of the necessity of finding a different path into the future—not just socially, but in terms of redefining development itself.

Socialism, especially the Marxist variant of socialism, in the past has not done a very good job of discovering such alternatives because of its internalization of the developmentalist assumptions of capitalism. Chinese socialist leaders, from Mao Zedong to the present leadership, have shared in these assumptions. This has been the case especially over the last three decades, when the idea of making capitalism serve socialism has often ended up with the reality of socialism serving capitalism, as the socialist state has found itself in alliance with global capital against the welfare of its own people in the pursuit of national wealth and power, not to mention class interests old and new.

The current leadership's recognition of this problem, as well as of the ecological limits on development, is therefore a hopeful sign. So far, how-

ever, the recognition of the problem has not been sufficient to force serious reconsideration of the developmental course that has led to these problems. The Scientific Outlook on Development, in its recognition of human welfare as the beginning and end of socialist policy, may yet produce such reconsideration, but only if it drops the "scientific" and puts in its place the "social," without which socialism itself has no meaning.

Confucius the Chameleon: Dubious Envoy for "Brand China"

Kam Louie

At the end of his 1995 article "Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," Arif Dirlik remarks, "The discourse on Confucianism in the eighties made Confucius into an Oriental 'money-bag'; one article lauding the functionality of Confucianism to money-making is entitled, appropriately enough, 'The Cash Value of Confucian Values.' The most recent revival of Confucianism may indeed be a sign of its final demise."[1] Fifteen years later, it appears that Dirlik's prediction of the decline of Confucianism was premature. In the twenty-first century, Confucianism continues to evolve inexorably and spread apparently unchecked around the globe. Confucianism is a remarkably pliable ideology, and Confucius has proved to be an extremely alluring "pinup boy." Indeed, not only is Confucianism thriving in the twenty-first century; it is likely to become even more influential in the foreseeable future. China's recent economic and political rise has produced a concomitant surge in

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. Arif Dirlik, "Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," *boundary 2* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 273.

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interest in "Chinese" culture. Into this discursive space, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has offered Confucianism to domestic and international audiences hankering to locate "China's uniqueness" as the key emblem of Chinese culture and the paramount symbol of Chinese civilization. Confucius and Confucianism have become China's "brand" in a world where national identity is marketed for political spin.

What's in a Name? Confucius by Any Other . . .

Political leaders who have grand, global aspirations, like the PRC's current rulers, want their particular culture to have an international impact. Confucius, newly wrested from the arms of other East Asian politicians and business leaders and their "Asian values" initiative of the 1980s, has become a twenty-first-century diplomat to facilitate PRC "soft power." In the first decade of the new millennium, the PRC government, through its educational wing, established a series of Confucius Institutes as part of its "soft power" project. The first of these institutes appeared in November 2004, and although the initial plan was to establish 100, by the end of 2007 there were already 210 Confucius Institutes in place globally.[2] By 2009, there were more than 300. In the name of Confucius, the PRC government now has a cultural wing akin to Italy's Dante Alighieri Society and Germany's Goethe Institute.

However, unlike *Dante* and *Goethe*, the name *Confucius* has been at the center of some of the most savage intellectual and political controversies in modern China. The meaning of Confucius and Confucianism has also undergone major transformations over time. I begin this essay with a discussion of the Confucius Institutes because they are concrete manifestations of how China is attempting to assert itself globally as part of its "soft power" policy. At the same time, their establishment reveals the nation's current understanding of itself as a cultural entity. The many, and radically different, representations of Confucius reveal the psychological condition of China at large: a one-party state that is desperately trying to find a solution to its "crisis of faith," and in doing so is beset by an inconsistent and contradictory ideological apparatus. Confucius as "brand China" may be an accurate reflection of an ideologically confused country. But because the global influence of China is likely to become increasingly more pronounced,

2. Yiwei Wang, "Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (March 2008): 265.

I argue that it is irresponsible to export such a schizophrenic persona as China's contribution to world culture.

Furthermore, unlike their European counterparts, the Confucius Institutes operate in conjunction with universities, in a joint-venture structure. The institutes leverage the host university's educational credentials to deliver Chinese language and culture courses to a broad public. Such a move implicates the cultural commitment of the host countries in their appreciation of what is Chinese culture, even though culture is meant to be only a secondary consideration of these initiatives. The constitution and bylaws of the Confucius Institutes and the pronouncements of the bureaucrats and managers of the institutes themselves state that their goal is primarily to enhance learning the Chinese language in foreign countries and, to a lesser extent, to expand knowledge of Chinese culture.[3] Officials in the government department responsible for the Confucius Institutes program, the Hanban, insist that the institutes do not seek to promote any particular values; rather, they aim to enhance knowledge of Chinese language and culture.[4] In other words, although these institutes are named after Confucius, their goal is not to spread Confucianism around the world. The "Confucius" in their title is merely a recognizable brand name that signifies Chinese culture, just as *Goethe* marks German culture.

Such protestations only underline the fact that naming is never a benign process—names matter, and they matter particularly within a Confucian rubric. The choice of Confucius as the icon of Chinese culture indicates the direction that the Chinese government wants to take. Ostensibly, China's search for wealth and power is based on moderation, harmony, and humane governance—qualities that the current advocates of Confucianism presume Confucius himself preached some two thousand years ago. This assumption may be true, but as the following summary of the trajectory and transformations of Confucius and *The Analects* over the last century shows, the Confucius icon has been used to represent such radically different views that the only way to reconcile these differences is to either embrace a self-contradictory philosophy or denounce generations of interpreters as hypocrites or misguided fools.

All fundamentalists or iconoclasts make absolute claims about canons and gospels that they seek to uphold or destroy. This essay is not

3. Details about the constitution and members of council are listed on the official website of the Confucius Institutes, http://college.chinese.cn/en/.

4. Ni Yanshuo, "Confucius Around the World," *Beijing Review* 51 (March 6, 2008): 26–27.

an attempt to prove or disprove the claims made by those who defend or oppose Confucianism. I will show that because Confucius has in the last sixty years come to stand for practically *anything*, it has enabled academics and politicians to advance a set of "core Confucian values" for the contemporary world that is at best highly conservative and at worst schizophrenic. In China, pronouncements made by public intellectuals are often initiated by and later reinforced by politicians, and have very significant consequences. Furthermore, because of China's growing international prominence, these meditations by philosophers are no longer simply an internal Chinese affair. They have become a global and multinational business. Their goal of unearthing an original Confucianism that is compatible with international best practice is part of the search for an "Asian value" that can fill the perceived moral vacuum in the world today. In this essay, I will explore the implications of such a global Confucius, exemplified by the establishment and naming of the Confucius Institutes.

Exhuming the Kong Family Shop and Flogging Back to Life a Dead Kongzi

The left-wing activists who inherited the iconoclasm of May Fourth did such a thorough job of "smashing" the old ideas represented by the "Confucius Shop" that, by the time they took control of China in 1949, Confucius, representing "feudal culture," was officially dead. Some were happy with the prospect of an indigenous pattern of thought being replaced by a foreign ideology, Marxism. But others were not. As I have shown elsewhere,[5] influential intellectuals made a concerted effort to incorporate traditional Chinese culture into the new China. Mao Zedong's comment that China should inherit the best of Chinese tradition from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen was repeated ad nauseam to justify the continuation of traditional ideas and practices. Given the restrictions imposed on academic debate in those days, these justifications were based on the argument that the core essence of Confucius's teachings was positive and compatible with Communism.

The best example of such an argument was advanced by the neo-Confucian philosopher Feng Youlan. Feng Youlan was based at Peking University and was one of the most influential thinkers in China even

5. Kam Louie, *Critiques of Confucius in Contemporary China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1980).

before 1949. He devised what he called the "abstract inheritance method" to ensure that the essential features of Confucianism were preserved in China. Feng Youlan claimed that there were some general principles of traditional thought (the "abstract principles") that might have been created in feudal times, but whose essences were applicable to the new socialist society. This way of "abstracting" essential features of complex and often inconsistent modes of thinking is similar to some of the arguments put forward in the late 1980s by those who claimed that there were some universal ingredients in the various Asian cultures that constituted, and should be treasured as, "Asian values."

However, in terms of actual scholarly assessments of Confucius and his teachings, even though Feng Youlan and his supporters continued to write in this vein until the early 1970s, what they said was not particularly new. They mostly continued to reiterate the interpretations that they had made decades earlier. In fact, in terms of innovative ways of reading old texts, the most interesting examples in the 1950s and 1960s were made, unsurprisingly, by a younger generation of scholars trained in Marxist methodology, who uncompromisingly used class as a primary tool for analyzing Chinese traditions. They did this systematically for all texts. Indeed, they adhered so strictly to their mechanistic way of employing class analysis that, while they did bring a refreshing approach to traditional Chinese philosophy, theirs quickly became an inflexible orthodoxy that served the fanaticism of the Cultural Revolution. A couple of well-known examples will serve to illustrate their method.

By tracing the etymology of key words in *The Analects* and reinterpretations of pre-Qin history, these younger historians and philosophers asserted that Confucian ideas were created as ideological weapons by the slave-owning class in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period to oppress the people—the slaves—and to stop historical progress. For example, one of the basic virtues in *The Analects* is *ren* (仁), and interpretations of this concept have been central to how Confucianism has been assessed. Traditional scholarship tended to interpret *ren* as "benevolence emanating from a sagely gentleman in his dealings with others"; some modern scholars claim that *ren* is proof that Confucius had discovered a common humanity in man. However, radical Marxists such as Zhao Jibin, through an examination of textual evidence, argued that *ren* was used only in conjunction with the elite. One definition of *ren* given in *The Analects* is *ai ren* (爱人)—"love the people." Zhao Jibin shows that this does not simply translate as "love the people"; indeed, such a rendition is misleading.

Ren (人) was always used in *The Analects* to refer to the upper classes, not the ordinary people. The notion of love and benevolence never extended to the common people, because a different word altogether—*min* (民)—was used in *The Analects* to refer to "the common people." And *ren* (仁) was never associated with *min*. Controlling words, such as *shi* (使), were used in conjunction with *min*. So Confucius was said to have been interested only in how to "use" people, never in loving them.

By claiming that Confucius worked only on behalf of the slave-owning class, and that therefore the benevolence he preached was intended only for the ruling classes, historians were able to assert that Confucius opposed anything that offered the prospect of better conditions for the majority of people. Needless to say, such analyses fundamentally changed the way in which the classics were viewed, but during the 1950s and early 1960s these discussions remained in the academic sphere. And while they were quite revolutionary, their tone also remained measured and scholarly compared to the passionate outburst against tradition during the May Fourth movement, with its slogan, "Down with the Confucius Shop." In fact, the May Fourth voices were among the "Hundred Schools" of thought that were allowed to contend. However, by the time of the Cultural Revolution, especially during the anti-Confucius campaign of the early 1970s, the theses advanced by such younger scholars as Zhao Jibin, Yang Rongguo, and Guan Feng were the only ones permitted and officially promoted.

In hindsight, we now know that the nationwide "Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius" (*piLin piKong*) campaign of the early 1970s was a last desperate attempt by the so-called Gang of Four to launch a political offensive to enable them to stay in power when they knew that their patron, Mao Zedong, was dying. In fact, as soon as Mao died, the whole campaign collapsed, and his supporters were humiliated. Unhappily, many of the philosophers whose ideas were used in the campaign were also disgraced—with some, including Guan Feng, jailed for many years—and their innovative ideas on Confucius were promptly discarded and forgotten. Ironically, the *piLin piKong* movement of the early 1970s saw the greatest revival of Confucius's teaching in Chinese history. Every university, school, factory, commune, even kindergarten had to study *The Analects* as "negative material." One would have thought that the May Fourth movement had done such a good job of killing Confucius that he could be allowed to rest in peace. But this flogging of his corpse only had the effect of making Confucius spring back to life as soon as the beating was over.

Before moving on from the Cultural Revolution period, I should highlight one other fundamental idea from *The Analects* that was singled out for relentless thrashing, because it relates to naming. In addition to "love *ren*" (人), another key definition of *ren* (仁) given by Confucius was the supremely backward-looking "self-restraint and returning to the rites." When asked to be more specific, Confucius proposed a "rectification of names" (正名) as a means of restoring order in society. He declared, for example, that rulers should behave like rulers, officials like officials, fathers like fathers, and sons like sons. He lamented that subordinates such as sons and officials were usurping the ways of their superiors, so that titles and names no longer held the meaning they had previously possessed (in the Zhou dynasty). Confucius certainly understood the importance attached to names.

The Cultural Revolution diehards also appreciated this and indeed sought to deconstruct traditional concepts to show that they were grounded in class. In other words, they sought to demonstrate that all of the righteous-sounding Confucian moral principles actually favored the ruling classes. Typical of Cultural Revolution practice, names and titles were juxtaposed to comment on contemporary concerns. For the first time, Confucius was referred to by his name, Kong Qiu. Often, he was referred to as Kong Laoer (孔老二) (Kong Number 2), possibly because he was the second eldest among his siblings, but more probably because the movement was linked to Lin Biao, Mao's successor and Number 2 before he was purged. The term may also have referred to Zhou Enlai, who was at that time Number 2. Interestingly, in the vernacular, *laoer* also refers to the penis, so for the first time in history, Kong Qiu was called "Confucius the Prick."[6] In any case, the anti-Lin anti-Confucius campaign collapsed very quickly, and when Mao died, the vitriolic but engaging attacks on Confucius stopped, to be replaced by the search for positive essences in Chinese core values that are compatible with Marxism that were so familiar in the 1950s and that have resurfaced today. What is different today, however, is that advocates for Confucius argue that he was the precursor to many of the best in the West as well. Let us now look back to see how Confucius fared outside China after 1949.

6. I should mention that although most people in China would have picked up the vernacular meaning of *laoer* as "prick," this reading was never, to my knowledge, publicly acknowledged.

The Goings and Comings of a Diasporic Confucius

After 1949, when Marxist-Leninist doctrine was the only avenue intellectuals in the mainland were able to explore, many influential Confucian scholars who disagreed with the new ideology simply packed up and left. Those who remained either tried, like Feng Youlan, to adapt Confucianism to the new ideology or stopped writing altogether. Liang Shuming and Xiong Shili were the two most significant philosophers to argue for decades for the revival of Confucianism in China. But their versions of Confucianism were heavily diluted by Buddhist elements, to the extent that Liang has been described as the "last Buddhist" as well as the "last Confucian."[7] While Liang and Xiong are now considered the fathers of the New Confucianism school, there was simply no way for them to express their conservative ideas in the mainland after 1949. Their message that Confucianism and Chinese tradition held the key to a correct way of living in the modern world was carried out by their disciples, such as Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, and Xu Fuguan, who left China mainly for Hong Kong and Taiwan. Some became influential academics in universities and research institutes, such as Hong Kong University and Chinese University of Hong Kong, and many continued to develop the conservative Confucian teachings of their instructors in China by publishing scholarly articles. However, their writings had no impact in China and limited impact outside a very small circle of academic readers in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The relative neglect of this group of scholars might have continued but for the Asian values debate that began around twenty years ago. In the 1980s, when some countries in East Asia experienced rapid economic growth, some tried to ascribe this economic "miracle" to Asian or Confucian values.[8] Research in cultural differences in the social sciences has also projected Confucian values as a "dynamic dimension" in promoting economic growth.[9] Philosophers were quick to join this chorus eulogizing the wonders of traditional ideas.

As part of this revival, a relatively obscure document published in

7. John J. Hanafin, "The 'Last Buddhist': The Philosophy of Liang Shuming," in *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*, ed. John Makeham (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 187–218.

8. Tu Wei-ming, ed., *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), x.

9. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 164.

1958 by Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, Tang Junyi, and Zhang Junmai, titled "Declaration on Behalf of Chinese Culture Respectfully Announced to the People of the World," has been resuscitated as the beginnings of the formation of a new school of thought.[10] This document is an "emotionally charged apologetic for traditional Chinese culture and the ethico-religious and spiritual values that the authors identify with that culture. . . . [It] argues for the cross-cultural significance of Confucianism on the world stage."[11] As scholars who had fled China, the authors of the declaration believed that China was losing its cultural heritage. By 1958, they were also very aware that their versions of Chinese tradition were under siege and that Western, particularly American, ways of life were gaining ground. In their defense of Chinese culture, they also advocated the integration of the more positive aspects of Western culture, such as democracy and science, and they were keen to point out that traditional Chinese culture is compatible with liberal constitutional democracy. Their hope was that the world would see the merits of traditional Chinese culture as both compatible with and desirable in the modern world. In fact, they suggested that traditional Chinese ethics could act as a counterbalance to the materialistic greed and superficiality of modern culture.

Whatever its merits, this declaration is now acknowledged both within and outside China as the clarion call for the formation of the New Confucianism school. The writings of the main players of this new school have been published, and collections of their works have been widely distributed in China. While the content of their message might have related more specifically to traditional Chinese culture, the sentiments expressed in the document are echoed some three decades later by the advocates of Asian values, suggesting that, in Asia, at least, the wishes of the authors of the 1958 manifesto have come true. However, there is a basic difference between the situation then and now. The 1958 document was designed to combat the evils of Communism, which is why it incorporates Western values in its objectives. Its authors left China when it became Communist. Many New Confucians today, both within and outside China, by contrast, set out to prove that Confucius is good not only for Western democracy but also for a Communist state. This acceptance of a basically anti-Communist

10. For a good and relatively sympathetic review of the document, see Albert H. Y. Chen, "Is Confucianism Compatible with Liberal Constitutional Democracy?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (June 2007): 195–216.

11. John Makeham, "The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism," in *New Confucianism*, 28.

statement shows the degree to which some Chinese are ready to prioritize nationalist imperatives over political correctness.

One of the clearest indications of the reversals in the treatment of the nation's philosophical heritage was the establishment of the Academy of Chinese Culture (*Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan*), headed by Tang Yijie, in 1985. Tang Yijie is one of the brightest and most influential historians of Chinese thought and has been a prolific writer on Chinese philosophy since the 1950s.[12] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, at a time when "Asian values" were being advocated in East Asia, the academy was at the forefront of reevaluations of Chinese thought, particularly Confucianism. Part of its mission was to integrate research on Chinese culture in China and the West. Thus, scholars from outside China were invited to work and conduct research at the academy. One of these visiting scholars was Tu Wei-ming, a professor from Harvard University. Tu Wei-ming's participation in the explorations of Chinese values proved pivotal in the growth of new Confucianism outside China. Tu had written an influential article in which he indicated that essential Chinese culture was now more likely to be found outside than within China. The title of his thesis sums up its content most succinctly: "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center."[13]

A Man for All Seasons and All Peoples

So there we have it. The best of Chinese culture, the essence of Confucianism, has now set up shop in the perceived center of world learning, Harvard. The periphery has indeed become the center. Confucianism is now considered so portable that a "Boston Confucianism" is said to have emerged, one that is admirably suited to American society.[14] The inspirational thinker for this Boston Confucian school, Tu Wei-ming, is now the best-known of the New Confucians. He was also one of the major consultants for Lee Kuan Yew's failed attempt to institute traditional Confucian

12. Tang now claims he only "really" began to write on philosophy in 1980. He has negated all that he wrote before that time as political tracts and not philosophy as such. Tang Yijie, *Ruxue shilun ji wai wupian* [Ten commentaries on Confucianism] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 1 and 25.

13. Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 1–32.

14. Robert Cummings Neville, *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

virtues in Singapore schools in the 1980s[15] and for a long time had a large following in China.[16]

The liberalization of academic inquiry is an admirable trend. Unfortunately, the "legacy" of the half century of Communist scholarship on Confucius is not only seen to have no academic merit; its methods and insights are also deliberately scorned and devalued. Thus, for example, class is hardly used as a tool for analysis, and when it is invoked, the method is scorned by influential scholars such as Jiang Qing.

Confucius might as well have been a running dog of the slave-owning class, because his teaching was elevated above class considerations. This is not surprising, because even when Maoism was a fad in some sections of Western academia in the 1960s and 1970s, studies of Confucius were mostly confined to philosophical theories and their relevance to contemporary life in the West. For the first time, Confucian scholars in both China and the West have now joined forces to show that Confucius's teachings are not only relevant in contemporary times but are also highly applicable in Western countries.

Today, when the "Made in China" label adorns every conceivable commodity in almost all corners of the globe, Chinese leaders feel the need for more than consumer goods to assure their citizens of their high moral status in the world. What better means to this end than schools that "sell" Chinese culture to the world? The Confucius Shop of May Fourth has been demolished, but the owners have simply packed up and opened Confucius Institutes instead. Housing a man for all seasons and all countries, the ubiquitous Confucius Institutes are therefore a part of the "soft power" offensive undertaken by the Chinese leadership to "charm" the rest of the world. Moreover, it also indirectly "repudiates Mao, since the Chairman had tried to wipe out the teaching of Confucian beliefs."[17]

This essay is concerned specifically with the ideological effectiveness of naming and institutionalizing Confucius for political purposes. Will this work? Past experience has produced mixed results. The current attempt to institutionalize the Confucius icon is said to be not only modern but also

15. Eddie C. Y. Kuo, "Confucianism as Political Discourse in Singapore," in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*, 304.

16. See, for example, the five-volume collection, Du Weiming, *Du Weiming wenji* (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 2002).

17. Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 68.

global. I will show here that such a move is inherently self-contradictory. I accept that all societies contain contradictory values. Indeed, as Joseph Tamney observes in regard to Singapore, groups of people with contradictory values often coexist. And having contradictions within a civilization need not necessarily bring about the demise of that civilization. That said, the existence of fundamental inconsistencies within the one system can have unforeseen and harmful consequences, because "when these inconsistencies are built into public policies, political alienation increases, with the result that people detach from public institutions and concentrate on their own personal worlds."[18] I should add that while efforts of the New Confucians to prove that Confucian ideology is good for modernity and internationalism are admirable, they have, perhaps inadvertently, succeeded in introducing contradictions into an already confused and unstable world. Political alienation has long plagued the Chinese system and it would be unfortunate to subject the world at large to this alienation when there are other viable operating systems. To illustrate my point, I will begin by examining how the New Confucians have presented their case.

The Democratic Business Consultant

The argument that Confucius is good for liberal democracy and international harmony stems mostly from the so-called Asian values debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Whether they were called Confucian values or "Asian values," these concepts, on the whole, represented a conservative politics with an emphasis on community rather than individuality, and status quo rather than change. This conservative stance was very convenient because, with the notable exception of Hong Kong, the governments of many states in the region were characterized by some Western commentators as repressive during the 1960s and 1970s. To counter these allegations about their authoritarian or dictatorial nature, the leaders of these countries naturally encouraged and welcomed arguments that interpreted them as benevolently democratic, but with "Asian" or "Chinese" characteristics.

Had the Asian countries that espoused these values remained economically backward, their voices would not have been heard despite their desire to be depicted as democratic. However, by the 1970s and 1980s, some Asian countries in the east and southeast were becoming increas-

18. Joseph B. Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul: Western Modernization and Asian Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 188.

ingly wealthy. In particular, Japan was seen by some as posing a serious challenge to America as the Number 1 economic power. Leaders of some former European colonies, such as Singapore and Malaysia, eagerly sought to build a measure of national identity and self-confidence at the same time that they were laying claim to a new form of democracy. The most nagging aspect of the democracy debate to leaders who had come to power via the revolutionary route was the issue of human rights.

In 1993, a number of Asian representatives gathered in Bangkok to discuss the human rights issue. The statement that came out of the conference, the "Bangkok Declaration of Human Rights," upheld the universality of human rights. However, it also stated that it is important to take the particular cultures and histories of individual countries into consideration. The resulting implication that individual rights are predicated on social backgrounds suggested that human rights were relative rather than absolute. This gave rise to considerable discussion about what constituted these social backgrounds in the case of Asia. Many well-researched and thoughtful essays on the topic appeared during the 1990s, culminating in books such as *Human Rights and Asian Values*[19] and *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*.[20] Most contributors agreed that values such as communitarianism were important for national identity formation, and that they were not specific to any culture. While the universality of human rights was more or less supported, some argued for the need to allow for areas of justifiable moral differences between societies. As a result of these concerns, many East Asian scholars looked for evidence of compatibility between Confucianism and Western-style liberal democracy, in the same way that Feng Youlan and his supporters had tried to prove that Communism and Chinese tradition were compatible in China in the 1950s and 1960s.[21]

This was particularly true of Chinese scholars. At the same time as diasporic Chinese New Confucians were reviving the spirit of the 1958 manifesto, well-respected, nonethnic Chinese Sinologists also tried to prove that Asian values and Confucianism were consistent with human rights. As Wm. Theodore de Bary argued in a speech in front of the Chinese

19. Michael Jacobsen and Ole Bruun, eds., *Human Rights and Asian Values: Contesting National Identities and Cultural Representations in Asia* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000).

20. Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

21. Sor-hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

political leadership in 1994, Confucius and his followers, such as Mencius, expressed concern about the issues of the day. De Bary proposed that a series of conferences should be held to explore issues such as human rights to see how they were situated in Chinese and Western cultures. By claiming that the communitarianism of Confucianism was, in its time, compatible with human rights, even human rights as understood in contemporary America, de Bary attempted to modernize Confucianism for a Western audience. True to his word, a series of conferences on Confucianism and human rights were held, under the encouragement and direction of de Bary, who also delivered a series of lectures that were later collected in the volume *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective*.[22] As we have seen in the reinterpretations of Confucius in China itself, what are seen as Confucian values are so malleable that any system could incorporate such ideas. Indeed, based on the premise that each country has its own individual conditions, neoconservatives in China such as Jiang Qing swayed many with their contention that Confucianism is more suitable than liberal democracy for China.[23]

The idea that Confucianism stood for communitarianism and harmony, and that these values are not incompatible with either democracy or Communism and could therefore be useful in both democratic and socialist states might not sound completely ludicrous. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, when East Asia and China began to take pride in their ability to create wealth, Confucius also became an emerging entrepreneur. Given the fact that Confucianism had for centuries been accepted as a philosophy that was hostile to commerce and monetary concerns (indeed, China's scholar class has a lengthy and well-documented disdain for commerce), it seems inconceivable that Confucius could be portrayed as a philosopher who taught people how to make money. The trend to cast Confucius as a business consultant was based on changing priorities in East Asia, especially China. After years of seeing itself as leading the world in revolutionary correctness, China, under Deng Xiaoping, wanted to catch up economically with Western countries as quickly as possible. By 1984, when the Interna-

22. Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

23. See, for example, Jiang Qing, *Shengming xinyang yu wangdao zhengzhi* [Faith in life and kingly politics] (Taipei: Yangzhengtang wenhua shiye gufen youxiangongsi, 2004). John Makeham provides a good summary of the basis of Jiang's ideas and his impact in his *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2008), 261–76.

tional Confucian Association was established in Beijing, Lee Kuan Yew, that ardent advocate of Asian values, was elected honorary director. Lee Kuan Yew's role in the association was a clear signal that Confucianism was seen as an important ingredient for building a modern, prosperous society. Since that time, there have been numerous international conferences to commemorate Confucius, and most foreign participants in these conferences have come from East and Southeast Asia.

By the 1990s, the new Confucian message was being forcefully promoted. From a sagely adviser to kings and statesmen everywhere, Confucius had been turned into a management consultant whose words set the benchmark for good business practice.[24] Very quickly, comparative studies of cultures in the social sciences also projected Confucian values as a "dynamic dimension" in promoting economic growth.[25] And in China, scholars who for many years had called for the "inheritance" of Confucius's educational thought were understandably quick to cash in on the economic boom in East Asia. Confucius's morals are considered exemplary because they are said to promote production and profit. However, as indicated earlier, Confucius had always been understood to be above monetary motives. *The Analects* unambiguously states that "the gentleman (*junzi*) understands the importance of morality (*yi*) and the inferior man (*xiaoren*) understands the importance of profitability (*li*)."[26] In the context of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, this is an important pronouncement. The greatest challenge to Confucians at that time was Mozi, who unashamedly advocated profit and utility as desirable goals. Confucians throughout the ages were considered to have placed morality above profits and utility, whereas the Mohists took the opposite stance. The Confucian hatred for the utilitarian profit motive (though some would argue that the Confucians were more against using immoral means to accumulate profit rather than profit per se) continued into the twentieth century, with merchants and business people theoretically relegated to almost the lowest social status in Chinese society.

Articles that discuss the relationship between ethics and utility usually conclude by arguing the need for some degree of morality in an

24. In Europe, a similar transformation took place within Protestantism at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, indicating that such changes may be symptomatic of a more general capitalist modernity.

25. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 164.

26. Yang Bojun, *Lunyu yizhu* [*The Analects* translated and annotated] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 42.

age when "money is all."[27] In quick succession, scholars sought to demonstrate the connection between Confucius's views on the profit motive and the modernization of China, claiming that the notions of both righteousness (*yi*) and profit (*li*) were important in this age of rapid economic growth.[28] Kuang Yaming, former president of Nanjing University and a staunch Communist, contended in an influential paper that, on close examination, Confucius did not really stress righteousness above profit. In fact, his highest ideal was "the Great Commonwealth," in which righteousness and profit were in harmony and in unity.[29] The reason Confucius highlighted the conflict between righteousness and profit was that he realized that "the Great Commonwealth" was difficult to accomplish in his time. He had thus emphasized righteousness so that an ethical society could at least develop before the Great Commonwealth could be realized.

Such reasoning was common throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when there was a concerted effort to show that Confucian ideas were favorable to economic growth. In addition to many articles devoted to the relationship between Confucian ethics and business management, a number of conferences were held to examine traditional Chinese morality and the market economy.[30] Using the generally accepted view that the essential core of Confucius's teaching is benevolence (*ren*), and that *ren* meant the discovery of humanity in human relationships, scholars sought to demonstrate that this emphasis on the centrality of the human was the essential element that had been missing in modern management.[31] This is certainly difficult to reconcile with the Cultural Revolution interpretation of *ren* as loving slave owners and dictating to the common people. Furthermore, it is often argued that there is a close connection between Confucian and socialist economic morality, whereby in a developing socialist market economy, Confucian ethics should be used to combat the corrupting influence

27. Zang Hong, "Lüelun rujia de yili guan" [On the Confucians' attitude towards Yi-Li], *Xuexi yuekan* [Study monthly] 4 (1986): 21.

28. Miao Runtian, "Qianlun Konzi de yili guan ji qi xiandai yiyi" [On Confucius's attitude towards Yi-Li and its modern significance], *Qilu xuekan* [Qilu journal] 1 (1989): 55–59.

29. Cited in Song Zhongfu, Zhao Jihui, and Pei Dayang, *Ruxue zai xiandai Zhongguo* [Confucianism in modern China] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991), 358–59.

30. Hu Dongyuan, "Zhongguo chuantong wenhua, shichang jingji, daode jianshe" [Traditional Chinese culture, the market economy, moral development], *Xuehai* [Sea of learning] 1 (1996): 52–54.

31. See, for example, Ye Ruixin, "Kongzi de yili guan" [Confucius's attitudes towards Yi-Li], *Shanxi daxue xuebao* [Shanxi University journal] 4 (1998): 33–37.

of the lust for money.[32] This view was even more appealing because of the belief that first the Cultural Revolution and then modernity had a dehumanizing and alienating effect on people, especially the young.[33]

Confucius is therefore celebrated as the sage who outlined a way for management to be carried out efficiently by humane cadres and factory managers. In a very detailed article, Peking University economist Zhao Jing argues that Confucius's management techniques could be adopted by capitalist and modern enterprises. The thrust of his argument targets "leaders" in both industry and politics. In particular, he claims that those who emphasized politics a few years ago "did not understand our national character" and wanted to rush ahead with Communism without checking whether it was a realistic move or not.[34] The national character he refers to, of course, was based on Confucianism. Zhao acknowledges that Confucius's lack of attention to the economic structure of nations had a negative impact on China. However, he believes that if Japan and Korea were able to modernize by adopting Confucius's management techniques, China should also be able to do so. "Moral management" became the motto under which many writers advocated the return of Confucius in the new industrial China.[35]

The Teacher, the Feminist, and the Good Life Guru

While politics and economics have been the major concerns of the Chinese leadership, the institutionalizing of Confucius in education is also seen as essential in the new era. I began with the rapid expansion of the Confucius Institutes, so I should say a few words here about how Confucius's name has been used in the educational field. Through success in education, the Chinese literati of the past and the scholar-gentry of modern

32. Liu Minghua, "Rujia yili guan yu fazhan shehuizhuyi shichang jingji" [On the Confucians' attitudes toward Yi-Li and the developing socialist market economy], *Guizhou daxue xuebao* [Guizhou University journal] 1 (1996): 29.

33. Song Xiren, "Rujia chuantong yili guan yu qingshaonian daode jiaoyu" [On the Confucians' attitudes toward Yi-Li and the moral education of the young], *Jiangsu shehui kexue* [Jiangsu social sciences] 6 (1993): 119–23.

34. Zhao Jing, "Kongzi de guanli sixiang he xiandai jingying guanli" [Confucius's management ideas and modern administration and management], *Kongzi yanjiu* [Confucius research] 1 (1989): 34.

35. Xu Qixian, "Lun rujia lunli yu daode guanli" [On Confucian ethics and moral management], *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* [Chinese People's University journal] 1 (1998): 48–54.

times have been able to acquire a sense of meaning and power in society. In the post-Mao period, debates on education took on an urgent tone. Like teachers everywhere, many educators saw themselves as the guardians of social morality. Conservative educators in particular argued that there was a moral vacuum after the disillusionment arising from the Cultural Revolution and that Confucian moral education was a means of filling this gap.

By the early 1990s, Confucius and Mao Zedong were seen as the two greatest educators in Chinese history—one ancient, one modern. In an interesting article on this topic, Xu Quanxing, a member of the CCP Central Committee Party School, argues that Mao Zedong had, on numerous occasions, sought to be remembered as a teacher. One of the most interesting quotations from Mao Zedong is his assessment of Confucius, given in a talk in 1938. After eulogizing Confucius, Mao asks rhetorically, "Why didn't Confucius become a Communist? That's because the masses those days did not want him to be a Communist; they wanted him to be a teacher. But today, the masses want us to be Communists."[36] In other words, if Confucius had been alive in the 1930s, he would have been a Communist leader. Such claims are almost clichés; what is remarkable about this one is the manner in which it is used to help argue the paramount importance of the ancient sage for Chinese culture.

Party theorists such as Xu Quanxing are not merely debating the merits of Confucian education. As a professor of the Communist Party School, Xu leaves little doubt about the political motivation behind his article. He concludes with a short comment to the effect that although Confucius's influence on Mao Zedong was generally positive, it also had a negative aspect. The greatest shortcoming in Confucius's educational thought, according to Xu Quanxing, is his "emphasis on ethics and disregard for materiality."[37] Because of this, Chinese thinkers throughout the ages had paid insufficient attention to material and economic progress, which explains why Mao Zedong was partial to political education and neglected modernization and economic production. Xu Quanxing claimed that Deng Xiaoping rectified this bias in Mao Zedong by emphasizing the importance of education in achieving modernization and attaining the highest international standards.[38]

36. Xu Quanxing, "Kongzi yu Mao Zedong: Gujin weida 'jiaoyuan'" [Confucius and Mao Zedong: Great "teachers" of the past and present], *Kongzi yanjiu* [Confucius research] 4 (1993): 4.

37. Xu Quanxing, "Kongzi yu Mao Zedong," 6.

38. Xu Quanxing, "Kongzi yu Mao Zedong," 6.

There is thus more concern about education and internationalization. And indeed, the New Confucians outside China have also written a great deal about the merits of Confucian education for peace and harmony in the world. Although this is not made explicit, the main purpose of the Confucius Institutes is to promote Chinese language and culture in Western society. There is a strong belief that moral superiority follows economic might, and that because China is seen as economically successful, the cultural aspects of Chinese society should also have an international impact, and Confucianism should be internationalized.

Gender is one of these cultural aspects. During the last century, when the position of Chinese women became a popular topic among intellectual circles, it was taken for granted that Confucianism, no matter how benevolent, was ultimately patriarchal. In *The Analects* itself, the detested "inferior people," the *xiaoren*, are mentioned twenty-four times, mostly as a counter to the gentlemen, the *junzi*. But in keeping with the disregard for women in Confucius's time, there is no reference to women as a group. Notably, the only time women are mentioned is when Confucius associates them with the *xiaoren*, the mean and inferior people he detested.[39] One would think that this dearth of instruction regarding women would confirm the traditional understanding of Confucius as a misogynist. But just as it is argued that Confucian ethics are communitarian and therefore more humane and appropriate to a democratic state and bureaucracy, the fact that Confucius had so little to say about women has simply left a lot of room for extravagant interpretations. Some have even tried to argue, as recently as a few years ago, "that the teachings of Confucius are similar to those of some Feminists"! The justification for such outrageous assertions usually rests on the argument that Confucius advocated the notion of *ren* (仁). In its written form, *ren* is "composed of two parts, the figure of a person and the numeral two, and so we render it into English as 'person to person care' or just 'care' to be brief."[40] In this instance, the authors are targeting a Western audience, which is presumably in favor of Chinese culture but not its sexist tendencies, so Confucius is presented as a caring, loving man.

This claim was made in a Taiwanese popular magazine targeted at a Western nonspecialist audience. Notwithstanding the fact that pairing feminism with care ethics again places women in the babysitter rather than controller role, many well-meaning scholars elaborated on Confucius's

39. Yang Bojun, *Lunyu yizhu*, 198.

40. James D. Sellmann and Sharon Rowe, "The Feminine in Confucius," *Asian Culture* 26, no. 3 (1998): 4.

alleged feminist credentials. As early as 1994, highly respected philosophers were defending the thesis that Confucius was misunderstood and that his people-centered philosophy demonstrated that his views were not antiwomen. Confucianism appeared to be sexist only because of distortions introduced after the Han dynasty.[41] The idea that Confucianism was beneficial in promoting modern gender relations was taken up by many other Western academics, such as Henry Rosemont, who appears to consider Confucianism less competitive and individualistic, and therefore less masculine, than Western practices, and who believes that the two modes of thinking could be mutually beneficial.[42] By carefully explaining that care ethics relate to "care" that is beyond blood relationships, and that Confucian ethics are based on human relations such as filial obligations that are never reciprocal, other commentators unapologetically explode the notion that the classical Confucians could complement modern-day care ethics.[43]

Some of the above claims are similar to the New Age appropriation of ancient philosophies as a path to self-fulfillment and happiness. This is precisely what one woman academic has managed to successfully achieve in China. In the last few years, Yu Dan, a media studies professor at Beijing Normal University, has become an academic celebrity because of her television appearances and books on Confucius and Zhuangzi. The fact that she has sold tens of millions of copies of her books on Confucius and Zhuangzi, is the subject of many books and articles, is a familiar face on television, and has a large Internet blog following all ensure that her version of Confucius is kept alive and popular. She summarizes her argument on the cover of her most important book, *Confucius from the Heart*, claiming, "The truths that Confucius gives us . . . tell us all how we can live the kind of happy life that our spirit needs."[44]

41. Chenyang Li, "The Confucian Concept of *Jen* and the Feminist Ethics of Care," later republished in *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics, and Gender*, ed. Chenyang Li (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 23–42. This book contains ten scholarly papers on Confucianism and women.

42. Henry Rosemont Jr., "Classical Confucian and Contemporary Feminist Perspectives on the Self: Some Parallels and Their Implications," in *Culture and Self: Philosophical and Religious, East and West*, ed. Douglas Allen (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 63–82.

43. Ranjoo Seodu Herr, "Is Confucianism Compatible with Care Ethics? A Critique," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4 (October 2003): 471–88.

44. Yu Dan, "*Lunyu" xinde* [Reflections on *The Analects*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006). An English translation has appeared as *Confucius from the Heart: Ancient Wisdom for Today's World*, trans. Esther Tyldesley (London: Macmillan, 2009), 10.

In a highly materialistic and consumerist China where many are searching for but not finding inner peace, this understanding of a major classical text as a vehicle for achieving a happy or good life has been embraced by millions. Yu Dan's popularity and celebrity status have continued to gain momentum, especially because, despite being a university lecturer, she does not try to analyze *The Analects* in academic detail but only refers to specific passages. She also uses personal anecdotes to show how the ideas behind the classic can be intuitively helpful for a modern society. But she has also been attacked, sometimes quite vehemently, especially by other aspiring young scholars.[45]

Yu Dan has been extensively covered in respected Western newspapers, including the *International Herald Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, as well as Western scholarly commentaries. Daniel Bell, for example, points out that Yu Dan has made use of Daoism (and Western liberal ideas) to urge people to look inward rather than change society, and that this in effect depoliticizes *The Analects*, which Bell considers to be about political action and commitment. He claims that Yu Dan's account is "complacent, conservative, and supportive of the status quo."[46] Bell is right to point out that by encouraging people to look into themselves and selectively quoting from *The Analects* to seek the good life, Yu Dan is encouraging apathy. To me, her philosophy is similar to that embodied by Lu Xun's character Ah Q, whose capacity for self-delusion enables him to brag about his importance and be complacent about his miserable existence despite occupying the status of a village idiot. Interestingly, some fifty years ago, Guan Feng accused Feng Youlan and other New Confucians of behaving like a modern-day Ah Q. They were vilified for trying to use the classical philosophers to avoid engaging in the political transformations occurring in the New China.[47]

Institutionalizing a Postmodern Confucius

Since the advent of modernity in China, Confucius has taken on a postmodern persona. He can be anything anyone wants him to be. Early

45. See, for example, the ten essays by PhD candidates collected in Xu Jinru and Yang Haoou, eds., *Jie "du" Yu Dan: Shi bo shi vs Yu Dan* [Disinfecting Yu Dan: Ten PhD's vs. Yu Dan] (Beijing: Zhongguo wuzi chubanshe, 2007).

46. Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 174.

47. See Kam Louie, *Inheriting Tradition: Interpretations of the Classical Philosophers in Communist China, 1949–1966* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986), 125–28.

reformers in the Qing dynasty tried to assert the superiority of Chinese culture by claiming that Confucius and other classical Chinese philosophers provided the inspiration for Jesus Christ's scientific outlook! Thus, early modernizers such as Wei Yuan and Xue Fucheng made the outrageous claims that Jesus had access to the Confucian classics and had learned from Mozi, thus giving Western civilization a head start in science.[48] But by the May Fourth period, iconoclasts such as Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun saw Confucius as a reactionary who, along with his shop, should be toppled and smashed. More recently, during the Cultural Revolution, the radicals were almost hysterical in their denunciation of him as a running dog of all sorts of ghosts and demons. Everyone claimed to know the real Confucius, but for more than a hundred years no one has been able to pin down this chameleon. Indeed, in these postmodern times, some scholars in the West wonder if Confucius was really responsible for *The Analects* or whether, in fact, he himself may have been "manufactured" by later generations.[49]

So what can explain this new attempt by both the Chinese government and Chinese academics within and outside China to appropriate and eulogize Confucius? Why, in the naming of the Confucius Institutes, institutionalize him for world consumption? At a time when American culture seems to dominate the world and there is widespread concern about American unilateralism, it may be natural for nations to try to avoid being swept along in the American tide by inventing their own national identity. But is it wise for China to use Confucius as a "brand name" to reach out to the world?[50] Some have raised doubts about whether the Chinese government has really established the Confucius Institutes to promote international understanding and harmony. I am not interested in that question. All governments have the right, indeed the duty, to try to "charm" others with their cultural software.

But I do question the choice of the name. There is an implicit belief among most people that because Confucianism has long dominated Chi-

48. See Jerome Chên, *China and the West: Society and Culture, 1815–1937* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 65–68.

49. See E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

50. Xin Ming, "Shijiexing de 'Zhongguo re' tsuisheng le Kongzi xueyuan" [The international "China fever" gave birth to the Confucius Institutes], *Sixiang zhengzhike jiaoxue* [Teaching of ideological and political curricula] 9 (2007): 88.

nese culture and because Confucius is a Chinese name, we should adopt it to represent China. But that's like proposing changing the Voice of America to the Voice of Jesus. Most Americans may identify themselves as Christians, but America is much more interesting and diverse than one dominant religion or one individual. In the same way, an institute that purports to promote Chinese culture should not do so in the name of one person, especially if that name or person has generated bitter controversies in the recent past. Like many other overarching philosophies and beliefs, Confucianism is fraught with inconsistencies. And even though some academics have tried to argue that Confucianism is compatible with and possibly superior to Western democracy, modern feminism, and best business practices, the truth is that the basic tenets of Confucian thinking are found in conservative people everywhere. For example, the cherished Confucian notions of family values and filial piety can be found in most cultures. And politically, Confucius's "rectification of names" and "return to the rites" are, in general, directives for social regression.

Confucius lived during a time of great social upheaval, when many warring states fought endless battles with each other until the establishment of the Qin dynasty. And we are currently also witnessing a world in conflict, so that notions such as a "clash of civilizations" have recently gained currency.[51] It is perhaps understandable that newly emerging countries such as Singapore deem it necessary to fabricate some concept of Asian values as a counterbalancing force to what they perceive as the corruptive influence of Western values. The need to assert one's own identity in the face of the overwhelming impact of American might is understandable and perhaps legitimate. However, Chinese culture has been around for a long time, and unlike many other small and endangered cultures that are being overwhelmed by hegemonic civilizations, it is likely to be around for a long time to come.

Those elements of Chinese culture that are relevant to the contemporary world will survive regardless of the babbling of academics. It is somewhat pathetic to promote them in such crass ways, especially when the elements of Chinese culture that are being promoted are so antiquated. However we look at it, Confucianism is a conservative philosophy. Distilling and mixing Confucian ideas until we find an "essence" that fits suspect national agendas, such as the naming of the Confucius Institutes, is not

51. For Asian perspectives on Samuel Huntington's thesis, see *The Clash of Civilizations: Asian Responses*, ed. Salim Rashid (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press Ltd., 1997).

a sound approach. If we *must* revive and defend Chinese traditions, we should at least salvage those useful elements that might have been traditionally neglected but that are more suited to today's world. Any political leadership today would be unlikely to promote the Daoist *wuwei* (nonaction) as a model, and the Gang of Four's spectacular failed attempts at salvaging the Legalists proves that Legalism is now also a lost cause.

However, there are other significant traditions that warrant consideration. For example, Mohism, with its pacifist and scientific bent, seems to me to be worthy of revival. So why not go for Mozi? He stood for universal love rather than family loyalty, and utilitarianism and profit rather than lofty words and morals. His ethics and scientific spirit seem to suit the modern world better than other traditional Chinese philosophies. Yet, throughout Chinese history, including the Communist period, when China should have "inherited" him, Mozi has largely been neglected.[52] If we do not choose to walk out of the shadow of Confucius now, we may once again miss an opportunity to change how Chinese culture is regarded around the world.

At a time when international relations are changing rapidly, and China is poised to play a much more significant role, Chinese culture will inevitably have a major global impact. While Communism remains the dominant ideology in China and the Communist leadership is unlikely to abandon this philosophical and political system in the foreseeable future, it is also very unlikely that the current rulers would want to preach the merits of Communism to the rest of the world. They have, in fact, fallen back on the other ideology they know: Confucianism. For them, Confucianism was a powerful cohesive force in imperial China, and it could be used as an ideology to build a harmonious society now. However, the Confucius icon has been an extremely controversial one in modern China, and Confucianism has been a divisive ideology in the last century. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated above, the confusion surrounding the debates on how to salvage tradition in a new China have been compounded by incoherent interpretations of Confucius's teachings in recent years. All the indicators suggest that domestically, the advocacy of Confucianism will in practice lead to the promotion of very conservative and inconsistent values. Internationally, if such values are to be paraded as the best of "Chinese" essences, China's contribution to world culture will be a confused and regressive one.

52. See Louie, *Inheriting Tradition*, 129–54.