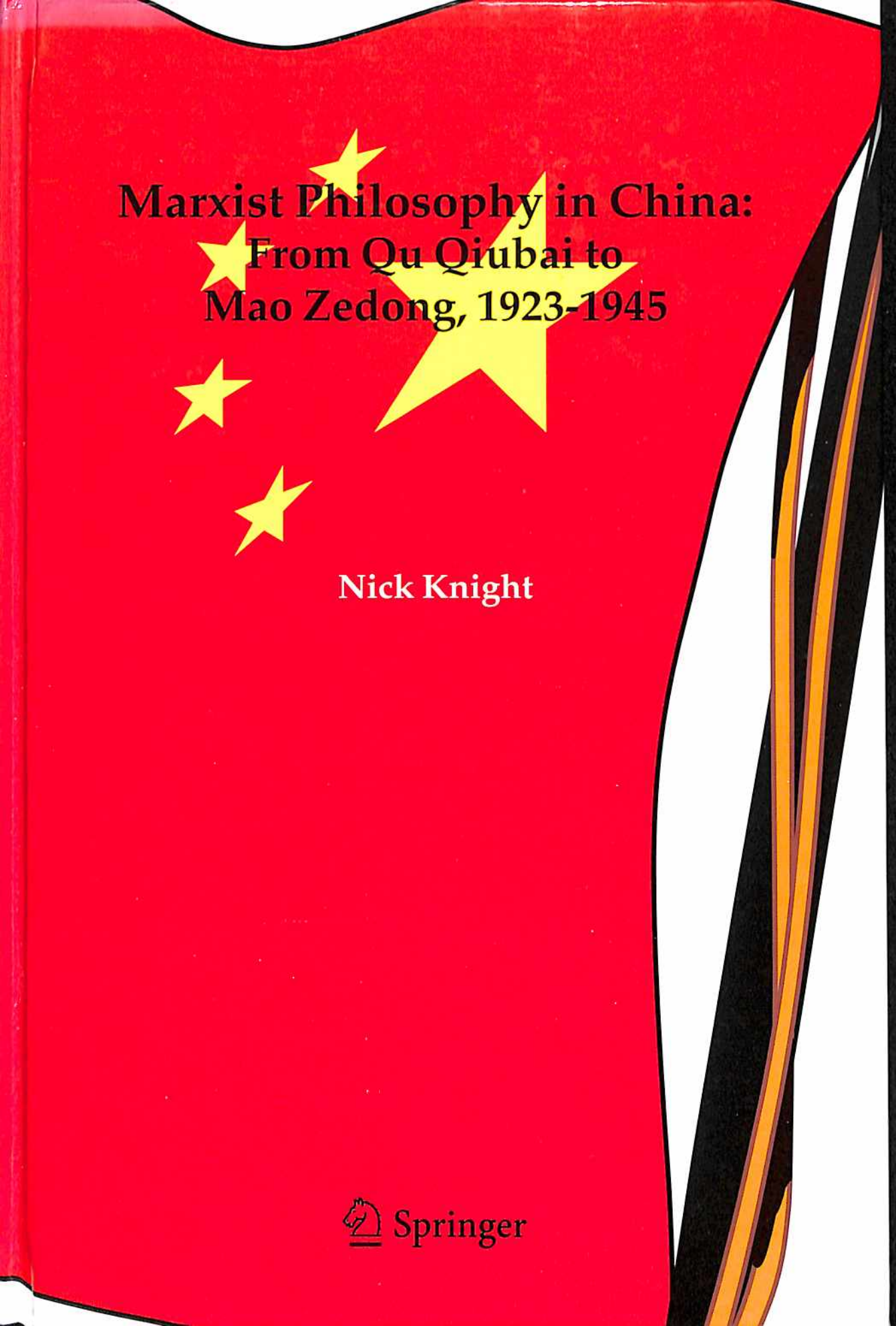

Marxist Philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, 1923-1945

Nick Knight

Springer

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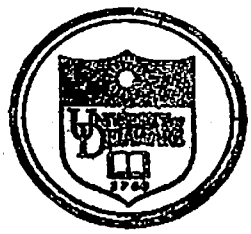

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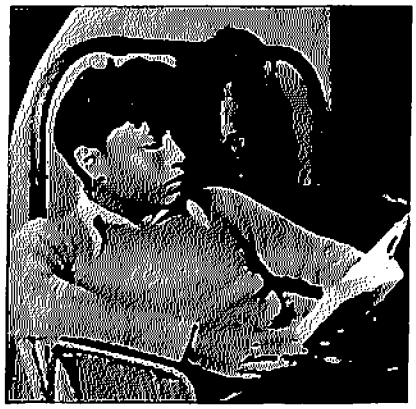

Ai Siqi

Li Da

Mao Zedong

Qu Quibai

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book recounts the history of Marxist philosophy in China between 1923 and 1945 through the writings and activities of four philosophers: Qu Qiubai, Ai Siqi, Li Da and Mao Zedong. Two of these philosophers – Qu and Mao – were also political activists and leaders, but their contribution to this history is as important, if not more so, than the contribution of Ai and Li who were predominantly philosophers and scholars. The inclusion of Qu and Mao underlines the intimate connection between philosophy and politics in the revolutionary movement in China. It is not possible to speak credibly of Marxist philosophy in China without considering the political context within which its introduction, elaboration and dissemination proceeded. Indeed, each of the philosophers considered in this book repudiated the notion that the study of philosophy was a scholastic intellectual exercise devoid of political significance. Each of these philosophers regarded himself as a revolutionary, and considered philosophy to be useful precisely because it could facilitate a comprehension of the world and so accelerate efforts to change it. By the same token, each of these philosophers took philosophy seriously; each bent his mind to the daunting task of mastering the arcane and labyrinthian philosophical system of dialectical materialism. Philosophy might well be political, they believed, but this was no excuse for philosophical dilettantism.

In accepting the philosophical credentials of these revolutionary philosophers, my analysis distances itself from much of the Western literature on Marxist philosophy and ideology in China. Written mainly by non-Marxist scholars, this literature tends to be dismissive of the substance and significance of Marxism in China; some of its more egregious examples suggest that Chinese intellectuals and philosophers who converted to Marxism could not possibly have understood Marxism, which grew out of the European intellectual tradition. The fact of being Chinese is presented as an insuperable barrier to the understanding of a theoretical system that originated outside the Chinese cultural hemisphere. This book stands in opposition to this tendency in the Western literature on Marxism in China. It accepts that Chinese intellectuals and philosophers could, and in fact did, accept the

intellectual challenge that Marxist theory posed, and prevail. Consequently, I argue that their efforts to comprehend, develop and apply Marxism are significant, not only for an understanding of the history of Marxism and the Marxist movement in China, but for the general history of Marxism. Moreover, an understanding of the history of Marxist philosophy in China during its seminal years is essential if any sense is to be made of the philosophical and ideological world of Mao's China and post-Mao China.

This book thus takes seriously the claims of these four Chinese revolutionaries to be Marxist philosophers. It attempts to unravel the nature of their thinking, and to identify the source of their philosophical inspiration within European and Soviet Marxism. It also attempts to comprehend the logic of their attempts to discover a formula that would allow the application of Marxism to Chinese conditions without sacrificing its universal dimensions. However, while the book approaches its subject matter positively, it does not do so uncritically. Where there are lapses in logic, these are identified; where elaboration fails to convince, the reasons are explained. In adopting this stance, the book thus moves beyond a descriptive history of Marxist philosophy in China; it represents a reconstruction of this history by one not unsympathetic to the claims of these philosophers, but which provides a critical engagement with prominent themes within their philosophies.

Earlier versions of Chapter 3 and 6 appeared in the following: 'The Dilemma of Determinism: Qu Qiubai and the Origins of Marxist Philosophy in China', *China Information*, Vol. XIII, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 1–26; and 'The Role of Philosopher to the Chinese Communist Movement: Ai Siqi, Mao Zedong and Marxist Philosophy in China', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (December 2002), pp. 419–46. A section of Chapter 10 appeared in '*On Contradiction* and *On New Democracy*: Contrasting Perspectives on Causation and Social Change in the Thought of Mao Zedong,' *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1990), pp. 18–34. I am grateful to the editors of these journals for permission to use these articles in this book.

This history of Marxist philosophy in China represents the culmination of an interest that has spanned three decades. During this time, I have incurred many intellectual and personal debts. The help and contribution of a number of colleagues and friends stand out. My particular thanks go to the following Chinese Mao scholars and philosophers: Ran Changuang, Li Yongtai, Li Junru, Chen Zuhua, Tan Zhen, Duan Qixian, Song Jingming and Wang Jionghua. My sincere thanks also go to my friend and colleague Wang Yuping of Griffith University's School of Languages and Linguistics for her help with Qu Qiubai's complex rendition of Marxist philosophy, and her tolerant and good-humoured attempts to improve my Chinese. Dr Liu Xian, my research assistant, gave considerable help with chapters 7 and 11, for which I am very grateful. Professor Arif Dirlik of the University of Oregon read the entire manuscript and offered incisive suggestions for improvement. I am grateful for the support he has given my research over many years. I am also grateful to the advice offered by the publisher's two anonymous referees.

Finally, as always, my most prominent debt is to my partner in life, Jill Kenny. Her unfailing love and support, and downright common sense, have allowed me to

achieve my goals in research and teaching without losing sight of the fact that there is more to life than these things. Thanks – more than I can say.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. PRELUDE TO PHILOSOPHY, 1919–23

The theoretical preoccupation of Marxist intellectuals in China during the early years of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was with the social theory of Marxism – the materialist conception of history, or historical materialism.[1] They paid particular attention to this theory's controversial representation of the causal relationship between society's economic base and superstructure, and struggled to make sense of its seemingly contradictory themes. On the one hand, Marxism's social theory talked in determinist tones of the causal significance of the economic base; change within the economic realm (productive forces and class relationships) led to changes within the superstructure, in the realm of politics, ideology, and art and literature. From this perspective, Marxism was an economic theory from which conscious human agency had been expunged; the superstructure reflected and responded to economic forces, lacking any autonomy to influence the course of history. On the other hand, Marxism explicitly called for conscious political struggle to achieve revolutionary change; only through concerted mass action – through the creation of political parties and organisations, the raising of ideological awareness, the honing of political tactics, development of cultural forms and practices appropriate to political struggle – could the progressive class or classes seize power and create a society in which their interests would be realised. From this perspective, Marxism was an activist theory; it recognised human agency in history. Humans, through their own efforts, could bring about change.

[1] For analysis of the early theoretical and ideological history of the Chinese Communist movement, see Michael Y.L. Luk, The *Origins of Chinese Bolshevism: An Ideology in the Making, 1920–1928* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1990); Arif Dirlik, The *Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1951), Chapters 1–3; Hans J. Van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Stuart R. Schram (ed.), *Mao's Road to Power, Revolutionary Writings 1912–1949: Volume I, The Pre-Marxist Period, 1912–1920* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992); and Stuart R. Schram (ed.), Nancy J. Hodes (Associate Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power, Revolutionary Writings 1912–1949: Volume II, National Revolution and Social Revolution, December 1920–June 1927* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

Marxism thus contained apparently conflicting tendencies – determinism and activism – that could lead to quite distinct responses. Economic determinism appeared to invite passivity, even fatalism; at best, political action could achieve no more than a marginal influence on a history destined to proceed through economically preordained stages. Activism, unanchored by recognition of the constraints imposed by economic forces, appeared to elevate human agency – will, consciousness, ideas – to voluntaristic proportions; political action inspired by will could accelerate the momentum of history towards predetermined goals.

Marxism's materialist conception of history thus presented a challenge to intellectuals in China persuaded of the veracity of this theory. The manner in which the dilemma of determinism (unconscious historical forces versus human agency, economic base versus superstructure) was elaborated within the discourse of Marxism during its early years in China was to be a major factor in the ideological development of the Communist movement in China. Marxist intellectuals in China confronted the dilemma of determinism in different ways. Li Da (1890–1966), who in the 1930s was to become one of China's most important Marxist philosophers, provided in his copious writings of 1919–23 a dialectical perspective on the interaction of the economic and non-economic realms. Drawing on a wide variety of European and Japanese Marxist and socialist sources, he arrived at the conclusion that Marxism *is* an economic theory of history, but one in which politics, ideology and other superstructural levels possess a definite, though qualified, capacity to react on the economic base, and thus influence the course of history. His interpretation of the materialist conception of history was founded on a complex economic determinism that appeared to resolve the apparently conflicting tendencies within Marxist social theory. However, Li's relatively sophisticated foray into Marxist theory was restricted, in the early 1920s, to the realm of social theory. It was not until the mid 1920s that he devoted any attention to Marxist philosophy, and it was not until the late 1920s and early 1930s that it became a preoccupation. Only then did he provide a concerted philosophical response to the dilemma of determinism within Marxist theory. It was in dialectical materialism, the philosophical twin of the materialist conception of history, that Li sought the ontological and epistemological framework that would resolve Marxism's theoretical tensions. By that time, as we will see, the political and philosophical context had changed dramatically, and Li was restricted, in the name of orthodoxy, in the sort of philosophical responses he could make (see Chapter 8).[2]

Other early Chinese Marxist intellectuals approached the dilemma of determinism within the materialist conception of history differently. Li Dazhao (1888–1927), for example, balanced an acceptance of the idea of history moving towards a determined future with an activist inclination to both political and personal struggle, one in which the ethical dimensions of history and personal life were accorded a more pronounced role than was usual in conventional readings of Marxist social theory. Indeed, Li Dazhao was dissatisfied with the apparently minimal role accorded to ethics and spiritual factors by Marxist theory, and he suggested that Marxism required revision to ensure that any reorganisation of the

[2] Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996).

economic realm be accompanied by concomitant changes to the realm of the human spirit.[3] Li Dazhao thus went much further than Li Da in pushing at the restrictions represented by an economic determinist reading of Marxism, although not as far as Zhou Fohai (1897–1948), who withdrew from the CCP having arrived at the conclusion that humans had the power to control the direction of historical development.[4] But such views were not characteristic of mainstream theoretical opinion amongst Marxist intellectuals in China before and after the formation of the CCP, which accepted the thrust of orthodox Marxism, with its emphasis on the inexorable unfolding of history's stages, and the necessity of a capitalist stage of development for the emergence of a socialist revolutionary movement. This picture of history, of vast elemental forces unleashed by transformations in the economic foundation of society, appeared to consign to impotence the actions of individual humans. Yet this apparently deterministic vision was, quixotically, accepted by many as a clarion call to political action; for it exuded confidence that its adherents were on the winning side, and that their political aspirations would, in the fullness of time, triumph.

China's early Marxist intellectuals, even those who adopted a conventional Marxist reading of society and historical change, nevertheless recognised that Marxism contained conflicting theoretical tendencies: an economic determinist theory of history rendered problematic the significance of ideas and conscious political action. The way in which they responded to this dilemma was not only to set the scene for the subsequent ideological development of Marxist ideology within the CCP, it defined the ideological poles between which many subsequent political struggles within the CCP were fought. At times, the deterministic tendency within Marxism attracted greater support: the unfolding of history is preordained and inexorable, and the stages through which history must pass are fixed; capitalism must replace feudalism, and socialism can only emerge on the foundation laid by capitalism's development of the forces of production. At other times, the activist potential within the materialist conception of history has been stressed: human consciousness and agency play a vital role in the direction and speed at which history develops; the superstructure – the arena of ideas and political action – is not a passive reflection of the economic base, but one that can react on the economic base, and thus constitutes a dynamic agent in facilitating political and social change.

Until 1923, however, consideration of the tensions within Marxism remained within the theoretical realm of the materialist conception of history. It was in the language of historical materialism (its concepts, modes of discourse and forms of debate) that theoretical inquiry and elaboration proceeded. The purely philosophical dimension of Marxism attracted no attention. Why was this the case? First, little if any Marxist philosophy had been translated into Chinese during the years between the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the formation of the CCP in 1921, and in the years immediately following. While many documents of Marxist provenance were translated into Chinese, these had focused on the materialist conception of history,

[3] Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the origins of Chinese Marxism*, esp. pp. 91–5.

[4] Chester C. Tan, *Chinese Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), pp. 102–3.

the policies of the new Soviet government in Russia, the history of the socialist movement in Europe, the writings of Lenin, women's liberation, and other topics of practical concern to radical intellectuals. Philosophy was bypassed in favour of these apparently more pressing theoretical concerns. This in part reflected a dearth of appropriate texts on Marxist philosophy in languages accessible to and comprehensible by the cadre of youthful translators within the emerging revolutionary movement. Few could read German or Russian, the two primary languages of Marxist theory. Many more could read Japanese, and it was Marxist and socialist texts available in Japanese, either authored in that language or translated into it from European languages, which largely constructed the corpus from which Chinese translators selected texts for translation. Many of the translators to the early revolutionary movement in China had studied in Japan, were fluent in its language and familiar with the Japanese socialist movement and the writings and translations of its intellectuals. The European and Russian sources chosen for translation by Japanese intellectuals consequently had a material impact on the choices open to Chinese translators, such as Li Da, who provided the early communist movement in China with an unwittingly selective body of texts on Marxism that excluded its philosophical dimension. It is no coincidence that Li Da's first translations (published in 1921) were of Japanese editions of Karl Kautsky's *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx* and the Dutch Marxist Herman Gorter's *An Explanation of the Materialist Conception of History*. Both of these volumes deal with issues central to Marxist theory – the theory of surplus value and its function within capitalism, and the theory of historical materialism – but incorporate no significant consideration of dialectical materialism, the philosophy of Marxism.[5] Similarly, Li Hanjun (who had grown up in Japan) translated Kawakami Hajime's *Introduction to 'Das Kapital'*, which focused on the economic and materialist dimensions of Marx's theory.[6] It was not until later in the 1920s that Japanese Marxists, such as Kawakami Hajime, began themselves to translate and write extensively on dialectical materialism, and it was these sources that Chinese translators then made accessible to a Chinese audience.[7] The years 1929–30 saw a flood of translations from Japanese of Marxist philosophical texts, although these had often originated in European languages.

Second, the theoretical needs of the nascent communist movement in China led in directions other than philosophy. As we have observed, there was a keen interest in the materialist conception of history, for this dimension of Marxism promised to reveal the particular characteristics of the Chinese historical context, on an understanding of which could be built strategies for successful revolutionary action. Similarly, the new CCP was in urgent need of information about the practical tasks

5 Knight, *Li Da and Marxist philosophy in China*, Chapter 5.

6 See Van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade*, pp. 81–4, for examples of the sorts of translations read by members of the early Marxist research societies.

7 See, for example, Kawakami Hajime, *Makesizhuyi jingjixue jichu lilun* [The fundamental theories of Marxist economics], translated by Li Da and others (Shanghai: Kunlun shudian, 1930). Despite its title, this book contains a very substantial section on Marxist philosophy. It was later read and annotated by Mao. See *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji* [The philosophical annotations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988), pp. 453–92.

of party building, and the contemporary state of affairs of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the other member parties of the Communist International (Comintern). For the time being, at least, an interest in the seemingly abstract realm of philosophy would have to wait.

Third, the tendency of Chen Duxiu, the CCP's leader, was to emphasise political action and the practical needs of the Party over the development of theory during the Party's early years. This was, at least, the view of some of the Party's most important intellectuals. It was a major consideration in the decision of Li Da and Li Hanjun to quit the Party, for their inclination was to stress intensive study of theory in order to establish the theoretical foundation required by the nascent communist movement in China. As Li Da later recalled, 'I requested that we gain a thorough understanding of revolutionary theory. However, the others within the Party emphasised practical action, and put no emphasis on study, demanding rather, 'Marxist practitioners and not Marxist theorists''.[8] Chen, while himself a famous intellectual, felt the current emphasis had to be placed on practical political action in the consolidation of the new Party. The tension between those theorists such as Li Da and Li Hanjun and a Party leadership, understandably preoccupied with the myriad details of organisation that accompanied the formation of the Party, militated against the creation of an environment in which Marxist philosophy and its elaboration could be regarded as valued pursuits.[9] Given the often life-and-death struggles of the diminutive Party during its first difficult years, it is little wonder that philosophy was low on the Party leaders' priorities.

Fourth, while Marxist philosophy had become an issue of very serious debate and contention amongst European and Russian Marxists prior to 1921, it had not yet become a core determinant of Party orthodoxy, as it would from the late 1920s within the CPSU and member parties of the Comintern.[10] The influential Russian Marxist George Plekhanov (1856–1918) had engaged, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in some vicious philosophical polemics with opponents in the Russian revolutionary movement in defence of his rather deterministic brand of Marxist philosophical orthodoxy.[11] Similarly, Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) was to write his most important philosophical treatise, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908), in the form of an extended polemic with 'would-be Marxists' and those guilty of 'philosophical revisionism'.[12] These philosophical forays by Plekhanov and Lenin in defence of 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy were to set in train a process that would ultimately result in the establishment of 'correct' philosophy as a criterion against which claims to Party orthodoxy could be tested (see Chapters 2 and 5).

8 Song Jingming, *Li Da zhuanji* [Li Da – A Biography] (Hubei: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 69.

9 See Van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade*, p. 63. According to Van de Ven, Li Hanjun's vision of the CCP was of a decentralised party that advocated communism among intellectuals, and was opposed to the covert involvement of intellectuals in the labor movement.

10 See David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and natural science, 1917–1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

11 See, in particular, George Plekhanov's *Materialismus Militans* (Moscow: Foreign Publishers, 1973), *In Defence of Materialism: The development of the monist view of history* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1947), and *Fundamental problems of Marxism* (London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., n.d.).

12 V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), pp. 5–7.

However, up to and throughout most of the 1920s there remained considerable philosophical debate within the CPSU, and it was possible for a Party member to espouse one of any number of philosophical positions, each claiming some allegiance to Marxism, without being the subject of censure or worse. The effect of this relatively relaxed atmosphere had, in turn, the effect of diminishing while not eliminating the significance of philosophy as a preoccupation of the CPSU; the Party's attention was elsewhere. This lack of focus on philosophy undoubtedly communicated itself to member parties of the Comintern, of which the CCP was one, and served to reinforce, at least in the case of this latter Party, the inclination to give priority to practical political matters, and kudos to 'Marxist practitioners' rather than those whose theoretical inclinations inclined towards philosophy.

2. FROM QU QIUBAI TO MAO ZEDONG: MARXIST PHILOSOPHERS IN CHINA

For these reasons, CCP theorists paid scant attention to philosophy during the first few years of the Party's existence. It was only in 1923, with the pioneering efforts of Qu Qiubai to teach and write on Marxist philosophy, that its vocabulary and theoretical concerns were introduced to the CCP and its supporters. As we will see (Chapters 3 and 4), Qu was to provide a relatively sophisticated commentary on many facets of Marxist philosophy in his valiant though inconclusive attempt to achieve a resolution, at a philosophical level, of the dilemma of determinism. In so doing, he not only provided a substantial array of information on the position of Marxist philosophy in the history of Western philosophy, he introduced to his Chinese audience novel ways of thinking *philosophically* within the Marxist system of thought. This was a theoretical initiative of the greatest significance for the ideological development of the CCP and the Chinese revolutionary movement generally. Here, for the first time, was a Chinese intellectual who spoke with authority on Marxist philosophy, and argued that an understanding of philosophy was central to the Marxist revolutionary's conceptual repertoire. Philosophy might involve abstractions, Qu seemed to be saying, but it was nonetheless central to a deep comprehension of the world and the role of humans within it. For the revolutionary, this was not a passing concern, but an imperative need: to change the world, one must first know it. The Marxist revolutionary thus had to invest the intellectual energy sufficient to master philosophy; its history, concepts and modes of thought could not legitimately be regarded as a waste of time. For there to be a credible and productive union of theory and practice, theory had to extend to philosophy; and this would pay dividends in terms of the precision and logic of representations of the world that would function as a guide to revolutionary action. Qu firmly believed in such a union of theory and practice, and attempted to live it in his short but spectacular political career.

While Qu's introduction of Marxist philosophy to a Chinese audience was highly significant to the ideological development of the CCP, the invitation to philosophy that he voiced was not immediately answered by other theorists within or around the Party. It was not until the late 1920s and particularly during the early 1930s that

other philosophers stepped forward to build on the groundwork Qu had laid. During that hiatus, the political context of Marxist philosophy was to change dramatically with the triumph of the New Philosophy in the Soviet Union (see Chapter 5). The triumph of this version of dialectical materialism was to have enormous consequences for Marxist philosophy in China, for it signalled the subordination of philosophy to Party dictate, and it introduced a particular view of philosophical orthodoxy. As we will observe, influential Marxist philosophers in China chose to operate consciously within the strictures of this orthodoxy, but nevertheless were persuaded by it *philosophically*. This is an important point, for Western observers have by and large given little credence to the persuasive power of the New Philosophy. Yet, Chinese philosophers of considerable intellectual stature and strength of will were so persuaded; it was not only the political implications that deterred them from adopting a more independent philosophical stance. The voluminous writings of Ai Siqi and Li Da, two of the most important Chinese philosophers of the twentieth century, give every indication that they were convinced by the philosophical claims of the New Philosophy, and accepted the logic of its linkage of philosophy and politics. No one who has experienced the sparkling wit and philosophical erudition of Ai's philosophical columns and articles of the early 1930s could doubt the sincerity of his philosophical commitment (see Chapters 6 and 7). Not only was Ai capable of sophisticated philosophical discourse and debate, he was able to communicate at a less challenging level with his lay audience, which was hungry for enlightenment on the seemingly impenetrable abstractions of dialectical materialism. His capacity for simplification and his skill as a populariser represent a significant theme in the early history of Marxist philosophy in China. While Li Da did not possess Ai's happy knack for popularisation, he established his philosophical reputation by composing *Elements of Sociology* (first edition published 1935), a vast and uncompromising treatise on the New Philosophy, which traverses and pronounces judgement on all areas of significance within dialectical and historical materialism (see Chapter 8). These two philosophers were, through their translations of key Soviet texts on philosophy and through their own elaborative texts, central to the complex process through which the Soviet Union's New Philosophy was introduced to a Chinese audience.

It was these, Ai's and Li's translations and elaborations, which constituted the corpus of texts that their most important reader – Mao Zedong – turned to in late 1936 when the opportunity and inclination facilitated his close engagement with the New Philosophy (see Chapter 9). Mao was not, like Ai and Li, a professional philosopher; if anything, he more closely resembled Qu Qiubai who combined political activism and leadership with a penchant for intellectual inquiry and composition. Mao accepted implicitly the New Philosophy's assertion of the 'Party-character' of philosophy; but like Ai and Li, he recognised that the New Philosophy *was* philosophy, and not merely Party-inspired dogma. While it certainly possessed a tendency towards the latter characteristic, it was the breadth and complexity of its philosophical system that appealed to Mao's inclination to understand the world intellectually and philosophically. Philosophy intrigued Mao; and the New Philosophy combined so rich a brew of philosophical inquiry and political rectitude that its appeal to Mao was instant and instinctive. The compass

that guided Mao's journey of discovery through the New Philosophy was, however, rather different to that of Ai and Li. Mao had by 1936 established himself as the CCP's most formidable political leader, although the reality of this had not yet been translated into appointment to the Party's supreme office. While philosophy was only one of the themes on which he wrote (military strategy was another), he recognised that an acceptable level of competence in Marxist theory and philosophy was essential to those who aspired to leadership of a Marxist party. His motivation for engagement with the demanding texts of the New Philosophy was thus not just a disinterested quest for philosophical erudition. Desire for philosophical understanding and shrewd political calculation combined to generate a powerful incentive to accept the rigours of sustained philosophical study.

Mao's period of intense philosophical study was to have a profound effect on the development of his thought and on the trajectory described by the CCP's ideology. Not only did Mao continue to engage philosophically with the New Philosophy after mid 1937, and well into the early 1940s (see Chapter 10), he continued thereafter to think philosophically about the practical problems of China's revolution and socialist transition. Some of his best-known texts of the 1950s and early 1960s – 'On the ten great relationships', 'On the correct handling of contradictions among the people', 'Where do correct ideas come from?' – have a clearly philosophical orientation, and bear the unmistakable stamp of the New Philosophy, although without formal attribution.[13] Other less known texts – 'Talks on questions of philosophy' (1964), 'Talk on Sakata's article' (1964), and his annotations to various texts on philosophy written after late 1964 – confirm Mao's predilection to think philosophically and in terms clearly recognisable as originating in his study of philosophy in 1936–37.[14] Not only did Mao continue to study philosophy and think philosophically after the late 1930s, he encouraged the establishment of institutions – such as the Yanan New Philosophy Association – whose brief, as its title implies, was to propagate the New Philosophy amongst Party members during the late 1930s and early 1940s (see Chapter 11). The influence of the New Philosophy, with Mao's backing, was such that Party cadres came to assume that the study of Marxist philosophy was a normal requirement of Party life.

It was not, however, to be too many years before the title, although not the substance, of the New Philosophy was to disappear from the Party lexicon, as Mao strove to unite the various dimensions of Party ideology under the rubric of his own thought: 'Mao Zedong Thought'. The process of the Sinification of Marxism had been a theme close to Mao's heart for some years, as had been the Sinification of Marxist philosophy for Ai Siqi (see Chapters 6 and 7). With the Party's adoption, at its Seventh Party Congress in April 1945, of 'Mao Zedong Thought' as the Party's guiding ideology, that process was formally resolved, although it left unstated

[13] See Stuart R. Schram (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung unrehearsed: Talks and letter, 1956–71* (Harmondsworth: penguin 1974), pp. 61–83; *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), Vol. V, pp. 384–421; and Mao Tse-tung, *Four Essays on Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), pp. 134–6.

[14] Schram, *Mao Tse-tung unrehearsed*, pp. 212–30; *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought (1949–1968)* (Arlington, Virginia: Joint Publication Research Service, 1974), Part II, pp. 397–402; *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 493–507.

(deliberately so) the extent of Mao's debt to his intellectual sources. The danger for the unwary observer is to assume that this change of nomenclature signalled a diminution in Mao's commitment to the universal principles of Marxism (at least, as he saw these) and the emergence of a specifically Chinese or Sinified Marxism that owed little to its European and Soviet progenitors. Having recognised the immense influence of the New Philosophy on the development of Mao's thought in the late 1930s, it is not difficult to discern its continuing influence in his own thought and amongst Marxist philosophers in China down through and beyond the period of Mao's China. And this raises the possibility that Marxism in China – at least in its philosophical dimension – did remain more orthodox than many observers have allowed.

3. THE MARXIST PHILOSOPHER IN CHINA AS 'AUTHOR'

The history of Marxist philosophy in China during its seminal phase – 1923 to 1945 – is this book's principal focus. It is a history told through the writings and activities of four philosophers – Qu Qiubai, Ai Siqi, Li Da and Mao Zedong. Other Marxist philosophers in China (such as Shen Zhiyuan) made a contribution, but it was the contribution of these four to the introduction, elaboration and dissemination of Marxist philosophy in China that was the most significant. Without their contribution – theoretical as well as practical – the history of Marxist philosophy in China would have been very different. It is consequently their writings on philosophy that our main concern; it is their handling of the complex problems of Marxist philosophy and their modes of elaboration that will occupy our attention.

Before plunging into their philosophical writings, however, it is important to raise a cautionary note about the concept of the 'author'.[15] These philosophers wrote their texts on philosophy consciously under the influence of an existing tradition of Marxist philosophy. Qu, for example, wrote his initial and most extensive pieces on Marxist philosophy soon after his sojourn in Russia and conversion to Marxism in 1922. While in Russia, he had steeped himself in Marxist theory and had experienced Communist institutions and theoretical practices at first hand, and he quickly came to recognise that the role of the Marxist theorist and philosopher was to work within the framework of Communist theoretical traditions, with all the limitations that this imposed.[16] His task now was to elaborate and, importantly, defend that tradition. While there remained room for disagreement and debate in Marxist parties over philosophical issues in the early 1920s, Qu was under no illusion that the Marxist philosopher's scope for personal discretion in matters of

[15] For a critical discussion of the concept of the 'author', see Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), esp. pp. 103–13.

[16] Qu was certainly not unaware of other theoretical and philosophical perspectives at the time of his conversion to Marxism. He had read Hu Shi's *Zhexue shi dagang* [Compendium on the history of philosophy], had studied Indian philosophy, and had steeped himself in Buddhism. See *Qu Qiubai wenji* [Collected Writings of Qu Qiubai] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1987–1995), Vol. 7, p. 704. See also Marián Gálik, *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism (1917–1930)* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), Chapter 9.

theoretical innovation was unlimited or unaffected by party affiliation. Indeed, the evidence suggests that Qu accepted that his conversion to Marxism did bring limitations to his naturally creative and expressive intellect.[17] Having once situated himself within the Marxist theoretical framework, Qu accepted that he wrote within the parameters of that theoretical tradition; he was, as it were, on the 'inside'. While this mental relocation did not entirely stifle his capacity for fine judgements and distinctions of a personal nature, his mental horizons were now more severely limited by contemporary constructions of orthodoxy than had previously been the case.

The philosophical texts written by Qu are thus, from this perspective, not the work of a sole author; they are, in a sense, 'owned' by a tradition.[18] The same is true of Ai Siqi, Li Da and Mao Zedong. While they wrote in a philosophical and political context somewhat different from that within which Qu's principal writings on philosophy were composed, they also consciously accepted the limitations that the New Philosophy imposed. While they may have physically 'written' the texts on philosophy that bear their name, they were in them addressing issues of common and longstanding concern to the theoretical tradition to which they had now affiliated themselves. Their philosophical writings cannot, therefore, be regarded as expressions of individual worldviews arrived at through a process of deep personal introspection. Rather, they are, in large part, the voice of the collective theoretical movement in which they had submerged themselves. As Marxist philosophers to the communist movement in China, they could lay little claim to originality in terms of the general thrust of their analysis; their task was to elaborate, disseminate and defend an already existing worldview. Nevertheless, within these larger parameters, their exposition of philosophy from a Marxist perspective often reveals a capacity for interesting and creative judgements, and novel forms of elaboration. We will identify these as we proceed through their writings.

While there did remain a notional sphere for personal discretion in the elaboration of Marxist philosophy, even into the 1930s, one should not press this point too far or exaggerate the distinctiveness of the response of these philosophers to problem areas in Marxist philosophy. There is often predictability in their responses, one anticipated by the logical structure of Marxism itself, and, in the case

[17] *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, pp. 696–7. Bernadette Li Yu-ning makes the following perceptive observation: 'As a Party spokesman, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai drew a dark curtain over his inner mind: no longer are there any philosophical ramblings and self-reflections in his writing'. *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai: From Youth to Party Leadership, 1899–1928* (New York: Unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1967), p. 117.

[18] Indeed, we know from his own testimony that Qu used only a limited number of translations of foreign works, most certainly Russian, in the preparation of his lectures on philosophy. *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, p. 705. Bernadette Yu-ning Li has argued that Qu relied entirely on Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*, although the evidence for this assertion is less than convincing. See *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*, pp. 138–40. Widmer suggests that there is good reason to believe Qu's article 'Russian literature before the October Revolution' (published 1927, written 1921–22) was pieced together by Qu from one or more studies in Russian. Despite this suggestion, one supported by Russian and Japanese scholars, she argues that it is still important to analyse this work as reflective of Qu's own views. A similar argument is made here about his writings on philosophy. See Ellen Widmer, 'Qu Qiubai and Russian literature', in Merle Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese literature in the May Fourth era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 106, and note 12.

of Ai, Li and Mao, by the philosophical and political imperatives of the New Philosophy. The challenge is to focus attention on the problematic notion of Marxist philosopher in China as 'author', and through this achieve a deeper understanding of the process through which Marxist philosophy was introduced into China and elaborated for a Chinese audience. While they may have put their own gloss on aspects of Marxist philosophy, they should not, for that reason, be conceived as authors whose philosophy was the highly personalised creation of individual thinkers free to think and write whatever they pleased. The implications of this judgement are important for an evaluation of the extent to which Marxism in China drew on Marxism in Europe and the Soviet Union, and particularly the latter; they are important too for an understanding of the level of theoretical awareness of Marxism within the early Chinese communist movement. The tendency of interpretation has been to emphasise discontinuity, to regard Marxism in China as a very different creature to its European and Soviet counterparts, and to downplay the importance of Marxist theory to early proponents of Marxism in China. The writings of our four philosophers can be employed to challenge these conclusions. They wrote consciously within the confines of the established theoretical tradition of Marxism. They perceived their principal function as being to introduce and explain that tradition to a Chinese audience; it was not to generate a highly personalised philosophy. This, in itself, signals a high level of continuity between their philosophical writings and those of their Marxist sources. At the moment of its birth, Marxist philosophy in China, through Qu's elaboration, drew its first breath from European and Russian air, and continued to draw sustenance from it in the later writings of Ai, Li and Mao. Moreover, their commentary on philosophy, while in large part derivative, was wide-ranging and at times complex. This suggests that the mainstream view of the theoretical isolation and immaturity of the early communist movement in China does not bear close scrutiny. From 1923, erudite explanations of Marxist philosophy flowed from the pens of Chinese philosophers. Subsequent chapters offer a validation of this judgement.

The writings of Marxist philosophers in China cover many themes. One that emerged in Qu's writings of 1923 and remained a continuing concern for later philosophers was the dilemma of determinism. To resolve this dilemma, they found it necessary to understand the history of Western philosophy, and in particular the great division between idealism and materialism. They perforce had to address the major and interrelated themes of Marxist philosophy – ontology, epistemology and logic – areas of concern to all philosophies. Their understanding of these themes is interesting in its own right, but more particularly for what it tells us about the history of Marxist philosophy in China. One of the characteristics evident in their combined consideration of Marxist philosophy and other philosophies is repetition. This characteristic flows logically from the point made earlier: that Marxist philosophers in China worked within the constraints of a philosophical tradition and, after 1931, within the even tighter constraints of orthodoxy. This characteristic of Marxist philosophy in China, while rather tedious for those who seek novelty, is highly informative of the developmental trajectory and level of orthodoxy of this philosophy; it speaks volumes of the genealogy of Marxist philosophy in China, and its provenance in European and Soviet Marxist philosophy. While I have

endeavoured to minimise repetition in elaborating the philosophy of the four philosophers under consideration, justice can only be done to this subject and to the philosophers under consideration by reference to and explanation of themes that are present in the writings of one philosopher that may have appeared in the writings of previous philosophers. Reading the texts of Marxist philosophy in China is not for the faint hearted; they are theoretically dense, complex, frequently abstract, and often repetitive. Hopefully the elaborations offered in this volume serve as an accessible introduction to the difficult but highly significant realm of intellectual inquiry that is Marxist philosophy in China.

The focus of the next chapter is the history of Marxist philosophy prior to its introduction to China in the early 1920s. When Chinese intellectuals turned to the daunting task of comprehending and elaborating Marxist philosophy, they quickly discovered that it had a history tightly interwoven with the history of the various Marxist movements and parties in Europe and Russia, and the struggles between them. They were thus obliged to make choices, both philosophical and political, for there was no uncontested interpretation of Marxist philosophy to which they could readily turn. Their choices were, however, simplified by the political contexts in which they found themselves, for these pointed in the direction of a reading or readings of Marxist philosophy that were acceptable, even orthodox. And it was the eventual emergence of orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy, and the radical narrowing of choices this imposed, which constructed the framework within and around which the history of Marxist philosophy in China proceeded.

CHAPTER 2

MARX, MARXIST PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'ORTHODOXY'

Prior to its introduction to China, Marxist philosophy had become the subject of bitter controversy amongst Marxist intellectuals. Their fierce polemics derived from a growing awareness that Marxist philosophy – often referred to as 'dialectical materialism' – encompassed the core ontological and epistemological premises of the entire Marxist theoretical system, including its political economy, social theory and philosophy of history. Dialectical materialism posed questions about the very nature of reality, a reality that Marxists sought to understand in order to change it. Thus, while dialectical materialism deals with issues that any philosophy must address – about the nature of reality and how humans can know it – it differs from other philosophies in possessing a quite articulate political significance and intention. If the nature of reality – its ontological character and laws of motion – could be comprehended through a correct epistemology, then the possessor of this knowledge would be in a position to steal a political march on those whose understanding of reality was faulty or less comprehensive. The stakes were thus high, or so it seemed to Marxist intellectuals, and their motivation for philosophical erudition keen.

Marxism does not therefore perceive philosophy as a disinterested inquiry into the relationship between humans and their natural and social worlds. Rather, an understanding of the laws that govern movement and change in the universe has been regarded as the rational premise from which extrapolations regarding the direction and speed of change in human society can be based, and the extent to which political intervention might accelerate this process. The philosophical laws deduced by dialectical materialism have thus been seen as relevant to an understanding of the historical process whereby the proletariat, the class nominated by Marx as the 'universal class', will (supposedly) in the fullness of time triumph in its revolutionary struggle with classes antagonistic to it, and establish a communist society. Philosophy has thus not been seen within the Marxist tradition as separate from history, or from politics. Rather, philosophy has been perceived (although, as we will observe, not necessarily by Marx himself) as the indispensable tool of the communist revolutionary. It is no coincidence that philosophy has held a fascination for prominent Marxist leaders such as Lenin and Mao, as well as Marxist theorists like Lukács, Korsch and Lefebvre.[19]

[19] See Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* (London: NLB, 1970); Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London: Merlin Press, 1971); and Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968). See also the four volume series – *Issues in*

In the first part of this chapter, we turn to a necessarily brief reconstruction of the history of Marxist philosophy in Europe and Russia prior to the 1920s. The purpose of this exercise is to provide a sense of the philosophical tradition inherited by philosophers in China on their conversion to Marxism. It will become apparent that they were immediately confronted by theoretical choices and political challenges when approaching the elaboration of Marxist philosophy for a Chinese audience. Marxism, they discovered, was not and never had been a unified theoretical tradition; there were competing currents within it, each claiming legitimacy as the correct interpretation. They discovered that even the dominant or 'orthodox' version of Marxist philosophy – that endorsed by powerful figures and institutions within the Marxist revolutionary movement – was contested. How were Marxist philosophers in China to know which of the available versions of dialectical materialism was correct; and to what extent were their judgments to be influenced by political as opposed to purely philosophical considerations? From the early 1930s, as we will observe, Marxist philosophers in China were persuaded by the version of Marxist philosophy propagated in the Soviet Union and described as the 'New Philosophy', which laid emphatic claim to the status of 'orthodoxy' within the international communist world. Most Marxist philosophers in China were persuaded by the New Philosophy's claim to orthodoxy, yet their commitment to this philosophy, and its elaboration in China, was premised on philosophical as well as political grounds. They were persuaded by its philosophical logic; but they were also conscious of the political implications attendant on any equivocation regarding the New Philosophy's claim to orthodoxy. The issue of the New Philosophy's 'orthodoxy' was never far from the minds of Marxist philosophers in China; and they assumed the responsibility of ensuring that the Chinese rendition of the New Philosophy remained as orthodox as its Soviet progenitor.

The concept of 'orthodoxy' – how it is constructed, how it is reinforced – is thus central to an understanding of the way in which Marxist philosophers in China confronted the challenge of the elaboration and dissemination of Soviet Marxist philosophy in the early to mid 1930s. I will argue, in the second part of this chapter, that 'orthodoxy' is an intellectual construction whose claim to represent the 'truth' is reinforced politically, and relies ultimately on its relationship with power; it is power that sanctifies 'truth' and employs it for its own ends. 'Orthodoxy' is thus a construction, an historically and politically created belief. This perspective on 'orthodoxy' underpins the argument pursued throughout this book that Marxist philosophy in China, when measured against the prescriptions of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy, which constituted the orthodoxy of the day in the international communist world, was very much more orthodox than one would anticipate from Western scholarly accounts of Marxism in China. The issue for Marxist philosophers in China was not whether the Soviet Union's New Philosophy was orthodox – which they accepted it was – but how this reading of Marxist philosophy might be applied in the Chinese context *without* sacrificing the supposedly universal truths on which its claims to orthodoxy rested. The 'Sinification' of Marxist

Marxist Philosophy – edited by John Mepham and David-Hillel Ruben, and published by Harvester Press, Brighton, in the 1970s and 1980s.

philosophy thus became a major theoretical preoccupation. We will explore in subsequent chapters their attempts to discover a philosophical formula that could sustain the status of 'orthodoxy', as understood by the criteria of contemporary Soviet Marxist philosophy, but which nonetheless could be applied in the Chinese context in a way that facilitated the achievement of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) historically conditioned revolutionary goals.

But why could Marxist philosophers in China not appeal directly to the authority of Marx in their quest to understand Marxist philosophy; after all, had he not written widely on philosophical issues in his early critique of Hegelian philosophy? Why need they defer to an interpretation of Marxist philosophy that appears well removed from the philosophical concerns of Marx himself? The answer lies in Marx's decision, in the mid 1840s, to abandon philosophy for political economy as the key to comprehend human history, and Engels' decision to fill the consequent philosophical lacuna in Marx's writings with a philosophy very much at odds with the philosophical concerns of the young Marx. Engels' foray into philosophy was sufficiently extensive to lay the basis of a Marxist philosophy later described as 'dialectical materialism'; and it was this rendition of Marxist philosophy that was to have a far more pronounced influence on Marxist philosophy in China than Marx's own philosophical writings, which remained largely unknown in China until the post-Mao era.

Not all Marxists in Europe and Russia shared Engels' views on philosophy, and they quickly became the subject of philosophical polemic and personal invective. These controversies, from the late nineteenth century, saw the emergence of claims by its supporters that Engels' reading of Marxist philosophy represented *the* philosophical orthodoxy of the Marxist tradition and should thus be immune from criticism. It was not, however, until the late 1920s and early 1930s that one version of 'dialectical materialism' was to achieve the status of orthodoxy through the political intervention of the CPSU. By that time, Marxist philosophy had travelled a long distance – politically and philosophically – from the philosophical concerns of the young Marx.

1. MARX ON PHILOSOPHY, ENGELS ON PHILOSOPHY

Some commentators perceive the origins of 'dialectical materialism' in the general project of Western philosophy from earliest times to explain the nature of reality, and movement and change within it.[20] Others have argued strongly and often critically that its origins are to be found in Engels' attempt to formulate a philosophy of nature from which the history of human society might be deduced, an intellectual project that Marx himself did not endorse.[21] The latter viewpoint thus rejects the assumption, so important to the establishment of dialectical materialism as orthodox

[20] See for example Loren R. Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), esp. Chapter 2.

[21] See Z.A. Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism: A Philosophical and Sociological Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 11.

Marxist philosophy, that the ideas of Engels and Marx can be readily equated,[22] and that Marx knew and approved of Engels' project to provide a philosophical basis for the materialist conception of history.[23] From this perspective, Engels' forays into philosophy (contained in such works as *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* and *Dialectics of Nature*) diverged from Marx's approach in a number of fundamental respects, the most important being that Marx did not perceive human history as an expression of nature, a nature governed by general philosophical laws external to human society. To the contrary, human history was a history of human interaction with nature; it was not a passive reflection of the laws of nature. Marx had accordingly abandoned philosophical attempts to explain history, developing in its place a political economy within which humans are attributed, according to Lichtheim, with critical reason, and the capacity to interact with and change nature in a dynamic way.[24]

In the early 1840s, Marx had written extensively on philosophical issues, and his attempt to understand the emergence and nature of capitalism, the state and religion drew heavily on a philosophical perspective inspired by yet critical of Hegel's philosophy. In documents such as 'Critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state' (1843), 'On the Jewish question' (1843) and 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (1844), Marx drew heavily on the themes of alienation and estrangement to critique the lot of humans within an emergent capitalism, and to comprehend the nature and significance of the modern state. These are the themes that characterise Marx's philosophy. However, they are not the themes that characterise 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy, and they are 'absent from the work of Engels, Plekhanov and Lenin alike'.[25] The philosophical writings of the young Marx were 'virtually abandoned by Marxists', and did not become available until the late 1920s and early 1930s, by which time the formalisation of a Soviet Marxist philosophy based on Engels' philosophy was well advanced.[26] Indeed, it was not until the renaissance in Marxist theory in Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s that Marx's early philosophical writings were to gain a wide and sympathetic audience.

One of the prominent reasons for this lengthy hibernation of Marx's early writings on philosophy was his adoption of political economy as the key to unlock

[22] A primer on dialectical materialism published in the Soviet Union explicitly makes this point and rejects assertions to the contrary as the work of 'bourgeois ideologues and revisionists of all stripe'. Dialectical materialism was 'founded by Marx and Engels' and is an 'integral doctrine'. See V. Krapivin, *What is Dialectical Materialism?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), pp. 91–6.

[23] See George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), Chapter 4; Lucio Colletti's 'Introduction' to Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 14–6; Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1958), pp. 280 ff, and passim; Terrel Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), passim; Norman Levine, *The Tragic Deception: Marx Contra Engels* (Oxford and Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1975); and Richard T. De George, *Patterns of Soviet Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), esp. pp. 107–8.

[24] Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study*, esp. pp. 246–7; see also Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 13–9.

[25] See Colletti's 'Introduction' to Marx, *Early Writings*, pp. 14–6.

[26] Ibid., p. 17.

the mysteries of the origins and nature of capitalism. Marx described in 1859 the process that led to his abandonment of philosophy as follows:

> The first work which I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical re-examination of the Hegelian philosophy of law; the introduction to this work being published in the *Deutsch-Franzosische Jahrbucher* issued in Paris in 1844. My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy.[27]

Consideration of the 'general development of the human mind' was thus set aside as a means of understanding legal relations and political forms, and replaced by political economy, which held the key to the comprehension of 'the material conditions of life'. However, despite Marx's repudiation of philosophy as the key to an understanding of human history, there remain in his mature work significant traces of his earlier philosophical approach. As Maurice Dobb points out, 'if Marx's economic analysis was distinguished by its historical setting, his historical interpretation had deep philosophical roots – roots originating in the Hegelian philosophy'.[28] Marx's political economy was itself premised on the assumption of the materiality of reality; there was thus an ontological premise at work that derived from his earlier largely philosophical repudiation of the idealism of the Hegelian philosophical system.[29] Moreover, there inevitably exists within Marx's writings an epistemology, a mechanism for 'knowing' the origins and nature of capitalist society, which was the preoccupation of his mature writings; and at times, these epistemological assumptions appear on the surface of such Marx texts as the 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* and his 'Marginal Notes' on Adolph Wagner's text on political economy.[30] Marx's political economy also incorporated the belief that capitalism had its own inner laws of motion that were dialectical in character; the movement and change dictated by these laws were not random, and there was consequently purpose and progress in capitalism's development.

While limitations of space preclude a more detailed analysis of philosophical traces in the writings of the mature Marx, the point remains that, even following his supposed repudiation of the possibility of a philosophical investigation into the history and development of capitalism, he continued to draw on modes of thought that possessed a philosophical dimension. His writings consequently could and indeed did give comfort to those who later sought to elaborate the *philosophy* of Marxism, one that supposedly derived from Marx himself. Yet, the comparative

27 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), Preface.

28 See Maurice Dobb's 'Introduction' to Ibid., p. 6.

29 See, in particular, Marx's critique of Hegel's idealist logic in 'Critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state', in Marx, *Early Writings*, pp. 70–7.

30 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973); and Karl Marx, 'Marginal Notes on A. Wagner, *Lehrbuch der Politischen Ökonomie*', in *Theoretical Practice*, No. 5 (1972).

absence of purely philosophical texts in the writings of the mature Marx suggests that he would not have approved of the project to create, in his name, a highly formalised philosophical system premised on a limited number of fundamental laws and principles from which the development of nature and history could be deduced. Still less would he have approved of such a philosophical system's complete subordination to the dictates of the state, the very situation that was to emerge in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s.

If Marx was disinclined to elaborate a philosophical system that could be applied to the analysis of history, his friend and collaborator Frederick Engels demonstrated no such disinclination, and in a number of texts explicitly on philosophy he elaborated the basis of Marxist philosophy. Although some of these texts were written after Marx's death, Engels in each case claimed the approval of Marx for the project to articulate a philosophy to complement Marx's materialist conception of history. For example, some three years after Marx's death, Engels published *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German philosophy*, and in the 'Foreword' to the book edition of this work (1888), Engels invoked Marx's early interest in philosophy as one reason for providing 'a short, connected account of our relation to the Hegelian philosophy, of how we proceeded from as well as separated from it'.[31] Similarly, in the second 'Preface' to *Anti-Dühring,* written some eleven years after Marx's death, Engels claimed that he had 'read the whole manuscript [of *Anti-Dühring*] to him [Marx] before it was printed', and implied that it had Marx's approval.[32] In addition, Engels had written to Marx in May 1873 providing him an outline of Engels' ideas on the philosophy of natural science, ideas that were to form the core of Engels' unfinished manuscripts later entitled *Dialectics of Nature* and published only in 1925; and there is no textual evidence that Marx objected to this foray of Engels into the philosophy of nature and science.[33] Engels thus claimed Marx's approval for his creation of a philosophy that would function as the basis of the Marxist theoretical system. In so doing, he provided plentiful ammunition to those who wished to conflate Marx and Engels in the realm of philosophy and to acquire Marx's authority for the formalised philosophy that dialectical materialism ultimately became.

Engels argued in *Anti-Dühring* that the same laws of dialectics govern nature and history, and that these laws are also evident in the realm of human consciousness. The initial purpose of philosophy is the discovery of these laws of dialectics through a largely inductive and empirical approach in which dialectical laws are the final result of investigation, and not the starting point.[34] Observation of reality confirms that the universe (nature, history, thought) is in motion, and this motion is dialectical, allowing for both movement and stasis. Stasis can, however, only be a relative phase in the absolute imperative of change, for even during stasis internal

[31] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes* (Moscow: FLPH, 1951), Vol. II, p. 325.

[32] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring (Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science)* (Peking FLP, 1976), p. 9.

[33] Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* (Moscow: FLPH, 1954), pp. 5–6, 8.

[34] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 43.

changes occur within phenomena that dictate the reappearance of overt change.[35] The demiurge that creates this imperative for change and motion is internal contradiction, for all things contain contradiction; it is the ceaseless emergence of contradictions and the struggle between them that dictate that stasis can only ever be a relative condition. As Engels points out, 'as soon as we consider things in their motion, their change, their life, their reciprocal influence ... we immediately become involved in contradictions'.[36]

The ubiquity of contradictions, their interaction and the results of their interaction, are expressed as a series of laws which are, Engels asserts, abstracted from nature and history and not 'foisted' on them. In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels summarises these laws as follows:

> It is, therefore, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development, as well as thought itself. And indeed they can be reduced in the main to three:
>
> The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa;
>
> The law of the interpenetration of opposites;
>
> The law of the negation of the negation.[37]

Engels argued that the expression of these laws in reality leads to a 'spiral form of development'.[38]

Engels thus insisted that the laws of dialectics exist in nature, human society and thought. But how are these laws to be discovered; how can this dialectical reality be known? In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels suggests that the 'great basic question of all philosophy ... is that concerning the relation of thinking and being', and he articulated the fundamental questions of epistemology as follows: 'in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of the cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality?'[39] He responds by dividing Western philosophy into two great camps – idealism and materialism – that had answered these questions in quite different fashion. For idealism, thought or spirit is dominant in relation to nature or being; materialism, on the other hand, regards nature or being as dominant. In support of the latter position, Engels points to practice (experiment and industry) as the most telling refutation of such 'philosophical crotchets' as idealism,[40] for 'we simply cannot get away from the fact that everything that sets men acting must find its way through their brains ... The influences of the external world upon man

35 Ibid., p. 77.
36 Ibid., pp. 152–3.
37 Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 83, see also p. 27.
38 Ibid., p. 27.
39 Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, pp. 334–5.
40 Ibid., p. 336.

expresses themselves in his brain, are *reflected* therein as feelings, thoughts, impulses, volitions...'[41]

One of the major problems with the materialist epistemological position articulated by Engels, and one that has continued to exercise subsequent Marxists, Marxist philosophers in China amongst them, is how a true reflection of reality is achieved. After all, all humans engage in practice of one sort or another, and yet, as Engels was only too well aware, many of them are clearly the bearers of false, unscientific reflections of reality. How is this to be explained, particularly if the reflection theory of epistemology, alluded to by Engels, and later taken up by Lenin, is invoked? Engels never satisfactorily answered this question, and the issue of the criteria by which true reflections of reality may be distinguished from the false has remained a controversial issue around which a number of highly charged philosophical polemics of considerable political significance have been fought. By the early 1930s, Soviet Marxist philosophy perceived the interaction of human thought with nature through practice as the dynamic process that constituted the best guarantee that reflections of reality in the human brain are correct. Wedded to this notion was the historicist suggestion that the context of human thought can place limitations on its veracity; so, for example, it is only with the rise of modern industry and the creation of the industrial proletariat that the exploitative character of class society can be faithfully reflected in the knowledge gained by the industrial proletariat through its experience of the exploitative nature of capitalism. But do the industrial proletariat gain a complete understanding of capitalism in one fell swoop; can the totality of reality be reflected in the human brain immediately? Here, Soviet and Chinese Marxist philosophers invoked the distinction – articulated by Engels and later Lenin – between absolute and relative truth: the aggregation of the myriad relative truths will, in the fullness of time, provide absolute truth, for the accumulation of 'eternal truths', as Engels calls them, is a process, one that proceeds unevenly in different areas of human inquiry.[42]

While these concepts elaborated originally by Engels – of a material reality subject to the laws of dialectics, and of practice as the kernel of a correct epistemology – constituted the foundation on which a formalised Marxist philosophy could emerge, not all Marxists have been prepared to accept Engels' rendition of them, or their interpretation at the hands of subsequent influential Marxist intellectuals, and in particular Plekhanov and Lenin.

2. PLEKHANOV AND LENIN: THE DEFENCE OF 'ORTHODOX' MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

While there is considerable justification for perceiving dialectical materialism as originating with Engels rather than Marx, the point remains that the emergence and defence of an 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy relied on the assumption of an identity of thought between the two. Indeed, Engels' writings on philosophy were regarded

[41] Ibid., p. 341. Emphasis added.
[42] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 105–20.

in the writings of some of the earliest systematisers of dialectical materialism as logical extensions of Marx's thought, and this was to become an article of faith in the Soviet Marxist philosophy inherited by Chinese Marxists in the 1920s and 1930s. The proponents of 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy could thus lay claim to a lineage going back to Marx, and in so doing reinforce the philosophy's claim to the status of orthodoxy.[43]

One of the most important figures in the attempt to establish an 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy was the celebrated Russian Marxist George Plekhanov (1856–1918), who is credited by some with being the first to coin and use the term 'dialectical materialism' (possibly in 1891).[44] He was also to follow in the footsteps of Engels' *Anti-Dühring* by perceiving the political significance of philosophy, and consequently writing about philosophy in a highly polemical way. This is clearly in evidence in Plekhanov's writings such as *The Materialist Conception of History* (1897) and *Materialismus Militans* (1908), which are highly charged with personal invective against those such as Bogdanov, a follower of Mach and Avenarius, who had criticised the philosophical, and in particular the epistemological, dimensions of Marxism. There was, according to Plekhanov, an orthodox and correct way of thinking about philosophy, and those who did not conform were beyond the pale. The following passage from *Materialismus Militans* is characteristic of the polemical tone of a good deal of the philosophical writings of the Russian Marxists:

> You are terribly mistaken, dear Sir [Bogdanov], if you imagine that I am throwing out more or less obvious hints to the effect that you should be, if not hanged, at least 'banished' from the confines of Marxism at the earliest possible moment. If any one intended to treat you in this way, he would first of all have to come up against the utter *impossibility of fulfilling* his harsh design ... no ideological Pompadour could possibly 'banish' from the confines of a particular teaching a 'thinker' who was already *outside them*. And that you are outside the confines of Marxism is clear for all those who know that the whole edifice of this teaching rests upon *dialectical materialism*, and who realise that you, as a convinced Machist, do not and cannot hold the materialist viewpoint.[45]

One can perceive in this passage the attempted construction of an orthodoxy whose tenets could be employed to attack and exclude those whose views were perceived as a threat. Its virulently polemical tone set the benchmark for future debate within Marxist philosophy, and is a tone quite evident in Lenin's philosophical writings and in the Soviet Union's New Philosophy that was to have such a pronounced influence on Marxist philosophy in China in the 1930s. As we

[43] Jordan, for example, has argued that the notion 'that dialectical materialism was formulated once and for all in its final and perfect form by Marx and Engels is an idea deeply embedded in Soviet philosophy'. Z.A. Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism: A Philosophical and Sociological Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. x.

[44] Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union*, p. 25; see also Tom Bottomore and Maximilan Rubel (eds), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), Introduction; also Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 184. However, John Gerber claims that it was Joseph Dietzgen (1828–1886), the German 'worker-philosopher' whose thought Marx praised, who first coined the term 'dialectical materialism'. See Gerber's Preface to Serge Bricianer, *Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils* (Saint Louis: Telos Press, 1978), p. 4.

[45] George Plekhanov, *Materialismus Militans* (Moscow: Foreign Publishers, 1973), p. 8, emphasis in original.

will observe (see Chapters 6 and 7), much of Ai Siqi's philosophical writings was caste in the form of a polemic with his philosophical opponents, and this served to reinforce the politically charged nature of Marxist philosophy in China.

It is interesting that the formulation of dialectical materialism as the 'orthodox' interpretation of Marxist philosophy grew out of Plekhanov's polemic with the Russian Narodniks or populists, particularly Mikhailovsky, who had attacked Marxism in the early 1890s. In response to these attacks, Plekhanov wrote his famous treatise *In Defence of Materialism: The Development of the Monist View of History* (1894). Plekhanov here reiterates Engels' suggestion that the history of philosophy is the history of the struggle between materialism and idealism. However, while staunchly defending materialism,[46] Plekhanov argued strongly for the dialectical method contained in Hegelian idealist philosophy, particularly the notion that motion is inherent in all phenomena, and this is because 'every phenomenon is transformed into its own opposite'; development thus proceeds through the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa.[47] Indeed, it was Plekhanov who was to alter the sequence of the three dialectical laws outlined by Engels in *Dialectics of Nature* (see above), and to give prominence to the law of the interpenetration of opposites, a practice followed by Lenin, and subsequently by Soviet Marxism until the publication of Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* in 1938,[48] by which time the theory of contradictions (the unity of opposites) had become a central tenet of Marxist philosophy in China.[49]

However, Hegel's ideas were, according to Plekhanov, guilty of mysticism in perceiving reason as the demiurge of history, a reason unrelated to the material conditions of existence of human beings. The dialectical method of Hegel's philosophy ('the examination of phenomena in their development, in their origin and destruction') had to be combined with a materialist appreciation of the significance of the process of production in the unfolding of history. In this insight, Plekhanov argues, lies Marx's genius,[50] for he had recognised the overwhelming importance of the productive forces in historical development: 'On the basis of a particular state of the productive forces there come into existence certain relations of production, which receive their ideal expression in the legal notions of men and in more or less 'abstract rules', in unwritten customs and written laws'.[51] But while quoting

46 See, however, Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 185–88. Jordan suggests that Plekhanov did not endorse Engels' absolute materialism. Aware of the implications of Kant's critique of pure reason for all metaphysical speculation, including materialism, Plekhanov endorsed what Jordan calls a 'genetic materialism'.

47 George Plekhanov, *In Defence of Materialism: The Development of the Monist View of History* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1947), pp. 91–107.

48 See Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 188–90; also Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961); J.V. Stalin, 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism', in J.V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), pp. 835–73.

49 See Nick Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), Introduction.

50 Plekhanov, *In Defence of Materialism*, p. 138.

51 Ibid., p. 180.

approvingly from Marx's 'Preface' of 1859,[52] Plekhanov dismisses the idea that superstructural institutions can have no influence on the development of the economic foundation of society; their influence is, however, limited. 'Interaction between politics and economics exists', Plekhanov insists, for '[p]olitical institutions influence economic life. They either *facilitate* its development or *impede* it'.[53] He makes it very clear, however, that the starting point of historical analysis is the 'material conditions of life'. As he insists in his attack on Mikhailovsky, 'Dialectical materialism says that it is not the consciousness of men which determines their being, but on the contrary their being which determines their consciousness; that it is not in the philosophy but in the economy of a particular society that one must seek the key to understanding its particular condition'.[54] Consequently, '*Dialectical materialism is the highest development of the materialist conception of history*'.[55]

Plekhanov's most systematic exposition of dialectical materialism appears in *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (1908), one of his last works.[56] In this book, Plekhanov asserts the identity of the philosophical views of Marx and Engels, an important premise, as we have seen, for the construction of dialectical materialism as the orthodox philosophy of Marxism.[57] He continues by elaborating the common debt owed by Marx and Engels to Feuerbach. However, the latter, in struggling against the speculative and idealist character of Hegelian philosophy, had not appreciated nor made sufficient use of its dialectical element. Marx and Engels were to grasp the importance of combining Feuerbach's stress on materialism with the dialectical method of Hegel, for only thus could the motion, change and development of human history be explained.[58] Plekhanov emphasises the centrality of motion to dialectical materialism, and also the connection between motion and contradiction: 'The movement of matter underlies all the phenomena of nature. But motion is a contradiction'.[59] He also suggests that the contradictions that exist in concepts are 'only the reflection, the translation into the language of thought, of contradictions which exist in phenomena owing to the contradictory nature of their common foundation, namely movement'.[60]

The issue of how contradictions in reality can be faithfully reflected in human thought was a contentious one for both Plekhanov and Lenin. In *Materialismus Militans*, Plekhanov made the conventional dualistic distinction between thought and objects in material reality, but believed that the latter could be reflected in human thought, not just as the result of the impressions (sensations) they made on the human nervous system, but as a result of practice (experience) that allowed humans to test their concepts. If humans engage in practice, then 'our perceptions

[52] Ibid., p. 175.
[53] Ibid., pp. 185–6. Emphasis in original.
[54] Ibid., p. 292.
[55] Ibid., p. 291. Emphasis in original.
[56] George Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., n.d.).
[57] Ibid., pp. 3–4.
[58] Ibid., pp. 26–7.
[59] Ibid., p. 113.
[60] Ibid., p. 119.

conform to the objective nature of the things perceived'.[61] Similarly, for Lenin, practice represented the only means through which humans could come to recognise correct perceptions from the incorrect. In his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, written at the same time as Plekhanov's *Materialismus Militans* and for the same purpose of defending 'orthodox' Marxism, Lenin expended considerable energy elaborating the epistemology of dialectical materialism. He concluded that 'the materialist theory, the theory of the reflection of objects by our mind, is here presented [in Engels' 'Introduction' to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*] with absolute clarity: things exist outside us. Our perceptions and ideas are their images. Verification of these images, differentiation between true and false images, is given by practice'.[62] Lenin recognised, however, that the subject's attainment of a true reflection of reality requires a dialectical process, one in which numerous relative truths combine to provide, ultimately, absolute truth. The process of knowledge thus possesses an historical dimension, one in which the practice of the human subject within a concrete social context is central.[63]

While *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is primarily concerned with the epistemological dimensions of dialectical materialism, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* (1914–15) explored the dialectical component of Marxist philosophy in considerable detail, arguing the centrality of contradictions and their struggle to all phenomena and processes. As he pointed out in 'On the Question of Dialectics' (1915):

> The identity of opposites ... is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature (*including* mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their '*self-movement*,' in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the 'struggle' of opposites ... The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute.[64]

In his 'Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic', Lenin summarised this view as follows: 'In brief, dialectics can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites'.[65] He also provided, echoing Engels, a list of the laws of dialectics that incorporated the laws of the negation of the negation and the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa.[66] Lenin's endorsement of these laws of dialectics was to have a marked influence on the variant of dialectical materialism anointed by the CPSU as orthodoxy after 1931, and his views on this theme were widely quoted in Soviet philosophical texts of the early 1930s, and subsequently by Marxist philosophers in China.

61 *Materialismus Militans*, pp. 57–9, quoting Engels.
62 V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Peking: FLP, 1972), p. 119.
63 Ibid., pp. 152–3.
64 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1963); Vol. 38, p. 360. Emphasis in original.
65 Ibid., p. 223
66 Ibid., pp. 221–2.

3. MARXIST PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'ORTHODOXY'

While Plekhanov and Lenin sallied forth vigorously to do battle with those who disparaged or sought to revise 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy, they were not able or willing to impose their views on the political movements with which they were associated. Their defence of philosophical 'orthodoxy' and critique of philosophical opponents remained largely rhetorical, and the issue of what constituted 'orthodox' Marxist philosophy remained a moot point. In the absence of the power and determination to enforce a particular variant of Marxist philosophy on the various Marxist factions and parties, debate was to continue well into the 1920s as to which of a variety of readings of Marxist philosophy constituted the 'correct' reading. It was only in the late 1920s, with Stalin's achievement of complete dominance of the CPSU, that the political context and will emerged to define one interpretation of Marxist philosophy as orthodoxy and to enforce acceptance of that view through the threat of enforceable political sanctions.

The idea of 'orthodoxy' is thus central to an understanding of the manner in which the history of Marxist philosophy unfolded in Europe and Russia, and the way in which this history influenced the introduction and elaboration of Marxist philosophy in China during the 1920s and particularly the 1930s. It is not possible to fully answer the question why Marxist philosophers in China endorsed a particular variant of Marxist philosophy without considering the *philosophical* authority that this philosophy acquired through the political determination and enforcement of its status as 'orthodoxy'. This observation serves to remind us that an 'orthodoxy' is not a timeless truth, and that its status relies on political and other contextual considerations; it is an observation relevant to all systems of thought, but particularly so to Marxism, which has perceived philosophy as serving an explicit political purpose. The definition of core concepts and themes within Marxist philosophy has never been static, one reason being that the right to define and deploy these has been a source of struggle; interpretations of philosophy have been contested, not just in the realm of philosophy, but in the realm of politics. Marxism's diverse currents have differentiated themselves in part on the basis of their different readings of its philosophy, with different readings underpinned by different political purposes. This is not to underestimate the persuasive power that these philosophies may have exercised on their adherents philosophically. But a significant dimension of the persuasive power of 'orthodox' Marxist philosophies (for there have been a number and these have altered over time) has inevitably been their incorporation into regimes of truth constructed and defended by those in power. The distinction between a 'correct' and 'incorrect' reading of Marxist philosophy thus derives, not from the presumed truth content of one reading as opposed to another, but rather from the relationship to power of these readings. 'Orthodoxy' is the reading favoured by power, for its tenets reinforce power's assertions of legitimacy; and 'orthodoxy' is true because power decrees that it should be so. But power is unstable and finite, and so consequently are orthodoxy's verities. What passes for truth inevitably gives way to a rival account favoured by those to whom the leader's baton has passed.

The concept of 'orthodoxy' is not only essential for an understanding of how and why a particular view of Marxist philosophy entered China and had such a dramatic influence. It is also essential for an understanding of the way in which Western scholarship, by and large, has responded to and evaluated Marxism in China. A significant category of this scholarly evaluation has been a presumed Marxist 'orthodoxy', and the objective has almost invariably been to exaggerate the theoretical distance separating Marxism in China from this 'orthodoxy'.[67] The problem has been that the content of this 'orthodoxy', on which very significant and quite often harsh judgments about Chinese Marxism have been made, has been blandly assumed rather than clearly articulated, and constructed in a way that highlights discontinuity and difference rather than continuity and uniformity. This approach assumes a single Marxist 'orthodoxy' based on the classic texts of Marx and Engels, one that can be gleaned through a largely unproblematic empiricist reading.[68] A striking feature of this 'orthodoxy' is its static and ahistorical character, one based on a mechanical and undialectical understanding of Marx's perspective on social change. Indeed, this particular 'orthodoxy' is one that many Marxist intellectuals in both Europe and China would have rejected, and this raises the question of the propriety of employing it as a benchmark for evaluating the orthodoxy of Marxism in China. If it is accepted that Marxism is a theoretical and political tradition that has encompassed numerous often hostile theoretical and political currents, the suggestion that there exists one static Marxist orthodoxy against which all claims to Marxist orthodoxy are to be measured is implausible; indeed, it is historically untenable. The criteria that define orthodoxy are themselves historical and as such subject to change. A valid judgement regarding the orthodoxy of Marxist philosophy in China must therefore identify which orthodoxy is being employed for purposes of comparison.

In the chapters that follow, I make the judgment that Marxist philosophy in China, from the 1920s to the 1940s, was quite orthodox when evaluated against the criteria established by the orthodoxy then prevailing in the international communist

[67] See for example Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1951); and *Communism and China: Ideology in Flux* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). See also Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, revised ed.); *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983); and *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also Maurice Meisner, 'Utopian Socialist Themes in Maoism', in John W. Lewis (ed.), *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 207–52; 'Leninism and Maoism: Some Populist Perspectives on Marxism-Leninism in China', *China Quarterly* 45 (January–March 1971), pp. 2–36; and *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic of China* (New York: The Free Press, 1977, 1986).

[68] For a methodological critique of the field, see Paul Healy, 'Reading the Mao texts: the Question of Epistemology', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 20, 3 (1990), pp. 330–58; Arif Dirlik, 'The Predicament of Marxist Revolutionary Consciousness: Mao Zedong, Antonio Gramsci and the Reformulation of Marxist Revolutionary Theory', *Modern China* 9, 2 (April 1983), pp. 182–211; Nick Knight, 'Mao and History: Who Judges and How?', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 13 (January 1985), pp. 121–36; Nick Knight, 'The Marxism of Mao Zedong: Empiricism and Discourse in the Field of Mao Studies', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 16 (July 1986), pp. 7–22; and Nick Knight, 'Xifang Mao Zedong yanjiu: Fenxi yu pingjia' (Western Mao Studies: Analysis and Critique), *Mao Zedong sixiang yanjiu* 2, 3 and 4 (1989).

world. This is particularly the case for the 1930s, when a very distinct orthodoxy emerged in the form of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy. The historical emergence and political enforcement of this philosophical orthodoxy are described in Chapter 5, as are its main philosophical themes. This exercise not only allows an insight into the international context within which Marxist philosophy was introduced to China, but provides a sense of the authority this philosophy bore as it first came within the vision of Marxist philosophers in China. While these philosophers were, as I will demonstrate, persuaded by the philosophical claims of the New Philosophy, they were also aware of the political force of this new and belligerent claimant to the status of orthodoxy. However, while they subscribed to and defended the universal claims of this philosophy, they were also conscious of the need to elaborate this philosophy for a Chinese audience, and to apply it in ways that would enhance their own understanding of the Chinese historical context. They were advocates of the New Philosophy, but they were also Chinese revolutionaries who believed that this philosophy's ultimate justification lay in its capacity to facilitate the realisation of their political movement's revolutionary goals. They were thus committed to the intellectual process whereby the New Philosophy would assume a recognisably Chinese form while retaining its core, and supposedly universal, philosophical premises. The incorporation of the New Philosophy into Mao Zedong Thought, the CCP's official ideology from 1945, was to be the culmination of this process (see Chapter 11).

Marxist philosophy in China had thus, by 1945, moved a considerable distance from the philosophical concerns of the young Marx who, dismayed at the iniquities of an emergent capitalism, sought in the concepts of alienation and estrangement an explanation of the 'soulless conditions' of this 'heartless world'.[69] The philosophy that came eventually to bear Marx's name turned decisively from these humanistic concerns to the formulation of laws of nature that would provide explanations of motion and change, and the direction of change, in nature, society and human consciousness. And it was this latter philosophy, and not Marx's philosophy, which was to exert such a profound influence on Marxist philosophers in China from the 1920s to the 1940s.

However, in the early 1920s, when Qu Qiubai confronted the ambitious task of elaborating Marxist philosophy for a Chinese audience, there was as yet no established orthodoxy to which he had to conform. Qu nevertheless sought his interpretation from amongst those philosophical perspectives enjoying currency within the newly established Soviet Union. Employing this limited range of views, Qu Qiubai sought to unravel the complex web of reasoning surrounding dialectical materialism's core mystery, the dilemma of determinism. In doing so, he managed to convey to his Chinese audience a sense of the intellectual breadth and power, and revolutionary significance, of Marxist philosophy. The history of Marxist philosophy in China commences with Qu, and it is in the company of this

[69] Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 244.

fascinating and thought-provoking intellectual that our journey of discovery commences.

CHAPTER 3

QU QIUBAI AND THE ORIGINS OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

– In defence of materialism –

The history of Marxist philosophy in China does not commence with the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, for the theoretical concerns of the Party were elsewhere during the first years of its existence. As we observed in Chapter 1, prior to and in the years immediately after 1921, attention was concentrated on the materialist conception of history rather than the philosophical dimension of Marxism. Chinese intellectuals, such as Li Da and Li Dazhao, viewed with concern the deterministic tendency of Marxist social theory, and sought reassurance that history was not an inexorable economic process with a predetermined end, a process that excluded any role for humans, their consciousness and ethical concerns. These early Marxist theorists in China arrived at a theoretical position that allowed varying degrees of significance to ethics and conscious human action in pursuit of revolutionary social change. However, they did not address the deeper philosophical issues implied by their reading of Marxism's social theory, and could not do so for the materialist conception of history lacked the conceptual repertoire necessary to address the complex ontological and epistemological problems of determinism at a metaphysical level. Indeed, it is quite likely that lack of interest in and knowledge of Marxist philosophy within the CCP might have endured for some time, and possibly until the late 1920s, had it not been for the fact that one of its leaders was uniquely placed to commence the process of its introduction to a Chinese audience. That person, the pioneer of Marxist philosophy in China, was Qu Qiubai (1899–1935). While Qu is remembered in the West primarily for his writings on literary theory and for his short and ill-fated leadership of the CCP in 1927–28,[70] he has not been given due recognition as the first Marxist theorist in China to address and elaborate the complex philosophical dimension of

[70] On literature, see Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China: The Influence of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Ellen Widmer, 'Qu Qiubai and Russian Literature', in Merle Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 103–25; Marián Gálik, *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism (1917–1930)* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), Chapter 9. On Qu Qiubai's role in the politics of the 1920s and early 1930s, see Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953, 1963); and Richard C. Thornton, *China: The Struggle for Power, 1917–1972* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973); and from a very different perspective, Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961, second ed.).

Marxism, which he did in 1923.[71] In so doing, he provided his receptive Chinese audience with an introduction to the dilemma of determinism at the heart of Marxist philosophy, and to the closely related realms of materialist ontology, dialectical logic, and epistemology, which combined provided the intellectual scaffolding for this dilemma and any attempted resolution of it.

Qu's motivation for broaching this difficult theoretical exercise was twofold. The first was his recognition of the need to disseminate knowledge of Marxist philosophy to members and supporters of the CCP, and a pragmatic recognition too of his unique capacity to do so. Qu was, by 1923, the only theorist in the CCP with both the intellectual stature and grasp of Marxist philosophy sufficient to explain it to a Chinese audience. He was one of the very few Chinese who had a command of Russian (he also had some familiarity with other languages), and this had allowed him access to Soviet Marxist texts on philosophy not readily accessible to other Chinese.[72] In 1917, he had enrolled at the National Institute of Russian Language in Beijing, and spent three years studying Russian there.[73] It was while studying at the Institute that his interest in Marxism developed, as a result of hearing of the Russian Revolution, and in 1918–19 he participated in Li Dazhao's informal Marxist study group.[74] In January 1921 he went to Moscow as correspondent for Beijing's *Morning Post*, and it was here, in what he described as the 'land of hunger', that his knowledge of Marxist theory, the Russian Revolution and Russian society deepened, and it was here that his conversion to Marxism occurred and he joined the CCP.[75] He was to remain in Moscow until December 1922.

[71] Although this is not so in the case of Chinese scholars of early Chinese Marxism. See for example Song Zhiming and Zhao Dezhi, *Xiandai Zhongguo zhexue sichao* [Philosophical trends in contemporary China] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992); also Meng Qingren, *Zhuming Makesizhuyi zhexue pingzhuan* [Critical biographies of prominent Marxist philosophers] (Jingnan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1990), pp. 235–89.

[72] Li Yu-ning points to the very small number of Chinese students who had specialised in Russian before the early 1920s. There was only one Russian Language Institute in China, the one at which Qu studied in Beijing. In contrast, by 1906, there had been between 13,000 and 14,000 Chinese students studying in Japan, and it was largely because of this that Japanese translations of Western texts and Japanese writings on socialism were translated into Chinese. See *The Introduction of Socialism into China* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 108–110. See also Bernadette Li Yu-ning, *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai: From Youth to Party Leadership, 1899–1928* (New York: unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1967), p. 101.

[73] As Pickowicz points out, Qu's initial motivation for studying Russian 'had nothing to do with his prior interest in literature or any particular attraction to Russian culture or politics ... Rather it was the promise of employment in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or by the Chinese Eastern Railway that drew the talented but virtually penniless Qu to these "modern studies"'. See Paul G. Pickowicz, 'Qu Qiubai's critique of the May Fourth Generation: Early Chinese Marxist Literary Criticism', in Merle Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 353.

[74] See Ellen Widmer, 'Qu Qiubai and Russian Literature', in Merle Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese literature In the May Fourth Era*, p. 104; also Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the origins of Chinese Marxism*, p. 73.

[75] According to Bernadette Yu-ning Li, Qu organised the Moscow Branch of the Chinese Communist Party, and quotes a Soviet scholar of Chinese history to the effect that Qu also joined the Russian Communist Party. *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*, pp. 96–7. See also Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1972), p. 184.

Qu's ability to read and speak Russian meant that he was quickly drawn into the task of explaining Marxism to Chinese students at the University of Toilers of the East in Moscow. He was the only Chinese capable of translating from the Russian and consequently gained a position of translator and tutor there in the autumn of 1921.[76] In this capacity, Qu had to struggle 'with ideological matters where a mistake in translation might be viewed as heresy'. In so doing, 'he was gradually led into the arcana of Marxism-Leninism'. The 'strict theoretical training' he underwent gave Qu the experience in Marxist theory and philosophy, and the confidence, to explain it to others.[77]

By the time he returned to China in January 1923, Qu 'had few equals among his comrades who, at this early stage, had received most of their ideas about Marxism and Leninism through translations'.[78] In recognition of his theoretical pre-eminence,[79] he was elected to the CCP's Central Committee, and in mid 1923 was involved in the planning and establishment of Shanghai University (a product of the cooperation between the Guomindang and the CCP), at which Marxist philosophy and social theory were to be taught, and where he was both Dean (for a short while) and Chairman of the Sociology Department.[80] His lectures to two courses at this university from late 1923 represent the first concerted attempt to introduce Marxist philosophy to a Chinese audience, and demonstrate a familiarity with the arcane terminology and subject matter of dialectical materialism quite lacking in the writings of other early Marxist theorists in China.[81] These lectures on philosophy ('An Introduction to the Social Sciences' and 'Outline of Social Philosophy') formed the basis of several books on Marxist philosophy and social theory, which were published in 1924 and subsequently printed in numerous editions.[82] These lectures and books introduced the vocabulary, concepts, theoretical problems and modes of analysis of Marxist philosophy to the emerging body of Marxist theory in China. They laid the foundation for the development of future

[76] *Qu Qiubai wenji* [Collected Writings of Qu Qiubai] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1987–1995), Vol. 7, p. 697.

[77] A. Hsia, 'Ch'u Ch'iu-pai's Autobiographical Writings: The Making and Destruction of a "Tender-Hearted Communist"', in Chün-tu Hsüeh (ed.), *Revolutionary Leaders of Modern China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 501. For Qu's own recollection of his theoretical training in Moscow, see his 'Duoyu de hua' [Superfluous Words], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, p. 697.

[78] Chester C. Tan, *Chinese Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), p. 315.

[79] Qu writes somewhat modestly in his 'Superfluous Words' that 'in 1923, those who had studied Marxism and some general sociology were very, very few, and it was for this reason, and only this reason that, after I became the professor of sociology at Shanghai University, I gained a name for being a so-called "Marxist theorist"'. *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, p. 705.

[80] For Qu Qiubai's explanation (of July 1923) of the need for the establishment of Shanghai University and for his thoughts on the positioning of philosophy within the curriculum, see 'Xiandai Zhongguo suo dangyou de "Shanghai daxue"' [Contemporary China's 'Shanghai University'], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 126–39.

[81] For summary and analysis of Li Da's writings on Marxist theory to 1923, see Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), Chapter 3.

[82] Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China: The Influence of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*, pp. 62–3. Also Bernadette Li Yu-ning, *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*, pp. 140–1.

philosophical discourse within the CCP, and on these grounds alone Qu's significance to the early theoretical development of the CCP needs to be more widely recognised.

The second motivation for Qu's foray into Marxist philosophy was intense personal curiosity. He was, as we will observe, intrigued by the knotty dilemma of human agency in an apparently determinist universe. He recognised that this dilemma was not an abstract scholastic conundrum; it was one that held obvious implications for his own life and those of his comrades, pledged as he and they were to the radical transformation of Chinese society, yet driven by what appeared, at first glance, to be a deterministic theory of social change. The question Qu posed himself was this: if the material universe is a determinist one, to what extent, if at all, is it possible for an intellectual of high moral principle, boundless energy and revolutionary ambition (in which light he undoubtedly perceived himself) to change that universe?[83] This question is at the heart of Qu's writings on philosophy. His explication of the history of Western philosophy, problems of epistemology and logic, and the laws of dialectical materialism, were justified, in his mind, by the need to understand all those dimensions of Marxist philosophy which could contribute to a comprehension and resolution of Marxist philosophy's core dilemma: determinism.

The conclusion of Qu's inquiry into the dilemma of determinism was that Marxism is a determinist, not a fatalistic, theory. On the basis of this subtle and rather difficult distinction, Qu allowed a very limited historical efficacy to human action. The material character of the universe and society, whose existence and development were governed by natural laws, precluded the possibility of unconstrained voluntarism: humans could not act as they wished; neither could they compel history in directions or at a speed contrary to its materialist structural constraints. Only through a scientific understanding of these constraints could the limited sphere of human agency be exploited; and exploited it should be, for whatever could be done by humans to facilitate the social changes anticipated by Marxist theory had to be done. The historical and ethical imperatives were there, and intellectuals of good conscience who did not heed that call were, Qu felt, derelict in their duty. But he did not exaggerate the possibility that human action, inspired by whatever noble motives, could substitute itself for those fundamental material structures whose change overwhelmingly determined the outcome of all other processes of change, whether social or natural. Qu's qualification of the determinism of Marxist philosophy was thus a very limited one, and one wonders to what extent his supposed resolution of the dilemma of determinism genuinely satisfied his activist political inclinations. At an intellectual level at least, it seems to have done so, although there are evident tensions between his philosophical position on the one hand and his literary theories and political activities on the other.[84] Moreover, while

[83] Qu wrote: 'I was born a romantic and always wanted to transcend the environment and accomplish some miraculous deed that would amaze and move people'. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China: The Influence of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*, p. 46.

[84] Pickowicz has made the following perceptive comment on this tension in Qu's writings on literary theory: Qu 'apparently did not realize that the rather deterministic account of Marxist literary theory he presented in his Shanghai University lectures contradicted not only the assumptions of early Soviet

there are inconsistencies in his explication of his understanding and resolution of the dilemma of determinism in Marxist philosophy, these are, in part at least, a reflection of the logical problems which beset Marxism itself, problems shared by all worldviews of a deterministic tenor. Qu's achievement was thus not inconsiderable, and is the more impressive when we remind ourselves that philosophy was not his major theoretical preoccupation, which was literary theory and criticism.[85]

While Qu's attempt to provide a philosophical rationale for (limited) conscious human action within the determinist philosophy of Marxism is not, as I will demonstrate, altogether successful or convincing, it is nevertheless extremely significant. Qu was the first Marxist theorist in China to be both aware of the issue and have sufficient theoretical grounding to broach it. While European and Russian Marxism had long recognised the philosophical dilemma of determinism as a core theoretical concern,[86] it was only with Qu's very public reflections on Marxist philosophy at Shanghai University in 1923, and subsequently through his books, that the Marxist movement in China became aware of it. In time, the problem of determinism would become central to theoretical discourse within the CCP, and we will track, through the pages of this book, the manner of articulation and attempted resolution of this problem in the writings of influential Chinese Marxist philosophers of the 1930s. In 1937, under the influence of these philosophers and Soviet texts on Marxist philosophy, Mao Zedong was, in his own writings on philosophy, to provide the CCP with an authoritative position on the dilemma of determinism.[87] In seeking a point of origin for the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China, with particular attention to the dilemma of determinism, it is to Qu Qiubai that one must turn.

Qu's search in 1923 for a solution to the dilemma of determinism is also significant as it indicates that the theoretical level of the early communist movement in China was not as low as some scholarly accounts have suggested.[88] It also

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proletarian cultural activists but also his own deeply rooted faith in the vanguard role of cultural revolution'. 'Qu Qiubai's critique of the May Fourth generation', in Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, p. 361.

85 Bernadette Yu-ning Li's suggestion that Qu 'lacked a solid grounding in Marxism' is quite inaccurate and grossly underestimates the extent of his understanding of the complex issues of Marxist philosophy and theory. See Bernadette Li Yu-ning, *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai: From Youth to Party Leadership, 1899–1928*, p. 139.

86 See Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, Chapter 2. See also James D. White, *Karl Marx and the intellectual origins of dialectical materialism* (London: Palgrave, 1996).

87 See *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), Vol. 1, pp. 292–347. For analysis, see Nick Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), Introduction; also Nick Knight, 'Soviet Philosophy and Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1990), pp. 89–109; and Joshua Fogel, *Ai Ssu-ch'i's Contribution to the Development of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Contemporary China Series, No. 4, 1987).

88 Scholarship on Mao Zedong and his thought has tended to down play, and in some cases belittle, his theoretical development as a Marxist during the 1920s, and one of the dimensions of this criticism is the supposed early theoretical immaturity of the CCP and its lack of access to works of Marxist theory and philosophy. See, for example, Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York: Harper, 1952). Other interpretations of the early years of the CCP focus on the political dimensions of its history, and largely ignore the development of theory. See for example, North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists*. For a contrasting point of view, see Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of*

demonstrates, contrary to Werner Meissner's suggestion, that interest in Marxist philosophy in China was genuinely motivated by personal interest and intellectual curiosity, and not just by the need to provide a philosophical rationale for the political struggles within the CCP (see Chapter 5).[89] Indeed, the sophistication and complexity of Qu's philosophical writings, as well as his deep personal interest in philosophy, contradict such dismissive conclusions of the theoretical naïveté of the early Chinese communist movement. Moreover, the popularity of his lectures and books on philosophy suggests that there was, even during the early 1920s, a considerable appetite for information on Marxist philosophy and theory amongst members and supporters of the Party.[90] Qu Qiubai's writings on philosophy deserve to be taken seriously as philosophy. Not only do they provide an insight into the thinking of this most intriguing of Chinese intellectuals, they reveal much of significance about the nature and level of theory within the CCP during its early years.

Qu's writings on philosophy cover many themes. Our purpose is to draw from them information sufficient to allow a reconstruction of his attempted resolution of the dilemma of determinism. In order to make sense of Qu's logic and argumentation, it is necessary to reconstruct his views on a number of related topics that provided the intellectual scaffolding of his philosophy. We commence with Qu's explication of the history of Western philosophy, and in particular the great division between idealism and materialism. In so doing, we address the first of the three major and interrelated themes – materialism, the laws of dialectics, determinism – that are prominent in Qu's philosophical writings. On an understanding of his views on materialism and the laws of dialectics can be broached an investigation into how he comprehended and responded to the third theme, determinism, and the dilemma within it of an apparent contradiction between determinism and conscious human action. This exercise will lead us to the core of Qu's philosophical discourse and provide an explanation of his rather enigmatic conclusion: Marxist philosophy is deterministic, but it is not fatalistic.

1. QU'S CRITIQUE OF IDEALISM

Qu's initial foray into Marxist philosophy concentrated on its critique of the history of Western philosophy, although there are occasional references to other philosophical traditions, including China's.[91] The purpose of his exploration into Western philosophy was to construct and map the historical development of the two

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Chinese Communism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

89 Werner Meissner, *Philosophy and Politics in China: The Controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s* (London: Hurst and Co., 1990).

90 According to Bernadette Yu-ning Li, Qu's lectures on philosophy were very popular. *A Biography of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*, pp. 137–8.

91 Qu had also studied Indian philosophy prior to his conversion to Marxism. See *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, p. 704.

great rival camps of philosophical thought: materialism and idealism. Underpinning this exploration is not only a largely predetermined bifurcation between these two supposedly incommensurable philosophical traditions, there is also a teleological assumption of the inevitable rise and triumph of materialism. As we will observe, Qu did deviate somewhat from the conventional materialist-idealist bifurcation to allow for eclectic philosophers (such as Spinoza) who, wittingly or otherwise, incorporated elements of both idealism and materialism into their philosophies.[92] But his consideration of eclecticism represents only a minor detour on a largely predetermined philosophical journey. Anyone familiar with the Marxist philosophy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will find his reading of Western philosophy rather predictable, and there is, in that sense, little remarkable about Qu's exposition. Its significance lies in its consistency with European and Soviet Marxist philosophy, for recognition of this allows an insight into the genealogy of Marxist philosophy in China.

In *Outline of Social Philosophy*, delivered initially as lectures at Shanghai University in 1923, Qu considers why philosophy should have emerged at all, and why certain tendencies within it – idealism and materialism – should have become pronounced. He argues that philosophy developed as human knowledge became more complex, this giving rise to a variety of different sciences and the gradual specialisation of philosophy itself into methodology and epistemology. However, the root of philosophy, both in early times as in the present, was a concern with the nature of the universe. Along with this contemplation of the universe arose the question of whether human knowledge could exist independently of reality and, based on this question, the issue of the relationships between self and not-self, knowledge and reality, and spirit and nature. All philosophical schools, Qu suggests, have their own responses to these questions, for they lie at the heart of all forms of philosophical inquiry.[93]

According to Qu, there are two major responses to these questions. The first, materialism, sets out from the objective (or nature, reality) and regards the subjective (or thought, mind) as built on objective reality. The second, idealism, proceeds from the subjective, and perceives the objective as constructed on the basis of the subjective. Qu's initial defence of materialism is a predictable one. Humans live within the natural world, and 'nature' (reality, the objective) should therefore be the starting point for all philosophical investigation; humans could not survive if they were unable to know and operate within their material environment. The philosophical test is thus a pragmatic, human, one, and one which is verified for Qu through the continuing capacity of humans and their societies to not only exist but to increase their control over nature. For humans to know the world, the material world (objects) must act on the senses to create sense perceptions, and the nature of these sense perceptions infers a certain order in the material world. The sense perceptions synthesise phenomena that are already synthesised in nature, and differentiate those

[92] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 329–30.

[93] Ibid., pp. 310–11.

phenomena that are already divided in nature. Here, Qu concurs with Feuerbach's criticism of Kant who had argued that 'reason gives the natural world its own laws'; it is, rather, the natural world that dictates the content of reason.

If the premise of materialist philosophy is so self-evidently correct, why are there philosophical systems that do not concur with it. To answer this question, Qu turns to the early history of philosophy, and in particular its roots in animism. Following the English anthropologist of the classical evolutionary school, E.B. Tylor, Qu argues that the spiritualism of religion, which was inevitably in opposition to materialism, resulted from the attempt by 'primitive peoples' to explain their natural environment. The result was animism, a belief that natural phenomena were not themselves the result of natural causes, but of spirits residing within them. This belief evolved into religious systems of belief, which became more complex in line with human evolution and the development of society, particularly the increased technological complexity of society. The various religions gave rise to a number of philosophical worldviews that were inevitably idealist in portraying nature as determined by spirit. There is thus a link between animism, religion and idealist philosophy. Qu goes so far as to argue that even sophisticated idealist philosophies, such as those of von Schelling and Hegel, share the basic premises of animism.[94]

Qu concedes that the animism of 'primitive peoples' was the first attempt to consciously explain the causes of natural phenomena, but argues that their explanation did not allow any increase in their mastery over nature. It was only when certain proto-scientific understandings of nature emerged that animism's influence waned and humans were able to extend their understanding of and control over natural processes and phenomena. Qu gives the example of Thales, the ancient Greek philosopher who predicated his explanation of the natural world on water. This, for Qu, was a move towards an objective starting point, one premised on the material character of reality. Similarly, Heraclites's premise that the universe is created neither by gods or humans was not an animist position, and represented a philosophical advance. Consequently, while Qu laments that Greek philosophy from Socrates onwards was to be dominated by idealism, it had at the very least established the possibility of an objectivist and materialist premise for philosophical inquiry. Qu notes the comparison with ancient Chinese philosophy that, while containing numerous themes, became dominated by idealism following Mencius.

Materialism, according to Qu, tends towards a scientific mode of thought, whereas idealism grew out of animism and retains its superstitious tendencies. There are, he suggests, two reasons why idealism continued to give rise to modes of thought characteristic of its animist origins. First, the advance of knowledge of the natural world had not been sufficiently rapid to displace entrenched animistic conceptions of causation. Humans perceived the world through a mix of both scientific and animistic viewpoints, but animism's influence was much the stronger, and as society became more complex, the dominance of animism continued to impede a materialist scientific explanation of new phenomena. Second, animism's link to religious thought became increasingly systematised. The conservatism of religious thought, with its defence of an unequal social order, further impeded the

[94] Ibid., pp. 313–17.

development of scientific modes of thought.[95] Qu thus rejected idealism as philosophically erroneous, and for the part it played in the reinforcement of social inequality.

Qu also employed the logical tensions within the philosophies of individual philosophers to prosecute his critique of idealism. In particular, he was sensitive to the way philosophers sometimes unwittingly incorporated both materialist and idealist elements within their largely idealist philosophies. The result was eclecticism, something that indicated an advance over pure idealism, but which nonetheless was tainted by its retention of idealist themes. Examples of such eclecticism are the philosophies of Berkeley, Voltaire, Kant and Huxley. Berkeley, for example, denied the existence of matter beyond thought, but also rejected the existence of spirits, an admission that indicated the probably unwitting inclusion of materialist traces within the philosophy of this otherwise ardent idealist and anti materialist philosopher. Similarly, Qu attacks Huxley, the well-known naturalist, for lapses in his materialism. Huxley had recognised the existence of the brain and nervous system as the material basis of consciousness, and should logically have recognised the independent material existence of the natural world. He did not do so, according to Qu, acknowledging only the existence of 'consciousness' or 'concepts' underpinned by the individual's nervous system, a position that inferred nothing exists beyond the individual. This amounts to a lapse into solipsism, a form of subjective idealism that perceives the consciousness of the individual as the starting point of the process of cognition. If one recognises the existence of organic life, as Huxley did, it is not logical to deny a material causal connection between the external environment and organic life, including thought to which organic life itself gives rise. As a corrective to Huxley's supposed solipsism, Qu refers to Descarte's famous aphorism – 'I think, therefore I am' – and suggests that philosophers of the natural world like Huxley should go further to proclaim: 'I exist, therefore the natural world exists separate from my consciousness'.[96]

For Qu the errors of solipsism are so manifest that some idealist philosophers had not dared acknowledge themselves as solipsists, but had professed rather belief in a consciousness that transcends the individual. But philosophers who hold this view are guilty of arbitrariness because they, like Berkeley, assert that nothing exists beyond consciousness while presuming the existence of a God or World Spirit that transcends individual human consciousness. Qu gives the example of Hegel and von Schelling, both of whom believed in an 'absolute spirit' that supposedly incorporated both the subject and object, the spiritual and natural worlds. Despite his recognition of the object, von Schelling considered the universe to be a 'self-concept' of this 'absolute spirit'; similarly, for Hegel, the universe was the 'self-thought' of the 'absolute spirit'. Here according to Qu, lies the weakness of the 'objective idealism' of Hegel and von Schelling. While their philosophical systems

[95] Ibid., pp. 317–19.
[96] Ibid., pp. 326–8.

had made a major contribution to the development of human thought, they were actually unable to explain either the material universe or society.[97]

Qu does come to the defence of Spinoza, and argues that he is often incorrectly identified as an idealist philosopher. He concurs with Feuerbach that Spinoza's philosophy was actually a manifestation of the materialism of his time, although he was not able to escape the influence of the 'spirit of the age', and his materialism consequently assumed a theological garb. Spinoza had discarded the dualism of an opposition between the spiritual and natural worlds, but designated nature as God, and God for him was all-inclusive. It is this identification of nature with God that distances Spinoza's philosophy from idealism *pur sang*.

The eclecticism evident in the philosophies of some of Western philosophy's major thinkers is to be explained, Qu asserts, by the social conditions of their times. For his authority, Qu invokes Marx's materialist premise: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'.[98] The extent to which idealist philosophers could admit materialist themes into their philosophies depended on the extent to which doing so would be injurious to the social class to which they belonged. Philosophers often wrote under a powerful sense of obligation to society's ruling class, and thus shied away from a completely candid admission of ideas that might challenge the viewpoint of this class. Qu illustrates this class perspective on the production of philosophy by referring to the social conditions that had given rise to the bourgeoisie, and which had also had the effect of generating liberalism, an ideology that supposedly promoted the idea of freedom. However, the bourgeoisie feared the popularisation of this idea, for excessive adherence to it could damage its own interests. Mainstream liberalism was thus forced into the anomalous position of attacking the materialism of 'free thinkers' like John Toland (1670–1722), who believed that the natural world is governed by its own laws; the proletariat could use these ideas and demand the freedoms advocated and enjoyed by such liberal thinkers, and they therefore had to be opposed. Similarly, Voltaire opposed Catholicism and worshipped reason, yet believed in the existence of a divinity that bestowed benefits and punishments. He was thus unable to abandon those ideas that were favourable to the class to which he belonged, and indeed, attempted to harmonise the conflict between his class position and personal belief in a way that provided philosophical support to his real class interests. Qu emphasises that such philosophers may not have adopted their philosophical position consciously; it was their social conditions of existence that generated this philosophical effect, and was therefore unavoidable. This perspective is crucial, he insists, to an understanding of the history of philosophy, and in particular to the emergence of eclectic modes of thought in which both materialism and idealism were represented.[99]

97 Ibid., pp. 328–9.

98 The quote used by Qu (without attribution) is from Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 21. I have used this translation, although Qu's Chinese translation could be rendered somewhat differently in English.

99 Ibid., pp. 323–7.

Qu does reject outright the agnosticism of extreme forms of idealism that reject the possibility of knowing the real world. Even spirit (mind, ideas), often the premise of idealist philosophy, can be known and explained by reference to matter; the existence of both matter and spirit can be accepted on the basis of the causal priority of matter.[100] Indeed, from an ontological point of view, there is nothing but matter. From an epistemological point of view, however, there is a distinction between subject and object, although the subject, which is itself matter, can also be object. Qu's reasoning runs as follows. Knowledge must have two dimensions: that which is known and that which knows. The latter is the subject, and it is able to know (and here Qu follows Spinoza) because that which is to be known, the object, exists objectively and acts upon it. External action (the object) exerts an effect on the human body, and this effect is a material one. From the standpoint of the subject, however, its effect appears as merely psychological and different from the materiality of the actual object. But this is not so, for there is a unity of subject and object, and they are united on the basis of the materiality of both. Qu quotes Feuerbach to the effect that, while personal thoughts and actions may appear subjective and non-material, they are objectively matter. The materiality of the subject can also be demonstrated by the fact that it is also object. From the point of view of the distinction between subject and object, the human body is the knower of the object; it is the subject. However, what can know can also be known by others; in this process, it becomes the object. Qu stresses that the 'I', the subject, is itself a part of nature, of the universe, and not some abstract entity. It is both subject (the knower) and that which can be known by others, and therefore object; the subject refers to oneself, the object refers to the self of others. The subject thus exists in and is part of a definite material environment. For Qu, the logical sequence runs as follows: I exist, I am a part of the universe, I must know the other parts, otherwise I don't exist.[101]

Qu consequently repudiates the idealists and neo-Kantians who accuse materialism of reducing psychological phenomena to material phenomena, for the distinction is a false one. Qu gives the example of Friedrich Lange (1828–95) who posed materialism a question to which it supposedly could not respond: how can conscious perceptions emerge from the motion of matter? Qu retorts that this opposition is not appropriate, for materialism does not perceive consciousness as separate from material reality. In support of his position, Qu approvingly quotes Diderot, a member of the neo-Spinozan school: 'There is only matter in the universe and it can possess sense perceptions; the existence of matter thus explains everything'.[102]

[100] Ibid., p. 333.
[101] Ibid., p. 331.
[102] Ibid., pp. 329–31.

2. MATERIALIST ONTOLOGY AND THE MATERIALIST OUTLOOK

The relationship between mind and matter was clearly an issue of great concern to Qu as he pondered the history of philosophy. He returned to this theme at some length in his *Contemporary Sociology* (published 1924), and in an essay on philosophy written in 1926 he drew on the findings of modern science, and in particular quantum mechanics and cosmology, to defend and illustrate his materialist ontology.

For Qu, the 'vexing problem' of the relationship between mind and matter had implications that extend beyond philosophy to the social sciences; it was therefore essential to get a precise understanding of this relationship. But what are these two realms of mind and matter, and how do they relate? Qu's response is as follows. The phenomena of the universe can be divided into two categories. The first (matter) has the capacity of 'extension' (and here Qu's approach is somewhat reminiscent of the atomists of early Greek philosophy); in other words, matter is all those things that exist in space, are in motion, and that can be experienced with the human senses.[103] These are material phenomena. The second (mind) does not exist in space, and cannot be seen or experienced in the same way as material phenomena. Examples are human thought, will and feelings. These do exist; people have them but cannot see them. Qu cites Descartes' aphorism – 'I think, therefore I am' – to support the proposition that thoughts and feelings do have existence even though they are not material objects in the conventional sense. They are, rather, psychological or spiritual phenomena. Having established the existence of these two realms, mind (or spirit) and matter, Qu poses the following questions: what is the relationship between material and spiritual phenomena; which comes first; does matter originate from spirit, or spirit from matter?

Qu's response to these philosophical questions proceeds largely through assertion and some occasional injudicious leaps of logic; but they are nonetheless interesting, both philosophically and in terms of the way these core philosophical problems entered the vocabulary of Marxism in China. His first response is to repeat that humans are part of nature, indeed are a product of nature; they are a species of animal, one capable of thought; humans are beings, not gods. 'Spirit', logically, can consequently only represent a small part of all phenomena that exist in nature, for the vastness of nature is composed of material objects beyond humans and their thought.[104] Second, Qu gives an evolutionary perspective on humans as being part of and evolving out of nature. The earth was initially a gaseous ball of fire and thus incapable of generating or supporting life. From this 'dead' natural world gradually emerged living things; and from living things evolved animals capable of thought. The highest point of the natural process of evolution, matter capable of conscious thought, took the form of humans. The early animals could not think, and this in itself is evidence that matter came first, with matter capable of thought only

[103] For a useful summary of the atomists' views, see Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy – and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), pp. 82–90.

[104] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 441–3.

emerging later. Third, Qu points to the fact that it is only because of the particular material construction of the human organism that 'spirit' (thought, mind) could emerge. There could be no 'spirit without matter', for that which can think can only be a human, and it is the brain of the human, part of the human organism, which performs this function. The human organism is therefore matter characterised by its complex organisation; it is a special form of matter.[105]

Qu concludes that there can be matter without spirit but there cannot be spirit without matter; matter existed before the emergence of spirit. In other words, the existence of matter does not depend on spirit; matter exists objectively and is not reliant on spirit. Spirit, on the other hand, has a permanent and dependent relationship with matter; if there is no matter, there is no spirit, which is itself only a particular function or characteristic of a specially organised form of matter. But if this is so, how then does one explain the multifarious forms of 'spirit'; why are there so many different forms of psychological phenomena? Qu responds that psychological phenomena are a characteristic of a specially organised form of matter, and as there are various forms of these, there can be different forms of psychological phenomena. Human beings are the organisms with the most fully developed brains, which is a special structure of complex matter; they are consequently capable of conscious thought. In contrast, dogs and insects, whose nervous systems are simpler than those of human beings, have psychologies that are much simpler than the psychology of humans. Mental phenomena depend on a special structure of matter, and because of the large variety of organic forms, there are many different types of psychological phenomena.

Qu's general ontological conclusion is that

> ... spirit cannot exist independently of matter; matter can exist independently of spirit; matter comes before spirit; spirit is a special characteristic of a special structure of matter. Therefore, matter is the origin of all the phenomena of the universe.[106]

For Qu, this was an incontestable conclusion. Therefore, the object of the process of cognition must be matter, for matter exists objectively and in a form that can be perceived and known, and has ontological priority. But what exactly is matter? In responding to this question, Qu appealed to (what was then) the latest in scientific discovery. In an explanatory appendix to his translation (1926) of the Russian Gorev's (Guoliefu) *Materialism, the Philosophy of the Proletariat*, Qu employs the findings of quantum mechanics to reinforce his philosophical view that the universe is constructed of matter.[107] Scientific materialism, he argues, demonstrates the unity of the material world. All substances (air, water, minerals, plant and animal life) are composed of at least one of ninety-two elements. These elements are comprised of minute units called atoms, which combine in different combinations to produce different material substances. However, the material bedrock of the universe is not the atom. With the scientific discoveries of Rutherford and others, the units which

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] 'Weiwulun de yuzhouguan gaishou' [A general explanation of the world outlook of materialism], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 4, pp. 1–17.

constitute the atom – the electron (with its positive, proton, and negative, neutron) – had now been established as the smallest material unit of the universe. The number and type of orbit of these sub-atomic particles determine the character of the atomic element, from hydrogen which is the simplest, to gold, the most complex. Beside the two types of electron, 'there is no other type of matter'. Qu bravely asserts 'matter is consequently no more than the various manifestations of the "electron"'. All things in the universe, from the human body, to the world and the stars beyond, are comprised of atoms whose differences are determined by the structure and motion of their electrons; the electron is the material basis of the entire universe. The discovery of the electron confirms the monism (*yiyuanxing*) of materialism.[108]

3. THE LAWS OF DIALECTICS

Qu's materialism was the core of his ontological beliefs. Central to his defence of materialism was an insistence that matter (nature) conforms to the laws of dialectics, and these laws impose order on the universe, and predictable mutual relations between the objects within it. He rejected absolutely the possibility that change in the universe is meaningless and random, and that there is nothing but chaos. There is, he argues, clear evidence of the mutual influence of one phenomenon on another, influence that conforms to a general pattern. Even simple examples (such as the four seasons following each other) are sufficient to infer that there is regularity (or 'law-likeness' [*guilüxing*]) in the behaviour of all phenomena in the universe, and from this one can deduce the existence of laws that govern the relationship between phenomena. Definite laws govern all processes and things, no matter how complex and unpredictable they may seem to be. If there were no laws, everything would be random, and one would be unable to establish causal connections between things. According to Qu, there is order, regularity and predictability in both nature and society; laws exist objectively.[109]

The first task of science, Qu argues, is the discovery of these laws.[110] But what are they? For Qu, the most basic law is that of motion.[111] He adamantly rejects the theory of stasis, that there is no change, for all things are in motion; the basis of the universe is the 'motion of matter'. If electrons, the building blocks of the universe, are in motion, then it follows logically that the universe and everything within it are in motion. In earlier times, Qu states, people had thought that the sun, moon and stars did not move; but he points to the research of Laplace and Chamberlain to discount the idea that astronomical bodies are fixed. The birth of the earth, with its development from a fiery cloud of gas to a solid sphere on which, following numerous complex chemical changes, life could emerge, also illustrates the universality of motion; for all these complex physical and chemical changes

[108] Ibid., pp. 1–4.
[109] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 409–11.
[110] Ibid., p. 411.
[111] Ibid., p. 449. Also Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 354–5.

involved motion.[112] All physical things, even those (such as fossilised wood) that undergo change so slowly that it cannot be experienced by the human senses, are in constant change. Similarly, Qu perceived the evolution of life on earth as explicit evidence of the universality of motion, and he heartily endorsed Darwin's theory.[113] The many species of animals and plants previously held to have been created by God in fixed and unchanging form were now known to have evolved and changed.

Qu concludes that all of these changes – subatomic, astronomical and evolutionary – reveal that things are not fixed, that there is continual motion. He thus sides with Heraclites against Parmenides, and while endorsing Hegel's accent on motion, accepts Marx's proposition that it is the motion of matter, rather than spirit, which is the basis of the universe.[114] If, as Marx suggests,[115] the entire universe is matter in motion, it follows that investigation of phenomena must involve investigation of their emergence, development, decay and disappearance, for to study the seemingly static dimension of things would lead to false conclusions. 'Stasis' is a subjective conclusion based on an impression of lack of change, and a failure to appreciate that motion is constant.

Motion, however, does not occur randomly, but dialectically. How did Qu understand this concept? Because the universe is in constant motion, he asserts, it is necessary to observe the influence of one phenomenon on another and to avoid seeing them as distinct and separate; all things in the universe are mutually connected in one way or another. He concedes that knowing the extent of that influence is a problem, but in the case of human action it is possible to assert that whatever humans do influences nature and society. The influence may be diminutive and have no apparent purpose or direction; but the influence is always there.[116]

A dialectical approach is thus premised on the related notions that all things in the universe are, first, in motion and, second, interconnected. The latter implies the necessity of looking at the 'whole picture' (phenomena in all their interconnections) rather than at phenomena presumed self-contained and isolated from their surroundings; and the former implies perceiving things historically, as in a process of change (emergence, development, decay and disappearance). Beyond these very fundamental premises is the necessary acceptance that motion can be explained by reference to the dialectical law of contradictions. Indeed, Qu argued that motion is

[112] Qu Qiubai, 'Weiwulun de yuzhouguan gaishou' [A general explanation of the world outlook of materialism], *Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 4, pp. 6–7.

[113] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 343–3; also Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 450.

[114] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 450.

[115] It was, in fact, Engels rather than Marx who elaborated a naturalistic dialectical philosophy that became the basis of what would come to be known as 'dialectical materialism'. Qu here conflates Marx and Engels' contribution to the development of a 'Marxist' philosophy, a very common theme in mainstream Marxism. See Frederick Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature* (Moscow: Foreign languages Publishing House, 1954). Also see Terrel Carver, *Marx and Engels: The intellectual relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983); and Norman Levine, *The Tragic Deception: Marx contra Engels* (Oxford: Clio Books, 1975).

[116] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 450.

itself contradiction.[117] Even the study of a simple and apparently static thing discloses a 'contradiction' at work; even simple mechanical motion involves a contradictory process. For example, an entity is, at the same time, both in one place and not in that place; and this is a contradiction, and the repeated emergence and elimination of this contradiction is in fact 'motion'. Contradiction in things and their mutual change is thus the 'fundamental principle' of the natural universe and society, an assertion of considerable significance in light of the future importance of the concept of 'contradiction' and the law of the unity of opposites to Marxist philosophy in China.[118]

In asserting that contradiction is the 'fundamental principle' of the universe and society, Qu again invokes the philosophical authority of Heraclites and Hegel. These philosophers not only pointed out that all things change, but also the reasons for the 'cause of motion': all change originates from contradictions, from struggle; for Hegel, contradiction is 'motion and progress'. It is on this notion of the cause of change that Qu constructed a conception of a universe in which change is not random, and in which chaos is eliminated through the inherent tendency towards order, and, in the case of social phenomena at least, purpose, direction and progress in the very mechanism through which change is realised.[119]

Qu insisted that the process of the motion and resolution of the struggle between contradictions is dialectical. He explains this process by reference to Hegel's methodology, which describes the various forms of the characteristics of motion as follows: 1. original balance – 'thesis'; 2. destruction of balance – 'antithesis'; and 3. resumption of balance – 'synthesis'. All phenomena incorporate these stages of the dialectic's 'triadic' movement.[120] While the process is driven by contradictions, and the law which describes this is subsequently the most fundamental of the laws of dialectics,[121] explanation of the process whereby the triadic movement is achieved necessitates reference to two further fundamental laws of dialectics: quantitative and qualitative change, and the negation of the negation.[122]

Qu's explanation of these dialectical laws is as follows. All development of society and the universe involves a definite process of the gradual accumulation of quantitative change until, inevitably, a rapid change occurs which is qualitative. An example he gives is the addition of one carbon atom and two hydrogen atoms to formic acid to produce acetic acid, a qualitatively different substance (formic acid has the same boiling and freezing points as water, whereas acetic acid boils at one hundred and eighteen degrees and freezes at seventeen degrees). An example from the biological world is the seed that, when combined with suitable soil, temperature

[117] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 354–5.
[118] Ibid., pp. 354–5.
[119] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 455. That being said, Qu's subsequent elaboration of the way in which purposeful change is effected through the various laws of dialectics is not altogether clear or consistent, and this is particularly the case of his attribution of causal significance to external as opposed to internal forces.
[120] Ibid., p. 457.
[121] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 354.
[122] Ibid., p. 355.

and moisture, undergoes internal quantitative change which culminates in qualitative change when a sprout is created. In this process, the seed is eliminated (it is negated) to produce the plant, and the plant is eventually eliminated to produce the seed (the negation of the negation).[123]

The only significant point of interest in Qu's rather lackluster explanation of these two laws of dialectics is his assertion that they operate differently in the social and natural worlds. In the natural world, the two principles bring about a repetitive cycle; in social phenomena, however, there is not just repetitive change but progress.[124] The notion that the laws of dialectics work, in the natural world, to create a cyclical pattern of repetitive change, gives the impression that Qu saw the non-social dimension of the universe as having no purpose or goal. However, he partially contradicts this impression by explicitly endorsing the Darwinian theory of evolution and accepting that change within the biological world does proceed towards a particular goal: the better adaptation of species to their environment. Moreover, he accepts that the theory of teleology (*mudilun*), which assumes that change is driven by the imperative need to achieve a particular purpose, applies to both the natural and biological worlds, as well as social phenomena. For Qu, however, the concept of teleology is conceived very broadly, as the characteristic of laws to achieve certain ends, and this is considerably different from the religious or quasi-religious teleological notion that there is a single, indivisible, purpose to the universe and all within it. Indeed, he explicitly rejects this conception of teleology; there is no general theory of progress.[125] Nevertheless, his acceptance of the teleological character of change within all things in the universe (that is, their characteristic of moving in a direction dictated by the laws of dialectics), while at the same time suggesting the repetitive character of change in the natural and biological worlds, indicates a tension in Qu's understanding of the laws of dialectics. It was not the only one.

4. CHANGE: INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL?

Qu's insistence on a universe governed by the laws of dialectics is of immense significance for an understanding of the introduction and dissemination of a particular form of Marxist philosophical discourse within the CCP. However, his elaboration of this ontological premise is not without its inconsistencies and inadequacies. Not only does his explanation of the laws of quantitative and qualitative change and the negation of the negation proceed in a rather humdrum

[123] Ibid., p. 356.

[124] The example Qu gives is of the negation of the public ownership of land under primitive communism and the emergence of private property; eventually, private ownership of land has the effect of impeding the development of production which requires its negation and once again the establishment of public ownership of land. This, however, is different from the public ownership of land in primitive communism as it is now premised on advanced agriculture with its modern techniques of chemical fertilisers and electrical machinery. Ibid., pp. 356–7.

[125] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 413.

manner through illustration rather than careful philosophical ratiocination, his elaboration of the crucial issue of whether change is driven primarily by internal or external forces contains an obvious inconsistency. While this might appear a minor philosophical point, it is not so in light of the subsequent history of Marxist philosophy in China, and in particular Mao's insistence in 1937 and subsequently that it is the struggle between contradictions *internal* to things that constitutes the ultimate motor of change and motion in the universe. Qu thus introduced to Marxism in China an ambivalent note on what eventually became a criterion of philosophical orthodoxy. His inconsistency is thus interesting in terms of the history of Marxist philosophy in China.

Let us briefly reconstruct Qu's explication, pointing out the lapses in the logical sequence of his argument. As we have seen, Qu asserted the primacy of motion and repudiated stasis. There are, he argued, various kinds of force (*liliang*) in the universe. If, among these forces there were absolutely no conflict, no struggle, no mutual antagonism, then they would remain in 'motionless balance – absolute stagnation, absolute stasis'. This, for Qu, is impossible, for it suggests that there is absolutely no mutual influence between the various parts (*bufen*) of the universe, and there could be no 'mutual motion'. The contradictory relationships between things ensure that there is no absolute stasis; even at times of apparent adaptation and balance between things, there is struggle, and this struggle eventually has the effect of destroying balance. Therefore, balance itself is a phase in the process of motion; a balance is established, is then destroyed, and a new balance emerges. This cycle continues without cessation.[126]

So far so good. However, Qu then makes the following statement that throws into doubt the relative significance of internal and external causality, of the contradictions between things and the contradictions within them:

> The significance of 'balance' is this: if a 'system' (phenomenon) is not subject to external force (*waili*), then it is not able to change its present situation – this is balance. In the natural sciences, there are the so-called 'mechanical balance', 'chemical balance', and 'biological balance'.
>
> All balances in the universe are temporary, and a so-called 'phenomenon' is an unending process of destruction of various balances. The so-called 'stasis' of normal times is only a phase during which genuine 'struggle' temporarily cannot be detected. Of the various forces in a situation of 'stalemate', internal change gradually manifests itself within a particular force, which is sufficient to destroy the balance; a new configuration of stalemate (*jijiao xiangshi de xingshi*) is then established – the 'stalemate' of the various forces will then take another form – and there is a new balance. Therefore, 'struggle' and 'contradiction' (the antagonism of the various forces whose tendencies are different) determine the course of change.
>
> Consequently, the form of the process of this 'motion' can be seen as: first, a condition of balance, second, the destruction of balance, and then the restoration of balance and a new situation. To sum up, the course of motion is the development of internal contradictions.[127]

[126] Ibid., p. 456.
[127] Ibid., pp. 456–7.

The conclusion at which Qu arrives – 'the course of motion is the development of internal contradictions' – does not flow logically from the sequence of his argument. The most troubling aspect is his assertion, in the first paragraph above, that without an external force, a phenomenon within a condition of balance will not be able to alter its current situation. This proposition elevates the significance of external causality at the expense of internal causality. Yet, in the very next paragraph, he argues that it is internal change within one of the forces in a situation of balance that is sufficient to disrupt that balance; and this change derives from the 'development of internal contradictions'. Qu's explanation of this most significant aspect of motion – of the operation of the law of contradictions – is obviously far from precise.

This imprecision is compounded when he again throws doubt on the overwhelming significance of internal causality in the process of motion by suggesting that, in certain circumstances, the external balance of forces is determinant:

> ... within and without an entity there are contradictions; but do they have a relationship? They do. The change of the internal structure of an entity (its internal balance) is determined by the relationship of the entity with the environment (the external balance). The character of the balance between society and nature determines the basic tendency of social evolution. If the capacity of society to overcome nature increases, then the internal contradictions of the social structure also increase – at that time appears a new contradiction – the contradiction between the internal balance of forces and the external balance of forces (*junshi*). Thereupon the social structure must undergo thorough change, and adapt to its new external relation. Therefore, the change of the internal balance of an entity frequently changes with the change of the balance between the entity and the environment. It can be said that the internal balance is a function of the external balance.[128]

Had Qu written these passages after 1929, and particularly after 1931, rather than in 1923, his explanation of change would have been regarded as uncomfortably close to that of the by then repudiated mechanistic materialists, one of whose signature beliefs was the centrality of external causation to the process of change. However, the later bitter rivalry in the Soviet Union between the mechanistic materialists and dialectical materialists was not nearly as in evidence in the early 1920s. Internal causality was not, by then, a central criterion of philosophical orthodoxy, and Qu was able to articulate his rather contradictory views on causality without attracting the sort of sanctions that later were imposed on those adopting a mechanistic materialist position.

It is clear from Qu's writings on philosophy from the early 1930s (that is, after the victory of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy in which the primacy of internal contradictions was accepted as doctrinal verity) that he recognized the error of his early writings, and he no longer allowed that an external balance or force could be attributed with greater causal significance than internal factors. Qu was in Moscow from mid 1928 to the end of September 1930, and was able to experience at first hand the massive changes then under way in Soviet theoretical and philosophical

[128] Ibid., pp. 460–1.

circles. That he had absorbed the lessons of these changes is demonstrated in an essay of 1932, in which he makes it absolutely clear that it is *internal* contradictions that are the source of motion of an entity; the mutual struggle of these internal contradictions is absolute.[129]

5. MATERIALISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL THEORY

Qu's defence of materialism had the purpose of demonstrating that the universe is constructed of matter; the basic building block of the universe, the electron, is matter, and it therefore followed that all phenomena are likewise composed of matter. However, even if one accepts this proposition as evidence in support of Qu's materialist ontology, of what relevance is it to an understanding of social phenomena and the way in which these change and develop? After all, the principal purpose of Marxism was supposedly not so much to engage in abstruse debates regarding the ontological status of the universe and the nature of the electron, but to establish the objective correctness of a particular view of social development, one which predicted the ultimate realisation of a very particular sort of social organisation.

For Qu, the link between the natural and social sciences was that each commenced from a materialist premise. It was this which united natural science and the social sciences, or, as Qu sometimes described the latter, scientific socialism.[130] Both scientific realms were concerned with matter, and both were concerned to understand how and why matter, whether in the natural world or society, underwent motion and change. For scientific socialism, the basic materialist premise was that, if matter changes, then thought, reflecting those changes, also changes. In material social terms, this involved the structure and evolution of economic classes and the generation of different modes of thought appropriate to them. Classes, and the struggle between them, are produced by production and exchange, and all historical change results from change in these economic realms, which are the real material basis of society. Law, politics, religion, philosophy, and other forms of thought are 'only' society's superstructure (although, as we have seen, these also have their own form of materiality), and change in them follows and is caused by changes in the economic structure. The economic foundation of society has ontological priority in the unfolding of social change.

According to Qu, the scientific study of society requires a comprehension of the essential character of class societies, 'manifestly a class contradiction between the "haves" and "have-nots"'. Scientific socialism recognised how the division based on class influenced perceptions of the world, and the way that dominant ideas were underpinned by material economic power. This materialist premise gave it its scientific outlook, for it was able to correctly recognise the dependent relationship of thought to material social reality, and the manner in which 'incorrect' ideas and

[129] In support of this position, Qu quotes Lenin's 'On the question of dialectics' (a quote later used by Mao): 'The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute'. See *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, pp. 506–1.

[130] *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 339.

theories were created by and served the interests of particular class structures. Scientific socialism's task was to critique misguided social theories that had served the interests of dominant classes of earlier eras, and which laboured under the illusions of the 'spirit of the age'. In the course of this critique, scientific socialism had formulated a new philosophy and worldview that allowed an objective conception of social reality. For Qu, the study of social phenomena thus involved not only investigation of the material realities and forms of motion of contemporary society, but elaboration, critique and repudiation of erroneous social theories.[131]

Qu's critique of social theory focused on three schools – Enlightenment, utopian socialist, and Hegelian – and employs these, supposedly incorrect, theories as foils to establish the objective correctness of Marxist social theory. The first of these schools, the philosophy of the French Enlightenment, was revolutionary in that it had not deferred to popular conceptions such as religion and contemporary social theories of the state. All such conceptions had to be subjected to the critical gaze of reason, which was, for the Enlightenment philosophers, the only criterion by which ideas, institutions and human action could be judged. Reason ought to be the basis of the social system and human affairs, and if this could be achieved, all contradictions of social life would be eliminated. Enlightenment philosophers proclaimed the irrationality of all previous forms of state and society, based as these were on superstition, privilege and oppression. They called for a society established on the basis of the enduring notions of truth and justice, and the equality inherent in natural law. Qu responds to these fine ideals dismissively: 'we of the twentieth century understand that the supposedly rational world painted by Enlightenment philosophy was nothing more than a rationalisation of an emerging bourgeois society, in which perpetual justice became bourgeois laws, equality became formal legal equality, and the rational state became the bourgeois democratic republic'.[132] And why was this the case? It was because power remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the class with absolute financial power, and the interests of this class perforce structured and placed limits on contemporary conceptions of the ideal society. After the French Revolution and the establishment of a supposedly rational society, one based on new institutions and state, the contradictions between rich and poor did not disappear, and in fact became more extreme; the misery of those working in capitalist industries grew worse as competition between companies intensified. In short, the idealistic expectations of the Enlightenment theorists were not and could not be realised.

Qu argues that pessimism resulting from the failure of Enlightenment philosophy gave rise to a new school of social theory: nineteenth century utopianism. During that era, the contradictions of the productive methods of capitalism were not highly developed, and the proletariat had not yet clearly distinguished itself from the impoverished masses. The proletariat emerged only gradually as a new and historically distinctive class; but it did not yet have the capacity for independent political action and required assistance from outside its ranks, particularly from

[131] Ibid., pp. 334–8.
[132] Ibid., p. 336.

intellectuals above it in the social hierarchy. The immaturity of capitalist relations ensured that the development of theory to explain and resolve the contradictions of capitalism thus remained immature. Early attempts at critical socialist theory thus focussed on the generation of utopian theories and ideals. However, utopian theorists were unable to provide a practical course of action to realise their utopian goals. Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier fabricated new societies out of their imaginations, very much like the philosophers of the Enlightenment, who had created a world founded on abstract notions of perpetual justice and reason. The utopian socialists, to their credit, did recognise the injustice and irrationality of capitalist society, and this represented an advance over Enlightenment philosophy.[133]

The third school of social theory, Hegelian philosophy, was quite different. Qu explains that Hegel had recognised that the universe is in a process of perpetual motion, change and development; and he sought the 'inner connections' of this motion, change and development. He recognised that history becomes the real process of the development of humankind, and that philosophy's task was to examine the way in which humans developed out of nature, and to discover laws from the myriad 'accidents' within this process. For Qu, these Hegelian postulates represented a significant achievement. However, Hegel's major failing was his idealism. 'Thought' was not a reflection of existing things; rather real things and processes were a reflection of thought, and consequently the real relationship between phenomena was concealed. Qu argues that, if the causal relationship articulated by Hegel was reversed, and based on a materialist premise, the positive, dialectical, dimension of his philosophy could be incorporated within scientific socialism. But for this to eventuate, fundamental change had to have occurred in social reality, and in particular the reality of capitalism.

Qu links this change to the class which had emerged as a result of the discovery of the steam engine – the proletariat – and the appearance of acute class struggle characteristic of industrial capitalism; for only with the emergence of these conditions could there be the possibility of a thorough change in historical concepts. Unlike utopianism, which had merely rejected capitalism on the basis of its immorality, the new worldview of the proletariat was able to provide a scientific solution to the contradictions of contemporary society. The capitalist system, like all previous economic stages, was an historical phenomenon, and the development of its productive forces and the progress of its class struggle would lead to its ultimate elimination. The theory of surplus value within this new worldview explained, in a scientific manner, how capitalism functioned and gave rise to a particular form of economic structure. The extraction of surplus value from the working class allowed the 'social production' of the propertied class, and allowed it to accumulate capital. While previous social theorists and political economists had argued that the interests of labour and capital were compatible, and that free competition could realise the common prosperity of the entire state, the facts disclosed by the theory of surplus value demonstrated, to Qu's satisfaction, that the productive techniques of large-scale industry had brought the class contradictions of capitalism to an extreme point. The great transformation of society to overcome the contradictions of

[133] Ibid., p. 337.

capitalism and to achieve socialism could not be realised except as an historical phenomenon, and it was only scientific socialism that could correctly explain the tendencies within capitalism that would manifest that great transformation. The normative goals of utopian socialism were thus displaced by an historical account that took the actual functioning of contemporary society as its starting point, and that described rather than prescribed a future whose certain realisation was implicit, yet discernible, in the historically generated present. For Qu, this was no 'dream of the new', no 'normative goal', but a firm prediction guaranteed by a scientific reading of the objective character of society. His vision of the future – a communist society of reason and justice in which class contradictions and class moralities no longer existed – was thus, he believed, a logical and empirically demonstrable component of his materialist philosophy.[134]

6. CONCLUSION

It is with this final outcome of historical development – the inevitability of a communist society – that Qu's defence of materialism comes to its supposedly logical conclusion, and reveals its ultimately teleological purpose. However, this teleology was premised, Qu believed, not on a tendentious and superficial perspective on the imperatives of social change, but an integrated worldview in which deep levels of philosophical analysis, supported by the findings of the natural sciences and integrated with the social sciences, pointed to the necessary result of change and development. That Qu was able to articulate this complex and relatively sophisticated chain of reasoning points to the breadth and internal coherence of his understanding of Marxist philosophy (although there were, as we have seen, some areas of inconsistency in his elaboration). Qu was conversant with the conventional materialist interpretation of Western philosophy. He was able to provide a solid, if somewhat schematic, historical account of this philosophy, and occasionally demonstrated a serious personal engagement with some of its knottier issues. One example of this was his willingness to go beyond the conventional bifurcation between idealism and materialism, and to allow that some of philosophy's major figures, such as Spinoza, were eclectic in their incorporation of themes from both camps. Moreover, Qu moves with facility (although without particular distinction) through the philosophies of some of the most difficult of Western thinkers: Plato, Socrates, Kant, Fichte, Berkeley, Voltaire, Hume, Huxley, Descartes, Diderot, Feuerbach, and Marx, as well as many lesser philosophical luminaries. He illustrated his materialist social philosophy by reference to Durkheim, James Mill, Comte, Spencer, Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier. His views on quantum mechanics, cosmology and evolution were reinforced by reference to Laplace, Darwin, Rutherford, and Moseley, amongst others.

While clearly derivative, Qu's defence of materialist philosophy was nonetheless remarkable in a number of important respects. Here was a man of twenty-four,

[134] Ibid., pp. 338–9, 348–9.

newly converted to Marxism, who was able to provide an intelligent, informed and wide-ranging discussion of its philosophy. Qu's central intellectual interest was not philosophy, but literary theory, but he was nevertheless sufficiently conversant with it to assume the task of its elaboration for a Chinese audience. And while Qu's excursion into philosophy was not original in the context of the Marxist tradition or the contemporary international communist movement, it certainly was so in the Chinese context. No Chinese theorist to the revolutionary movement had yet broached the complex issues of dialectical materialism. If Qu could lay claim to any philosophical originality, and he did not personally do so, it was his pioneering efforts to bring an understanding of Marxist philosophy to the CCP and its supporters. The challenge that Qu posed the Party was the integration of theory with the practical dimensions of revolution.[135] This challenge could not be met unless the Party directed more attention to the articulation of theory; and while this challenge was not immediately met, Qu's efforts did construct a philosophical platform on which the next generation of Marxist philosophers in China could build.

The integration of revolutionary practice with theory was also especially challenging for Qu personally, as the materialist philosophy to which he subscribed was a deterministic one. On what basis could Qu exhort others to action if his philosophical beliefs portrayed a deterministic material universe that was reflected in seemingly deterministic patterns of social change? Indeed, on what logical basis could Qu motivate himself to action? Was not a logical response to his deterministic and teleological philosophy a retreat into quietism and passivity? Perhaps so, but the whole tenor of Qu's life as a revolutionary represents a rejection of the temptation to passivity. This, in turn, suggests strongly that his exploration of the materialist philosophy of Marxism extended beyond its apparent determinism to arrive at a conclusion that endorsed the possibility that conscious human action could contribute to the realisation of historical objectives. To test this proposition, we turn from Qu Qiubai's defence of materialism to a reconstruction of his views on determinism, the second pillar on which his philosophical edifice was constructed.

[135] For Qu's insistence on the integration of theory and practice, see *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 4, pp. 14–17; also *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, pp. 514–5.

CHAPTER 4

QU QIUBAI AND THE ORIGINS OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

– The dilemma of determinism –

Qu Qiubai accepted without reservation Marxist philosophy's premise of a material universe. The basis of the universe was matter, indeed was the variable forms of existence and behaviour of the electron. The materialism of these minute sub-atomic particles ensured that all objects in the universe are composed of matter. Humans are consequently a part of a material universe governed by the laws of dialectics, and are matter themselves; their biological structure and forms of behaviour are ontologically indistinguishable from the material context in which they exist. While, for purposes of epistemological ratiocination, Qu allowed a distinction between mind (ideas, spirit) and matter (body) in order to demonstrate the dependence of the former on the latter, underpinning this supposed dualism was an ontological monism which dictated the material character even of mind. Mind was, from the perspective of this monism, no more than a particular manifestation of matter, one wholly dependent on a material neural basis, and a reflection of the material structures and processes of the social context within which humans lived. Put in this way, mind was no more than a particular, although particularly important, subset of matter.[136]

Now this is all very well, but the monistic materialism revealed by Qu's foray into ontology appears to preclude the possibility of humans as anything more than reactive to the inherent imperatives of matter, at both a biological and social level. Qu's deterministic materialism would, at first glance, suggest that humans do not make choices premised on individual ethical predilections; there is no sphere of autonomous individual action. Free will, of the sort implied by some variants of Christian theology or extreme forms of liberalism (individualism), is an illusion, and one which was, from Qu's perspective, encouraged by those doctrines to deflect attention from the actual negation of individual choice by repressive social structures that construct and confine the choices supposedly open to individuals. Indeed, given the class perspective adopted by Qu, does the individual even exist except as a construction of such misguided social and religious theories?

It is clear that the determinism implied by the materialist ontology of Marxist philosophy posed some awkward questions for Qu, who was a committed

[136] Qu Qiubai, 'Weiwulun de yuzhouguan gaishou' [A general explanation of the world outlook of materialism], *Qu Qiubai wenji* [Collected writings of Qu Qiubai] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1987–1995), Vol. 4, pp. 5–6, 12–13.

revolutionary and one who implicitly believed that his own actions could make a difference to the outcome of the revolutionary struggle.[137] It is clear, too, that Qu recognised the worrying antinomy inherent in a deterministic doctrine that called on the individual to exert every effort in pursuit of historical goals that were, so the doctrine claimed, inevitable. How did he resolve this antinomy?

1. FREEDOM AND NECESSITY: 'THAT IS THE QUESTION!'[138]

For Qu, the dilemma of determinism could not be resolved without an acknowledgement that natural and social phenomena are governed by natural laws (as we have seen, the laws of dialectics). This is the realm of necessity. These are laws that no amount of human tampering can alter, but knowledge of which can be used to achieve human ends, the realm of 'freedom'. Following in the tradition of Engels,[139] Qu accepts the distinction between freedom and necessity, and employs this dichotomy as one way out of the impasse of determinism, or at least a qualification of its more restrictive implications.[140]

In his 'Outline of Social Philosophy' (1923), Qu refers in passing to the realms of freedom and necessity.[141] Freedom, he argues, is based on necessity, a knowledge of necessity. If humans know the natural laws of the universe, this will allow them freedom; but the laws of nature come first. Here, freedom means not the capacity of humans to do as they want, but to be able, through an increased understanding of the laws of nature and the capacity to use them, to achieve their goals. This does not imply a realm in which the laws of nature do not apply, but one in which those laws, particularly those of cause and effect, are known and acted on. In this sense, humans can exploit the possibilities in nature through their knowledge of it; nature can consequently be made to serve human ends, although only to the extent that the laws of nature are complied with. Similarly, social relations exist, and it is on the basis of a knowledge of the laws that govern these relations that humans can strive for liberation. But the realm of necessity, Qu emphasises, come first; it exists prior to and separate from human understanding of it. Even the capacity of humans to know this realm is the inevitable result of historical development, of the enhanced technological capacity of humans derived through their discoveries of the laws that exist in the realm of necessity. Qu gives the example of the discovery of steam power, which occurred in a specific historical context; this led to the invention of the steam engine, which had an enormous impact on the fortunes of the rising

[137] Although his views on this altered, becoming more activist as the 1920s wore on. See Ellen Widmer, 'Qu Qiubai and Russian Literature', in Merle Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 118–19.

[138] Qu concludes an explanatory preamble to his 1923 philosophical essay by saying (in Chinese) he would 'attempt to discuss the significance of "necessity" and "freedom"', and follows this with the rhetorical flourish (in English) – 'That is the question!'. *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 294.

[139] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring (Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science)* (Peking: FLP, 1976), pp. 143–4, 367.

[140] *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 294–309.

[141] *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 353–4.

bourgeoisie, a class whose 'freedom' was materially advanced through its knowledge of the laws describing the capacities of steam.

Qu returned to the issue of freedom and necessity in an extended essay of late 1923 published in *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth). He argued that the histories of nature and human society are different. The world of nature is driven by unconscious forces that interact with each other; the common laws of cause and effect made manifest in this process are a function of the mutual motion of these forces. There is no conscious purpose in nature, and no goal (although, as we observed in the last chapter, Qu was not entirely consistent on this issue). In contrast, in human society there are conscious human beings, each pursuing their goals. But this should not, Qu asserts, lead to a repudiation of the common laws of cause and effect in the social sphere, for there are objective causes underpinning the goals which humans adopt. The clash of these very many different goals may make it appear as though the course of human history is accidental, that history is indistinguishable from the unconscious world of nature. The difference lies in the fact that each human action has a purpose, has a goal. However, because an individual desires a certain goal and acts to achieve it, it is not necessarily the case that it is either the goal or the consequent action that causes the desired effect. This needs to be determined by the application of a scientific method, for human behaviour is governed by natural laws. Nevertheless, the fact that humans can consciously formulate goals and strive for their realisation is an important distinction between society and nature, and an important premise for Qu's attempted qualification of an absolute determinism. As we shall see, however, this qualification is very limited and there are some important unresolved tensions in Qu's position.

For Qu, history is the sum total of the interaction of countless humans consciously pursuing their ends. The problem here is that Qu insists that the consciousness that underpins an individual's actions is itself determined. This, plus the fact that the ends desired by the individual are not necessarily realised, suggests strongly that he perceived human consciousness, like the superstructure of society, as very much a second order phenomenon in the chain of historical causation.[142] Indeed, it is clear that Qu regarded individual human actions and the motivations underpinning those actions to be governed by social structures and historical forces operating at a much deeper ontological level than that of human consciousness. He rejects the notion that the morality of the individual has any historical significance; similarly, he rejects the idea that the behaviour of the masses is caused by the acts of individual heroes. The acts of individuals, no matter how apparently historically significant, are premised on the acts of the masses, whether national or class. One must therefore strive to understand the causes underpinning the actions of the masses, which may vary from sudden outbursts of sentiment, such as occurred during the May Fourth period, to large-scale transformations in behaviour which occur over lengthy periods of time. In each case, Qu believed, it is important to understand the psychology of the masses and their leaders, but more importantly to understand what underpinned this. One must seek the 'ultimate cause' (*zuihou*

[142] Ibid., pp. 294–309.

yuanyin) of historical actions, and these are to be sought in the dialectical laws of historical evolution as well as the particular laws of different times and places.[143]

It is clear, then, that the individual's consciousness (including motivation and will) is not free in any absolute sense, but constrained by its interconnection with the consciousness of others, and ultimately a function of deeper, long-term historical forces. In this sense, Qu argues, all historical phenomena are 'necessary'. It is here that Qu's conception of necessity becomes clearer, as well as the very real limitations to 'freedom' this conception of necessity imposes. Necessity means causation. Things have causes; they are not accidental. Necessity only seems blind because the causes of it are, for the time being, not understood. 'Freedom', too, is not accidental but a necessary product of historical development, one which can be illustrated by the fact that each stage of historical development has extended human awareness of the causes of natural phenomena and thus increased human control over nature. Consequently, to achieve 'freedom', humans must know the causal laws of necessity.

Qu argues that the significance of necessity is threefold. First, there is 'conditional necessity'. He provides simple examples: if we wish to live, we must breathe; if we are sick and want to recover, we must take medicine. This sort of conditionality is something frequently encountered in the everyday life of human beings. But if the range of this conditionality is to be extended, humans must be able to demand more in terms of what can be gained from nature. Here, Qu poses a dilemma that bears on the relationship between humans and nature. Should humans wish to control nature for their own ends, they must at the same time realise their subordination to nature; this subordination is paradoxically a condition of human emancipation, for the more the power of nature is recognised, the more human 'freedom' is enhanced. This necessitates human understanding of and deference to the laws of nature. The increased subordination of humans to technology and the economy in the emergent phase of capitalism, which in turn allowed a greater degree of human control of nature than had existed hitherto, is an illustration of this paradoxical process.

A second significance of necessity is its 'capacity to impede' (*zhangaili*): humans are prevented by external forces from achieving their goals, and humans are thus forced to act in a manner contrary to their own aspirations. However, Qu argues that human goals can themselves become an external force, if there is compatibility between goals and external reality. For example, the ownership of land by the landlord class is an impediment to the realisation of the aspiration of the poor peasantry to possess land. But this impediment is not immutable, and if the aspirations of the poor peasantry are in appropriate alignment with other external forces, they can function as one of the factors for change. As Qu states, the capacity to impede, like conditional necessity, is not absolute.

Third, and the most important significance of necessity, is causal necessity. Qu rejects the views of those who argue that causal necessity is merely objective necessity: that because social development involves causal necessity, then it is not subject in any way to conscious human action; as in nature, so too in society – things

[143] The material for this section is drawn from Ibid., pp. 294–309.

that happen are unavoidable. Rather, humans make history; human purpose cannot but be a factor in historical change and development, and is 'necessary' to it. And the various purposes of humans are part of this 'necessity'; purpose and necessity are not in opposition. However, purpose is itself determined by necessity. An example is the way in which classes behave: the tendency of each class is to strive for liberation, to bring about change in society, and its actions are a cause of that change. However, its actions and the various human purposes involved are themselves caused by various economic developments, and are therefore determined by necessity.

It is here that Qu's suggestion that human aspiration is, in causal terms, a second order phenomenon must be recalled, for without this, his elaboration of causal necessity lapses into a fully blown determinism. For while, on the one hand, he allows that human purpose can be one of the configuration of forces which determines history, he undercuts this concession by immediately insisting that human purpose is not free but is itself caused. If it is accepted that causation is not indivisible, but constructed on different levels of agency or effectivity, the tensions in Qu's apparently contradictory position can be eased, if not altogether resolved. The notion of human purpose as a second order phenomenon suggests wheels within wheels, or different levels of determination, different levels of causal influence. There are causes beyond the 'ultimate cause'; other factors do exert an influence, but they are determined by necessity in the sense that they are themselves effects of the 'ultimate cause'; and it is only within a context determined by the 'ultimate cause' that their causal potential can come into play and be realised.

Qu's desire to rescue human consciousness and purpose from the oblivion threatened by an absolute determinism (an unqualified objective necessity) thus inspires him to some only limited qualifications to the scope and force of determinism. Moreover, there is some ambivalence in his concession of causal significance to human consciousness and purpose. Human action, if undertaken on the basis of some knowledge of historical necessity (a 'somewhat conscious' action), can be 'somewhat free' (*ziyouxie*); it does have a greater chance of achieving its goals than action not underpinned by such knowledge. But such human action is just one of the many conditions required by the necessity of social motion; it is not and cannot be the 'ultimate cause'. Causal necessity therefore does not imply the impossibility of conscious (or 'somewhat conscious') human action, but indicates the limitations imposed on the significance of the consciousness of the action, and suggests that the capacity of the action itself to bring about the desired result is severely circumscribed.

How then can a major historical goal such as socialism be realised; is such an ideal mere wishful thinking and beyond the scope of human action to achieve? Qu responds that an ideal cannot be realised if it is not founded on and have an intimate connection with 'reality'. Genuine socialist ideals are, he asserts, intimately linked to 'real life', and can therefore be realised. As he points out rather grandiosely: 'Genuine ideals are tomorrow's reality'. And these 'genuine ideals' are those that are based on a scientific reading of the potentialities of the present which, combined with conscious human action to realise those potentialities, can ensure the realisation

of that future reality. The theory of necessity is thus deterministic; *but it is not fatalistic.* If the laws of causation of society are known (causal necessity), then ideals grounded in reality can be achieved through human action.[144] The onus is thus on individuals and, far more importantly, on the 'social aggregate' to which they belong, to ensure that their knowledge and actions are in accord with reality.

2. SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL, DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL

What, however, is the relationship between the individual and society, and between the individual and the social aggregates (such as class) to which they belong? This is a particularly important question in light of Qu's rejection of fatalism. For if history is not destined to unfold in a manner completely immune to the effects of conscious human action, then what is the contribution, if any, of the individual to the realisation of the future? Does the individual matter or is it only individuals in the aggregate that count? Qu's response to the paradox of non-fatalistic determinism is instructive, as it puts into interesting perspective his own efforts to contribute to revolutionary social change. His response is one which accepts that, while the individual is part of the causal equation, the individual represents a very minor integer and is dwarfed in significance by the thoughts and actions of individuals in the aggregate. Even these aggregated individual thoughts and actions are themselves structured and limited by very broad historical forces. Consequently, the individual's consciousness and action have very limited (but not negligible) historical agency. Nevertheless, the causal potential of individual human action had to be exploited in pursuit of change that a scientific reading of the laws of history and social change indicated as achievable. Moreover, there are clearly some individuals whose capacity for influencing the historical process is greater than others; not all individuals are historically equal. Qu's perception of the relationship between society and the individual is thus complicated by his concession that there are 'great personalities' who, while their influence is also conditioned and limited by their historical context, can play an important role in achieving social change if they are closely in tune with the tenor of the times. Let us attempt to reconstruct Qu's position.

Qu repeats his materialist belief that social life, as with nature, is governed by natural laws. However, social phenomena are created by humans: society is organised by humans; people are able to think, and feel that they can determine their own goals and act for themselves. This implies that human will is free. Qu states quite categorically that this is not the case. Human will is not free; it is subordinate to the laws that govern social phenomena.[145] If human will is absolutely free, there would be no such laws; an absolute freedom of human will would imply its complete lack of connection with other wills and society as a whole, and this would amount to a negation of causation. Moreover, it is logically impossible to conceive of all wills being free, as the absolute freedom of one will would necessitate the

[144] Ibid.

[145] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 424.

subordination of other wills in conflict with it. Will is constrained by interconnections, by its social context. Qu insists that laws govern all things in the universe, from small organisms to the actions of solar systems. Humans cannot stand apart, god-like, from a universe in which laws of causation operate; humans and their will cannot be the only exception.

Qu argues that those who advocate indeterminism and the absolute freedom of will frequently confuse the individual's feeling of lack of constraints with an objective lack of constraints; the result is to grossly elevate the capacity of the 'human spirit'.[146] Will is not free, but is determined by many causes. Human feelings and will are indissolubly interconnected with the organic life of humans and their environment; humans live in the natural world, which is itself determined by all manner of causes. All actions, whether the individual realises it or not, consequently have causes.[147] From Qu's perspective, indeterminism is in effect a semi-religious form of explanation, one not grounded in or able to explain reality, and he joins with Spinoza and Leibniz in rejecting the doctrine of complete indeterminacy.

While Qu agrees that, in one sense, society is constituted of individuals, he insists that social phenomena are the sum total of the collective feelings, wills, and actions of countless individuals, and not the result of any one individual. The struggle of all of the wills of these individuals, pursued within an historically-determined context, creates a particular outcome. In revolution, in which many people act at the same time – some positively, some negatively, some tending one way, some tending another – it is this 'struggle of humans' which determines whether a new social system will be achieved. These relationships between humans can play a significant causal role; they are produced by humans, but they are entered into within definite historical conditions and are underpinned by concrete causal forces.[148]

What are these other forces and how do they operate? The 'ultimate cause' of social phenomena is the productive forces of society, within which category Qu includes nature, technology, and labour skills.[149] The causal sequence, in which the productive forces give rise to particular forms of human motivation and action, is as follows. The condition of the productive forces determines the nature of the economic relations, which in turn give rise to a social and political system. The social mentality (the psychology of 'social man') is in part determined directly by economic phenomena, and in part indirectly by the social and political systems that

[146] Ibid., p. 426. An everyday example favoured by Qu is that of the market and the role of the individuals in market relations. In the market, sellers want to increase the price of a commodity whereas buyers wish to decrease it; both feel that their thoughts and actions are arrived at independently. However, it is their positions as buyers and sellers in a structured relationship that determine their wills and actions; it is their social position and the context that are determinant.

[147] Ibid., p. 427.

[148] Ibid., pp. 427–8. Here Qu quotes Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* to the effect that 'these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc.' See Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955), p. 95, also p. 163.

[149] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 303–4.

are themselves determined by the economic relations. Reflecting this social mentality (*shehui xinli*) are all sorts of 'social thought' encapsulated in the world outlook and view on life of society's ideologists.[150]

Qu argues that the unending struggle between humans and nature gives rise to changes in productive techniques, which are systematised in various sciences; this new knowledge creates changes in economic relations that gradually generate a new political system, consequently bringing about changes in the balance of forces in the struggle between humans. Following the changes in the economic realm, the social mentality also changes, and along with these changes, 'one or two great personalities' emerge to represent the new social mentality. The worldview articulated by these 'great personalities' centres, at an ideological level, on the class struggle between new and old class forces, and represents the class position of the new class. The social mentality of a particular age is differentiated along class lines, and while it may seem as though individual personalities can 'freely' choose a particular class position, or 'freely' tend towards a particular method of resolving the problems of a class, the social and economic context in which these personalities are situated determines these 'choices'. Qu stresses that humans cannot transcend the historical age in which they live, and that their thinking is not entirely their own creation. The great personalities of history only appear to transcend class and 'freely' choose their own social position; but this too is a result of the causal laws governing class and class struggle. The thoughts and motivations of the great personalities in history are forerunners of the thoughts and motivations of their class and the masses. Moreover, the resolution of the problems generated within a particular age, such as those of a particular form of class struggle, are limited by the possibilities of that age, and are not the consequence of the 'freely' chosen intentions of a great personality. Consequently, the great personalities of history, and Qu here includes Marx and Lenin, can only be considered as the historical tool of a society or class; they emerge only on the basis of the needs of the struggles generated by the introduction of new technologies within the economic base, and the class struggle.[151]

In what sense, then, can Qu claim that humans play a part in the unfolding of the historical drama? After all, the logic of his position on determinism seems, at first blush, to suggest that humans have a virtually negligible capacity to influence social change. Despite his assertion that history is made by humans (their will, motivation, thought, action, personality), they are depicted as themselves a function of broad historical forces, particularly the development of technology within the forces of production and resultant forms of class struggle. Yet, despite this apparent radical diminution of human agency in Qu's philosophy of history, his rejection of fatalism and endorsement of determinism does possess a certain logic, one which he undoubtedly drew on as an intellectual support to his own dramatic political career.

First, we must remind ourselves that, although Qu rejects the possibility that 'great personalities' make history, he does not reject the idea that they do play an

[150] Ibid., p. 304.

[151] Ibid., pp. 307–8; also Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, 486–8.

extremely important role in apprehending and articulating the deep structural changes occurring in the economic realm of society. This in itself is extremely important, for without these insights into the historical process, the mass of people (nation, class) would be unable to react coherently in pursuit of their collective interests. Qu did not underestimate the potential of leadership, of the 'great personalities', to respond to economic and social changes and to articulate an alternative vision premised on the potentialities discerned within those changes. As Qu points out, 'the "great personalities" are bound to be the instrument of history of a certain epoch or class'.[152] It is no accident that Qu's paean to Lenin bore the title 'Lenin – the instrument of history'. While Qu obviously had the greatest admiration for him, Lenin was 'no hero, no great man, but the instrument of the world proletariat of the twentieth century'.[153] It was Lenin's achievement that he had been able to correctly discern and explain the development of capitalism to its imperialist stage, and to read the tendencies of social development and exert his own revolutionary will in a way which exploited the potential for change evident in the 'objective environment'. Qu's depiction of Lenin as the 'instrument of history' is certainly not one of a figure overawed into passivity by the immensity of historical forces; indeed, there is not the slightest suggestion of fatalism in Qu's positive reading of Lenin's character or political career. By the same token, it is quite evident that Qu did not accept that Lenin, as an individual human, made history purely through the force of his intellect or the steely determination of his political will. These undoubtedly were significant factors, but quite secondary to the objective context within which Lenin found himself. Lenin, like all historical leaders, might find ways to redesign the stage settings; but the stage on which he played was itself inherited from the past, and not of his own choosing or making. Similarly, it is instructive that Qu's biographical sketch of Marx and Engels stresses the historical context of their youth and the influences exerted on their families by the fact that the Rhineland was comparatively underdeveloped industrially, and consequently influenced the more by the ideals of the French Revolution; indeed, their fathers and uncles were contemporaries of the French Revolution and had grown up in its shadow. Marx's father, under the influence of eighteenth century French materialism, rejected Judaism and adopted Protestantism. This impacted indirectly on the young Marx through his early advocacy of atheism, a factor that facilitated his recognition of the powerful influence of the objective environment on human choices, an important precursor to his discovery of the materialist conception of history. Nevertheless, while Marx, like Lenin, was a product of his historical environment, his greatness derived from his capacity to comprehend the historical changes set in motion by the emergence of industrial capitalism and articulate these in a manner which could inspire in the working class a widespread desire for change.[154]

[152] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailu' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 308.
[153] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 486.
[154] Qu Qiubai, 'Makesi he Engesi' [Marx and Engels], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, pp. 533–7.

Second, it is clear, as we observed in the previous chapter, that Qu had a very real respect for science; those capable of achieving a scientific reading of nature and society were in a position to use their knowledge to influence the process of change. It was only on the basis of this capacity that individuals could exert an influence on history in a purposive and conscious way. If, in the process of struggle, they were able to discover causal necessity in history, and to induce others to act on this knowledge of the laws of nature and society in the realm of necessity, then the 'realm of freedom' could be realised. The realm of necessity was thus accessible to human understanding; knowledge of this realm could be used to achieve a degree of control over it. Qu's respect for science and its potential to advance human control over nature and society thus militated against any acceptance on his part of a fatalistic form of determinism, for his conception of science and its practice was an activist one. The acquisition of knowledge was not merely a disinterested quest for truth. The motivation underpinning science was, for Qu, a utilitarian, pragmatic desire to bring about change that could transform humans from the 'slaves of necessity' into the 'masters of necessity'.[155] If the protocols of science were observed and the materialist premises of the laws of nature and society recognised and accepted, then action in conformity with them could, without doubt, enhance human agency. Humans were not doomed forever to be the 'slaves of necessity', and it was science, itself an activity undertaken by humans, which held the key to their liberation.

Third, and related to Qu's faith in science, is his acceptance of a form of human rationality: the capacity of humans to consciously plan and then strive for a particular future; humans can set themselves goals. An important factor in Qu's endorsement of a teleological conception of history (*mudilun*) was his recognition that humans are quite distinct from other living creatures or natural objects in being able to plan their own futures, often involving quite complex, sophisticated projects of lengthy duration.[156] As he points out, 'a rock has no goal, no purpose; it is humans who establish purpose'.[157] Qu thus echoes Marx's admiring depiction of the human capacity to set goals and consciously work towards these, and approvingly quotes the relevant passage from Volume I of *Capital*:

> A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the

[155] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 308.
[156] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 418.
[157] Ibid.

> exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work. This means close attention.[158]

Qu believed that humans could infer 'future reality' from knowledge of the laws of social phenomena, and then establish this as their goal and consciously work towards it. In this sense, human consciousness and capacity to establish goals become integral to the historical process. As he points out in his essay on freedom and necessity, human consciousness is a result of social development, but once created becomes a social force itself and a cause, a conscious cause, of social phenomena.[159]

Finally, we must remind ourselves of Qu's insistence that it is not humans as individuals that matter (much), but humans in the aggregate.[160] Humans exist as part of society; they do not exist as isolated atoms. Although humans are subject to other more powerful forces, in particular changes within the productive forces and class relations, they *can* become a factor for historical change when acting in concert. Once these other forces have exerted their effect on humans and generated a consciousness of them, humans and their consciousness become part of the causal cycle in history. Indeed, it is through humans that the potential within social and historical forces is realised. Consequently, while humans in the aggregate may not be the 'ultimate cause', they are nevertheless extremely important to the way in which history unfolds; the potentialities for change inherent in the productive forces and class relations would remain unrealised in the absence of collective human action. As Qu points out, 'human consciousness is an effect of social development, but can become a social cause after it has become a social force; it is only if this connection between cause and effect is known, that human will can become a conscious cause of social phenomena'.[161]

3. DETERMINISM AND HUMAN AGENCY IN ORGANISED AND UNORGANISED SOCIETIES

It is with this point that Qu underlines his endorsement of determinism. Things are determined because they have causes; but humans (in the aggregate, and their leaders) are part of those causes, even though the extent of their causal agency is limited and of a second order variety. Nevertheless, the extent to which humans can exercise agency in the determination of the future necessitates a rejection of a

[158] Ibid., pp. 418–19. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 284, for the translation used here.

[159] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 307–8.

[160] For Qu's interesting and instructive discussion of society as an 'actual aggregate', not a 'logical aggregate', and the various 'systems' into which humans are aggregated and which modify and mediate the influence of their actions, see Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shchuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 464–70.

[161] Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 307–8.

fatalism in which humans abdicate responsibility for their historical destiny; and Qu rejected such a position, both theoretically and in his own political life, in no uncertain terms. He believed that the tendencies in history had been revealed by Marxism to indicate the strong possibility of a particular future, a communist society. But its realisation depended in part on the conscious efforts of those whose ideals encompassed that future. Qu was committed to its realisation, for he foresaw in communism a society whose organisation enhanced human agency, a society in which collective and conscious action would have a greater impact than in the class societies of the past. In other words, the equation of forces that constituted determinism was different in class (unorganised) and non-class (organised, communist) societies, with the latter favouring a greater degree of human control.

The logic of Qu's position is as follows. Although social phenomena are, to some extent, a 'human product', there are two very different circumstances for the exercise of human influence on social phenomena. The first is a society that is unorganised, and here Qu is referring to a society with 'a simple commodity economy', in other words, a capitalist society. The other is an organised society: communism. The former has an economy which is entirely unplanned, and in which there is class struggle, at times intense. There are many aspects of this society that those living in it do not want. However, while it is the case that humans do have some capacity to create the conditions of their social life, in a society which lacks organisation and in which things merely run their course, what people set out to achieve (their goals) is not always what eventuates. In some cases it is precisely the opposite.[162]

Consequently, in an unorganised society, the will of the individual may be in conflict with the aggregate will of those living in society and may not be realised as a result of the limitations imposed by social phenomena. All sorts of ideas emerge from the economic, cultural and political realms, ideas which become part of the general social consciousness, but which vary from one individual to the next. There is no mechanism for ensuring that what the individual thinks and wants to achieve will either be realised or in harmony with the thoughts and wishes of other humans. In this context, it is social phenomena that dominate humans, and not the other way round. Individuals may desire certain social or personal outcomes, but unless social phenomena are conducive to their aspirations, their desires remain unrealised. There is thus a quite possible disjuncture between individual sentiment and collective social consciousness, and between human aspiration and what is possible given the limitations imposed by social phenomena, which do not express the will of individual human beings. As a result, individuals often feel oppressed by social phenomena, which appear to emerge and decline autonomously and over which they have no control.[163]

Qu argues that in an organised society, namely a communist society, the problem of disparate wills ceases to be significant. Humans, according to Qu, are clearly capable of cooperation, of meshing their individual wills to achieve a common

[162] Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], in *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 429. Here, Qu gives the example of the businessman whose desire is to make money but who is bankrupted.
[163] Ibid., p. 430.

objective; and this cooperation can be extremely extensive. The social will in this context is an organised will, the result of a conscious and organised social determination. People are not dominated by society, and there is a consistency between their wills, their actions and the will of society. Their actions are therefore conscious actions in the full sense in that there is coherence between individual wills and the will of society (of individuals in the aggregate). This is not to say that individuals within communist society will be able to transcend nature, or that society itself will then be immune from the effect of natural laws; people in communist society will, as before, be part of nature, and subject to the laws of cause and effect. Determinism, in the sense of the operation of the laws of cause and effect, will still operate within communist society. Nevertheless, while social phenomena will, as was the case in class society, remain the 'combination' of various individual wills and actions, in an organised society the process of this 'combination' no longer proceeds capriciously, but is organised. The result is that there is far greater uniformity of ideas and coherence of aspiration within society. Social phenomena can express the will of individual human beings, and is not separate from that will. People can control their own decisions, and do not feel oppressed by social forces beyond individual control, for these have been eliminated and replaced by a rational and organised society. Consequently, while Qu rejected the notion that determinism would not operate in communist society, he believed its inhabitants would be conscious of their situation and organised, and this would allow them to know what to do and how to do it in order to wage their struggle with nature. In such a context, there could be truly the capacity to move from necessity to freedom, for 'freedom is knowledge of necessity'.[164]

4. QU QIUBAI AND THE DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM

It is clear that Qu recognised the very significant tensions within Marxist philosophy, between acceptance of a materialist universe determined by the laws of dialectics on the one hand and belief in the possibility of conscious human action on the other. Without the latter, the call to political action in pursuit of determined historical goals appeared totally redundant; but given too much prominence as an agency of historical change, conscious human action appeared to erode the materialist foundations on which Marxist philosophy stood. Qu's attempted resolution of this antinomy, while interesting and in parts sophisticated, is ultimately unsatisfying, for he refused to give ground on the fundamental premise that all things have causes and that these causes must be materialist in nature. If, ontologically, the universe and all within it are composed of matter, then the distinction between consciousness and material reality, between subject and object, is at best a relative one; and it is a distinction which inevitably evaporates when the

[164] Ibid., pp. 431–2.

materialist test is applied to both sides of the epistemological dualism.[165] Qu goes to considerable pains, in both his philosophical and scientific writings, to demonstrate that consciousness is not only a manifestation of a form of matter (brain, nerves), but is itself matter of a particular sort.[166] The logical conclusion is that matter acts on matter, a materialist cul-de-sac.

To extricate himself from this impasse, Qu did accept, at an epistemological level, a dualism of subject and object, of consciousness and material reality, and he attempted to demonstrate how the subject and consciousness can, within very severe historical and social limitations, exert an influence on historical change. Most important to his reasoning is the concept of the 'aggregate': it is only as part of this aggregate (such as nation or class) that the individual can exert an influence through conscious action; the individual standing alone can have little influence. The important and (from Qu's perspective of leadership within the CCP) essential exception is that of the 'great personalities' who, if sufficiently cognisant of the objective character of society, can instigate social change through the transmission of this knowledge to the social aggregate they lead. It is undoubtedly in this light that Qu perceived his own role, and this helps explain his strong interest in natural science, social science theory and philosophy, as well as China's history and society; for knowledge of these, if acted on by a determined social aggregate led by perspicacious leadership, could lead to the realisation of desired historical goals.[167]

Nevertheless, even the 'great personalities', Qu tells us, are themselves a product of their material – social, natural, historical – environment; they, like everything else, have causes. Consequently, while Qu does attempt to create a space within which conscious human action has agency, it is a very limited space; and he immediately restricts it even further by insisting that conscious human action is itself a function of something else, for it too has causes. One way out of this impasse is to perceive conscious human action as a second order phenomenon, one that may have an influence, but not in its own right; its influence, and the extent of that influence, also have causes. Another solution is to recognise that Qu's 'ultimate cause' – the productive forces – involved human beings, and was not some abstract structure from which human consciousness was excluded. He echoed Marx's description of the human as labourer, one of whose most important characteristics is the capacity to consciously plan the outcome of labour. In an important sense, then, conscious human action is part of the 'ultimate' cause'. However, the role and extent of its influence within this 'ultimate cause' (either individually or in aggregate) is not made at all clear by Qu. Moreover, this supposedly 'ultimate cause' is itself part of the material universe and subject to its laws of cause and effect. The productive

[165] Qu Qiubai, 'Weiwulun de yuzhouguan gaishou' [A general explanation of the world outlook of materialism], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 4, p. 12.

[166] For elaboration of this point, see Qu's critique of the naturalist Huxley's materialism. Qu Qiubai, 'Shehui zhexue gailun' [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 326–8; also Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 441–3.

[167] Widmer argues that Qu's views on the role of literature became more activist towards the end of the 1920s. This coincided with his second sojourn in the Soviet Union, and may have heralded a firmer stance on the possibility of accelerating social change through political and cultural means. See Widmer, 'Qu Qiubai and Russian literature', pp. 118–19.

forces, as Qu makes clear, have a very real connection with the natural environment within which they are set, and given the significance of external causality in his thought (during the early 1920s, see Chapter 3), the concept of an 'ultimate cause' begins itself to look somewhat threadbare.

If Qu's purpose in delving into the complex philosophical issue of determinism was to rescue the human subject as a conscious agent of historical change, the very strong impression he leaves is that, at a philosophical level at least, he was not overly successful. If all things have causes, and there are no genuine 'accidents',[168] then conscious human action, like all else, is determined.[169] This basic premise, while a viable foundation for a materialist worldview, proved an intellectual straitjacket for one who so wished to establish the possibility that humans were not just the objects of history, but its subjects too. Indeed, the effort to demonstrate this in a coherent and convincing manner was ultimately beyond Qu's capacity as a philosopher. In saying this, however, we need to remind ourselves that Qu's Marxist philosophy was not unique in being unable to escape its deterministic premises. The determinism of Freudian psychoanalytical theory and Augustinian theology creates just such problems for their adherents as the determinism of Marxism creates for its. One might therefore suggest that Qu did as well as can be expected, given the tools to hand.

However, the issue is not so much whether Qu's philosophy is correct, logical or intellectual convincing, for such judgements depend on the eye of the beholder. More important is the fact that Qu was actually talking and writing on these complex themes within Marxist philosophy during the CCP's formative years. It was Qu who introduced to Marxism in China the concepts and language of European and Soviet Marxist philosophy; and the erudition he displayed in addressing the core problems of materialism and determinism within Marxist philosophy, and the popularity of his lectures and books on philosophy, suggest that knowledge of and interest in Marxism within the CCP was not as undeveloped as some scholars have led us to believe.

Qu's contribution to the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China was to stand for some time. Li Da's *Contemporary Sociology*, published in 1926, contained only a short and rather schematic section on Marxist philosophy, and does not nearly approach the complexity and breadth of material introduced by Qu three years earlier (see Chapter 8). Indeed, Li Da did not turn his attention to philosophy in a concerted way until the late 1920s, when he undertook the task of translating into Chinese a number of volumes on Marxist philosophy of Russian and Japanese

[168] As Qu points out, the apparent accidents of history still have their laws, even though these laws may be complex, difficult to discover and function over a long time scale; it is things for which the cause is not readily apparent that are designated as accidents. The concept of 'accident' is therefore a subjective, rather than objective, one; there is nothing in the world that is without a cause. Qu quotes Spinoza as saying: 'The so-called accidental is entirely a result of our lack of knowledge; it is because we do not know its causes'. Qu Qiubai, 'Xiandai shehuixue' [Contemporary Sociology], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, p. 433.

[169] Qu was consistent to his view of the early 1920s by believing that it would take China one hundred years to catch up to its communist future. See Widmer, 'Qu Qiubai and Russian literature', p. 118.

provenance. Li Da's massive philosophical tome *Elements of Sociology*, written under the influence of Soviet Marxism's New Philosophy, was not published until 1935. Similarly, it was not until 1933 that Ai Siqi began his prolific career as elaborator and populariser of the New Philosophy, and not until 1936 that his books on philosophy began to be published.

By that time, Qu Qiubai was dead, and the context for the study of Marxist philosophy had changed dramatically. While Qu lived long enough to witness the triumph of the New Philosophy, and did write briefly within its ambit, it was left to the next generation of Chinese Marxist philosophers to take up the challenge of the introduction to China of this new orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy. It was their philosophical translations and writings during the early to mid 1930s that were to have a dramatic and enduring influence on the theoretical development of the CCP. However, their influence, and particularly their influence on Mao Zedong, cannot be regarded as separate from the larger influence exerted by the Soviet Union's New Philosophy, which had received Stalin's seal of approval in 1931. It was the New Philosophy that demanded and secured their allegiance; it was this philosophy that dominated their thinking; and it was this philosophy that, in 1936–37, was communicated to Mao Zedong as orthodox Marxist philosophy and which then received his imprimatur as the orthodoxy of the CCP.

It is to this story, the introduction and elaboration of the New Philosophy by its leading Chinese advocates – Ai Siqi, Li Da and Mao Zedong – that we now turn. While the themes introduced by Qu Qiubai – materialism and determinism – continue into this next phase in the history of Marxist philosophy in China, they do so in somewhat different guise, and there are different emphases. In particular, there is a greater focus, deriving from the preoccupations of the New Philosophy, on a practice-based epistemology; there is also increased attention given to the law of the unity of contradictions (or opposites) as 'the fundamental law' of dialectical materialism. These abstract themes are accompanied, particularly in the writings of Ai Siqi, by the use of concrete Chinese examples to illustrate the abstruse formulae of Marxist philosophy. Ai's popularising mode of explication, one suited to a Chinese audience within a Chinese context, was a major theme in the development of Marxist philosophy in China during the 1930s; and it was part of a broader movement on the part of Communist intellectuals to find a way to 'Sinify' Marxism without eroding its core theoretical premises. Mao was to endorse this objective in 1938, and also himself to emulate Ai Siqi's approach to the elaboration and popularisation of Marxist philosophy.

However, the 'Sinification' of Marxist philosophy was to occupy what can be regarded as the second phase of the process of the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China. It was only when Ai Siqi and like-minded Marxist philosophers felt sufficiently conversant with the New Philosophy's abstract and supposedly universal philosophical system of dialectical materialism that they turned to the question of how it could be 'Sinified'. In so doing, they ensured that Marxist philosophy in China incorporated a very high level of orthodoxy as measured by the New Philosophy's exacting criteria. Without an understanding of the New Philosophy – its emergence, political triumph and doctrines – the next phase in the history of Marxist philosophy in China cannot be understood. It is consequently to

the story of the New Philosophy that we now turn, for its telling is pivotal to our understanding of the provenance and level of orthodoxy of Marxist philosophy in China. It is, significantly, a story whose beginning occurred outside China.

CHAPTER 5

THE NEW PHILOSOPHY AND MARXIST PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

By the time of the Russian Revolution, the idea had become well entrenched in Marxist circles that philosophical speculation and debate were legitimate preoccupations of Marxist theorists.[170] There had been strident attempts by prominent Russian Marxists, most notably Plekhanov and Lenin, to establish a particular interpretation of philosophy as *orthodox* Marxist philosophy. Nevertheless, during the early to mid 1920s, and despite Lenin's robust defence of his definition of orthodox Marxist philosophy,[171] considerable philosophical debate continued in the ranks of Bolshevik intellectuals. As Ahlberg notes, 'In the first half of the twenties the principles of Marxist philosophy had by no means been fully elaborated'.[172] Some of the major figures in these debates were Minin and Encmen, who endorsed the view, later to be attacked by Bukharin as 'vulgar materialism', that philosophy was itself an anachronism left over from class society and should be discarded in favour of science;[173] Bogdanov, whose empirio-monism attempted to unite subject and object on the basis of the sensations of the subject;[174] and Stepanov and Timiryazev, who represented the 'mechanical materialists' with their belief in mechanical motion, external causality and linear forms of development.[175] It was particularly against this latter philosophical tendency that the proponents of 'dialectical materialism' were to struggle, and it was their victory over the mechanical materialists in 1929 that was to set the scene for the emergence of the philosophical orthodoxy of the years 1931–36 that was to have such a dramatic influence on Marxism in China.

[170] For the history of Marxist philosophy within the Bolshevik Party before 1917, see David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science, 1917–1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 24–44.

[171] The second edition of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was published in September 1920. Lenin expressed the hope, in the 'Preface' to this second edition, that the book would 'prove useful as an aid to an acquaintance with the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism, as well as with the philosophical conclusions from the recent discoveries in natural science'. V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), p. 8.

[172] Rene Ahlberg, 'The Forgotten Philosopher: Abram Deborin', in Leopold Labedz (ed.), *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 129.

[173] See Werner Meissner, *Philosophy and Politics in China: The Controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s* (London: Hurst and Co., 1990), pp. 16–17.

[174] See Loren R. Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 43.

[175] Meissner, *Philosophy and politics in China*, p. 16.

The major figure in the emergence of dialectical materialism as the orthodox philosophy of Soviet Marxism was Abram Deborin, described by his biographer Rene Ahlberg as the 'forgotten philosopher'.[176] It was Deborin who led the attack against the 'mechanistic materialists' during the years 1925–29, and who accelerated the process of formalising the philosophy of dialectical materialism so that it could function as orthodox Marxist philosophy. Deborin and the dialectical materialists quarrelled with the mechanistic materialists over a number of basic philosophical postulates. The mechanistic materialists, drawing on a particular reading of Engels' philosophy, adopted a deterministic perspective on natural and social change, one that favoured an evolutionary view of development, a process driven by external causation. They were openly hostile to dialectics, regarding it as 'scholasticism', and urged the abolition of philosophy and dialectics as subjects that could be studied in the Soviet Union, arguing that these should be replaced by sciences premised on the methods of positivism.[177] Deborin violently opposed this attack on dialectics. Following in the footsteps of Hegel and Plekhanov, Deborin perceived the dialectic as a combination of logic, ontology and epistemology; as such, the dialectical method constituted the foundation of the natural sciences. He insisted that development proceeded in a dialectical manner, and that leaps in development were caused by contradictions within phenomena. Indeed, he perceived the dialectic's law of the unity of opposites as so fundamental to an understanding of the natural world that it should be made the basis of theoretical physics.[178] There was thus a wide theoretical gulf between the proponents of dialectical materialism and mechanistic materialism.

Deborin's staunch defence and elaboration of dialectical materialism's basic propositions (unity of opposites, internal causality, development in leaps) was not pursued only in the realm of abstract theoretical debate, but in the realm of politics. During the latter half of the 1920s, adherents of dialectical materialism gained increasing control of influential organisations, such as scientific institutes (the prestigious Soviet Academy of Sciences being a prime example[179]), universities, and professional associations. Of the latter, the Society of Militant Materialists and Dialecticians, of which Deborin was the Director, had by 1929 established an organisational network that covered almost all of Russia. Deborin was also the chief editor (from 1926–30) of *Under the Banner of Marxism*, the major philosophical journal.[180] The increasing influence of supporters of dialectical materialism within such organisations was accompanied by, and was in part a manifestation of, the increasing control exercised by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) over philosophy and science. These realms were increasingly regarded as too significant to the goals of the Party to remain autonomous. The judgement rendered

[176] Ahlberg, 'The Forgotten Philosopher', pp. 126–41.
[177] Ibid, pp. 129–32.
[178] Ibid., p. 134.
[179] For analysis of the increasing domination of the affairs of the Academy by political and ideological considerations, see Loren R. Graham, *The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Communist Party, 1927–1932* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).
[180] Ahlberg, 'The Forgotten Philosopher', p. 132.

on mechanistic materialism by the Party in April 1929 – that it was an 'obvious deviation from the position of Marxist-Leninist philosophy' – consequently foreshadowed the end of philosophy as a realm of free debate, and anticipated the idea, to become entrenched from 1931, that the Party would be the ultimate determiner of which variant of Marxist philosophy was to be regarded as orthodox.[181]

1. THE 'NEW PHILOSOPHY': THE NEW ORTHODOXY IN MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

The status of orthodoxy which dialectical materialism attracted in 1929 with the victory of the Deborinites over mechanistic materialism was in part a function of a belief that a dialectical rather than mechanistic variant of materialism accorded more closely with the philosophical tradition of Marxism. After all, while the mechanistic materialists could invoke the positivist and evolutionary themes in Engels' writings, dialectical materialists could appeal with equal if not greater justification to their dialectical themes, as well as appealing to the ideas of Plekhanov and Lenin, both of whom regarded a *dialectical* materialism which drew heavily on Hegel as 'orthodox' Marxism. The ascendancy of dialectical materialism thus rested in part on the ideological authority of its earlier famous proponents (Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin), as well as on the persuasiveness of its ideas and concepts.[182] In this regard, there can be no doubt that Deborin, influenced heavily by the dialectical philosophies of Hegel and Plekhanov, firmly believed in the superiority of dialectical materialism and functioned as an energetic and effective advocate of its ideas. He was able to convince, through his writings and activities, an emerging generation of Soviet philosophers.[183] He also influenced philosophers in China, including Ai Siqi and Li Da, an influence they were later obliged to renounce.[184]

However, the establishment of dialectical materialism as Marxist philosophical orthodoxy in the Soviet Union was not only a function of the intellectual persuasiveness of Deborin's interpretation of Marxist philosophy. It was a function, as we have seen, of the increasing control of key organisations by its proponents, and ultimately of intervention by the Party. It was the Party, firmly under the control

[181] Ibid., p. 134.

[182] It is fashionable in much Western literature to belittle dialectical materialism as a philosophy. However, for a reasoned defence of it, see Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union*, Chapter 2.

[183] Indeed, Lenin had read and been influenced by Deborin's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Dialectical Materialism*, written in 1908; see Ahlberg, 'The forgotten philosopher', p. 126. For Lenin's critical annotations on Deborin's article 'Dialectical Materialism' (1909), see Lenin, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961), Vol. 38, pp. 477–85.

[184] Li Da admitted in the early 1930s that he had himself uncritically adopted the views of Plekhanov and Deborin, and would employ the criteria provided by the philosophical texts of the New Philosophy to 'settle accounts' with their philosophy. The New Philosophy would henceforth, Li declared, be 'our model'. See M. Shirokov and A. Aizenberg et al., *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng* [A Course on dialectical materialism], translated by Li Da and Lei Zhongjian (Shanghai: Bigengtang shudian, 1932), p. 4.

of Stalin by the late 1920s, which determined that philosophy, science and history were realms of intellectual inquiry too important to socialism to permit the existence of ideas within them inimical to the Party's needs.

The victory of the Deborinites and dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union was to have a significant impact on Marxist philosophy in China. The impact was twofold. First, much of the material that became available in Chinese translation in the late 1920s and 1930 bore the influence of Deborin's interpretation of dialectical materialism, with its heavy emphasis on the dialectic, and owing much to the philosophy of Hegel.[185] Second, it became apparent to Marxist philosophers in China that, with the CPSU's rejection of 'mechanistic materialism', the Party had now fully asserted its right to be the final arbiter of orthodoxy in matters philosophical. Deborin's interpretation of dialectical materialism had received the seal of approval, and it was this philosophy that they were compelled to endorse and disseminate if they wished to remain within the revolutionary fold. While they had not previously been blind to the connection between politics and philosophy, it was now impressed on them even more forcefully that it was the CPSU, and not they, which would render the ultimate philosophical judgement. Their task as philosophers was not to critically reflect on Marxist philosophy and to arrive at a personalised rendition of it, but to translate, elaborate and disseminate the new orthodoxy.

The CPSU's insistence that it was the final arbiter of philosophical orthodoxy was reinforced by its repudiation in 1931 of the Deborinite interpretation of dialectical materialism. It was this dramatic sea change in Soviet Marxist philosophy in 1931 that was to have the most profound impact on the subsequent history of Marxist philosophy in China. The very greatly increased domination of philosophy by the CPSU indicated by its attack in 1929 on mechanical materialism explains not only the triumph of Deborin's philosophy, but the reasons why he was to fall from grace in January 1931 and his interpretation of dialectical materialism repudiated. As early as April 1930, the Deborinites had been attacked by members of the Institute of Red Professors, including Mark Mitin, whose philosophical writings were soon to become very influential in China under the rubric of the 'New Philosophy'. The attack was mounted on two related fronts. Politically, the Deborinites were guilty of failing 'to give immediate sanction to the Party's

[185] An example is I. Luppol's *Lenin und die Philosophie – Zur Frage des Verhaltnisses der Philosophie zur Revolution* (Lenin and Philosophy – Debates on the relationship between philosophy and revolution), which was translated into Chinese by Li Da and published in Shanghai in 1930. This book quotes extensively from Deborin, and emphasises the importance of dialectics. All things, Luppol states, are connected and in motion; all things are full of difference, and under certain conditions contradictions manifest themselves and change into other forms through the process of the negation of the negation. Similarly, the famous Japanese Marxist theorist and philosopher Kawakami Hajime's *Fundamental Theories of Marxist Economics* (also translated by Li Da, and also published in 1930), is replete with lengthy quotes from Deborin and Luppol. It stresses the Hegelian dialectic, maintaining that the self-motion of matter springs from dialectical causes and adopts a dialectical form of development. There is a unity of opposites, but there is also struggle and dissociation between opposites. It is therefore essential to recognise the role of negation in the process of development, for it is this that allows the emergence of new things. It was this philosophical view that Chinese philosophers took from the Soviet texts on philosophy of the late 1920s. See Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), Chapter 5.

practical measures'. An article published in *Pravda* in June 1930 accused them of 'a lack of party-mindedness', and 'the malicious separation of philosophy from the practical problems of the country'. Philosophically, they were guilty of 'extreme formalism', for their interpretation of Marxist philosophy had been excessively influenced by the ideas of Hegel and Plekhanov.[186] There had been too much emphasis on the dialectical component of dialectical materialism at the expense of its materialist dimension, and this had had the unfortunate consequence of reducing the capacity of Marxist philosophy to understand and serve the practical problems faced by the Party in its struggle to establish socialism. In December 1930, Stalin branded Deborin's views 'Menshevizing idealism', and this judgement ended any possibility that philosophy could henceforth remain independent of Party control. However, despite this repudiation of Deborin's interpretation of dialectical materialism, its basic tenets were not repudiated after 1931, although in practice they were interpreted in a less Hegelian spirit.[187] What did distinguish Soviet Marxist philosophy after 1931 was its complete domination by the Party. 'Orthodoxy' was now defined and enforced politically. This was to lead to the complete formalisation of dialectical materialism along lines approved by the Party, a process in which speculative and innovative thought disappeared and in which there was constant repetition of the approved principles of this philosophy.[188]

The formalistic and repetitive nature of the orthodoxy that prevailed in Soviet philosophy during the early-1930s serves to make a comparison between it and the writings on dialectical materialism of Marxist philosophers in China relatively straightforward, for they consciously operated within its philosophical framework. But what were Marxist philosophers in the Soviet Union, the philosophers of the 'New Philosophy', saying about the nature and function of philosophy; how did they elaborate the basic postulates of dialectical materialism, and in particular, its materialist ontology, practice-based epistemology, and the laws of dialectics? Each of these themes within dialectical materialism became of great concern to Marxist philosophers in China, and require some consideration here. Let us turn to a necessarily brief reconstruction of the New Philosophy's rendition of dialectical materialism. Our attention will focus on the basic premises of this philosophy, and this will function as a basis from which judgements regarding the provenance and level of orthodoxy of Chinese Marxist philosophers' interpretation of Marxist philosophy can be made.

[186] Deborin had in fact left the Bolshevik Party in 1907 and become a Menshevik. He did not rejoin the Communist Party of the Soviet Union until 1928.

[187] See Eugene Kamenka, 'Soviet Philosophy, 1917–67', in Alex Simirenko (ed.), *Social Thought in the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 95; also Ahlberg, 'The Forgotten Philosopher', pp. 136–40. The pejorative term 'Menshevizing idealism' appears frequently in the Soviet texts on philosophy from the early 1930s that Chinese philosophers like Ai Siqi and Li Da read and translated; they were thus left in no doubt as to Deborin's outcast status in the world of Marxist philosophy.

[188] On the issue of repetition in Soviet philosophical writings, see Kamenka, 'Soviet Philosophy, 1917–1967', p. 95; also Richard T. De George, *Patterns of Soviet Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 193.

2. THE NEW PHILOSOPHY ON DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

The three texts of the New Philosophy that found their way to China and exerted a major influence on the course of Marxist philosophy in China were Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy*[189] and *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*,[190] and Shirokov and Aizenberg et al.'s *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*.[191] We will turn in this and subsequent chapters to evaluation of their influence on Ai Siqi and Li Da, the two most significant Chinese Marxist philosophers of the 1930s, and more particularly on Mao Zedong and the development of his philosophical thought from late 1936. This evaluation inevitably incorporates judgements about the nature of 'orthodoxy' and the role that the Soviet texts on philosophy played in instilling a sense of the importance of philosophical orthodoxy within the CCP's leading figures in Marxist philosophy. Here we focus on six themes common to these three Soviet texts on philosophy, and which combined provide a snapshot of the content of dialectical materialism, as interpreted by the New Philosophy.

The first, and in some senses most significant theme, is that of the subordination of philosophy to politics, and particularly to the direction of the CPSU. This basic premise of the New Philosophy is articulated in highly polemical tones, with some vicious assaults, amounting to caricatures, on the proponents of alternative readings of Marxist philosophy. For example, the opening section of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* forcefully asserts the 'Party character' of philosophy, and underlines the fundamental reason why 'mechanistic materialism' and the Deborinite version of dialectical materialism had been rejected. Having achieved the era of socialism, a major target of Marxist theory in the Soviet Union had to be those who opportunistically opposed the 'correct policies' of the Party; and of these 'class enemies', the Mensheviks were the most pernicious, for they refused to change their erroneous views even though the context had changed and the urgent needs of the Party demanded that philosophy and philosophers change to accommodate those needs. The task of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in the current stage was to study problems raised by practice in the period of socialist transition, such as the relationship between various classes in the Soviet Union, and the creation of new forms of labour. Such problems could only be solved through acknowledgement of the correctness of the Party's orientation, and through a struggle for the truth of Leninism.[192] Philosophy could not be perceived as a realm of inquiry that stood apart from the urgent tasks of the day; it was, rather, a 'Party science'.[193] There was thus a strong *political* premise to the repudiation of previous versions of Marxist philosophy.

[189] M.B. Mitin (ed.), *Xin zhexue dagang* [Outline of New Philosophy], translated by Ai Siqi and Zheng Yili (n.p.: Dushu Shenghuo chubanshe, 1936).
[190] M.B. Mitin, *Bianzhengweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun* [Dialectical and Historical Materialism], translated by Shen Zhiyuan (n.p.: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936).
[191] Shirokov and Aizenberg et al., *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*.
[192] Ibid., p. 6.
[193] Ibid., p. 7.

Singled out for particularly harsh criticism were the leading thinkers of the Mensheviks, who were guilty of proceeding, not from 'concrete reality' but from 'empty' theoretical premises, and in so doing producing philosophical and theoretical perspectives that were subjective and non-materialist.[194] For example, the mechanistic materialists, of whom Minin was a protagonist, had advocated the abandonment of philosophy for natural science, and had advocated its replacement by the natural sciences. To do so, however, was to employ the premises of bourgeois philosophy, one that adopted a static conception of nature and society and which ignored the dialectical character of motion and change.[195] Bukharin's theory of 'equilibrium' is cited as an example of this erroneous way of thinking, for it ignored the existence of classes and the struggle between them, and ignored too the fact that development proceeded through leaps. Bukharin had thus rejected the law of revolutionary development – the law of the unity and struggle of opposites – opting for a perspective that viewed change as gradual expansion and contraction, as mere quantitative change.[196] Similarly, 'Menshevising idealists' such as Deborin are accused of being unable to integrate theory and practice, of being unable to grasp the purpose of philosophy during its 'Leninist stage'.[197] It was the task of Party philosophers to struggle against such erroneous tendencies and to establish a philosophy that explained the correctness of the Party's goals and tactics. That philosophy was the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism.[198]

Second, the Soviet philosophical texts assert the materialist ontology of the New Philosophy, and again do so in a highly polemical fashion. Philosophy, they assert, can be reduced to two basic tendencies: materialism and idealism. The distinction between them rests on their response to the basic question of philosophy: the relationship between reality and human consciousness. The basic premise of dialectical materialism is materialist because it accepts that the universe is a material universe and that the objects of which it is constituted are composed of matter whose existence is independent of human consciousness.[199] It holds that reality determines consciousness, whereas idealism holds that the objects of reality are created by consciousness.[200]

Idealism, in contrast to materialism, commences not from reality but from abstract propositions about reality. Philosophers identified in this camp are Berkeley, Kant, the neo-Kantians such as Mach and Bogdanov, and Hegel. It was Hegel who had exerted such a pernicious influence on the Deborinites; they had consequently allowed themselves to become separated from practice and the Party's political struggle.[201] The Deborinites had emphasised Hegel's thought over Marx and Lenin's, and paid insufficient attention to the revolutionary struggles of the

[194] Ibid., p. 28.
[195] Ibid., pp. 22–6.
[196] Ibid., pp. 38–9.
[197] Ibid., pp. 42–4; see also the critique of Luppol, p. 297.
[198] Ibid., pp. 47–8.
[199] Mitin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, pp. 160–1.
[200] Ibid., p. 48.
[201] Ibid., pp. 142–66.

proletariat. They were obsessed with Hegel's view of the dialectic, of the symmetry of his theoretical system, claiming that it could explain not only motion but the direction of change as well. The purpose and goal of motion were supposedly guaranteed by the existence, in Hegel's theoretical system, of an absolute spirit, and all things – the creativity of human thought, the different forms adopted by the state, the variety of societies – were presumed to be a product of this absolute spirit and its self-knowledge. The rationality of this supposedly divine being manifested itself, according to Hegel, in human history, philosophy, science and technology, law, and in the very social system itself; the changes in these were manifestations of the progression of the absolute spirit towards its final goal. The New Philosophy rejected this philosophical viewpoint as subjective idealism.

While repudiating Hegel's idealism, the New Philosophy did accept the dialectical premise of his philosophical system, in which change was neither random nor accidental. In Hegel's system, the cause of motion and development were the contradictions replete within the process of development of the absolute spirit; in all things, there were consequently forces for change and progress, and others that resisted change, and it was the struggle between these (between affirmation and negation) that led to the dialectical pattern of development. While the dialectical element of Hegel's philosophical system was rational, its identification of the absolute spirit as the primal cause of change and development was not. Only through the union of dialectics with the materialism of Marx, with his identification of the proletariat as the force for change within capitalist society, could the dialectic be salvaged from Hegel's idealism.

Third, the texts of the New Philosophy provide a detailed explanation of the approved theory of change, and it is here that the laws of dialectical materialism are introduced and the relationship between them specified. Drawing heavily on Engels, the New Philosophy argued that the behaviour (motion, change, development) of the materialist universe and all objects within it is governed by natural laws. The first and most important of these is the law of the unity of opposites (sometimes described as the law of the unity and struggle of opposites). This law posits that within all objects and processes there are opposites (or contradictions). The identity that exists between the opposites that constitute an object is the ontological premise for its existence. But the existence of opposites is at the same time the premise for the change and development of that object, for while there is identity between opposites, there is at the same time struggle, this ensuring that no object in the universe is free from the imperative that drives change. The fundamental cause of motion, change and development is thus internal (and here we can note a significant shift from Qu Qiubai's interpretation of Marxist philosophy, with its references to the importance of external change). As opposites (contradictions) and the struggle between them constitute the primal impulse for change and motion in the material universe, the law that describes this process – the law of the unity of opposites – represents the fundamental law of dialectical materialism. In his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Mitin asserts:

> Consequently, the law of the unity and mutual penetration of opposites becomes the most fundamental, the most important law of dialectics, and the law of determinative significance ... In his *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin described the unity of opposites

> as the kernel of dialectics ... The law of the unity of opposites is the most universal law of the objective world and of cognition.[202]

The same judgement appears in the other texts of the New Philosophy. *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* refers to the law of the unity of opposites as 'the fundamental law of dialectics' and its 'determining element'.[203] Similarly, *Outline of New Philosophy* emphasises the determinative and general significance of this law.[204] Readers of the New Philosophy were thus left in no doubt as to the centrality of the law of the unity of opposites to Marxist philosophical orthodoxy.

According to the New Philosophy, the law of the unity of opposites works as follows. All things in reality are in motion, and motion is driven by the struggle of contradictions. Contradictions are constituted of two aspects. One aspect is the condition for the existence of the other aspect; while the identity between the aspects of a contradiction can only ever be relative, the struggle between them is absolute. In the struggle between the aspects of a contradiction, one of the aspects is the principal aspect.[205] In analysing a particular process or thing, it is necessary to identify this principal aspect. In addition, it is important to be aware that the motion of contradictions exists in a process from beginning to end, and in analysing the many contradictions that exist within the process it is necessary to identify the principal contradiction, for it is this which has a determining effect on other contradictions in the process.[206] There is thus a principal contradiction, and there is a principal aspect of this contradiction.

The second and third of the laws of dialectical materialism are the law of the mutual transformation of quantity and quality, and the law of the negation of the negation. While the law of the unity of opposites describes the ontological basis of change and development, these two laws are concerned with the process of change itself and the reasons why change proceeds in leaps. The law of the mutual transformation of quantity and quality determines that change takes different forms: change which is gradual, cumulative and does not alter the essential nature of a phenomenon is quantitative change; such quantitative change will, however, eventually reach an extreme point at which the nature of the phenomenon is altered to become something qualitatively different. A new phenomenon is thus created which does, however, retain elements of the old phenomenon. The law of the negation of the negation, which is a concrete manifestation of the law of the unity of opposites, explains the reasons for this kind of change (in which the negative elements of an object are themselves negated).[207] The laws of quantitative and qualitative change and the negation of the negation explain the periodicity of the process of change, and the reasons why the direction of change is not random but purposive.

[202] Mitin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, p. 222; see also pp. 212–3.
[203] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 15, 309.
[204] Mitin, *Outline of New Philosophy*, p. 238.
[205] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 295–7.
[206] Ibid., p. 298.
[207] Mitin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, p. 247.

Fourth, the New Philosophy's explanation of epistemology insists that the objects that constitute reality are knowable, and it is through social and historical practice that knowledge of them can be achieved.[208] Knowledge derives from a process in which reality is reflected in the brain of the subject; reflection does not occur immediately but proceeds through a series of repeated stages which leads the subject to a deeper understanding of reality, its internal connections, its laws of motion and development. The process of knowledge production is a dynamic (indeed, dialectical) process that incorporates the multi-faceted aspects of social practice, of which production and class struggle are the most significant.[209] In social practice, humans act on reality, and in changing it, change themselves; in so doing, they arrive at knowledge of reality. Practice is therefore not only the basis of the process of knowledge, it represents the criterion of truth.[210]

The process of knowledge production incorporates a number of stages. The first is perceptual knowledge, which results from observation of the external appearance of things; perceptions are the raw material of concepts (or rational knowledge). The process then moves to the stage of rational knowledge, to an understanding of the internal connections of things, and to an understanding of the laws that govern their behaviour. But how are humans to know that concepts correctly reflect reality? The answer is practice; it is the criterion of truth.[211] Rational knowledge, which derives from perceptual knowledge, must be tested through practice; and the most important form of practice is social practice. However, the dialectical process of cognition does not cease at the rational stage of cognition, for judgement is required to ensure that concepts (rational knowledge) are a true reflection of reality. In order to ensure knowledge of the concrete contradictions within specific things, thought must employ judgement (or evaluation); and judgement, again on the basis of the social practice of production and class struggle, allows the observer to decide whether a concept actually reflects the motion of the contradictions within things. Judgement is an important stage in the motion of knowledge from the particular to the universal, and allows the formation of premises from which inferences can be made. Such inferences avoid subjectivism through reference back to practice; for the motion of knowledge must return from universal conclusions (such as judgements and inferences) to concrete reality, and these conclusions tested in practice. Similarly, analysis and synthesis, while high-level orders of cognition and seemingly very abstract, must, like judgement and inference, return to practice to ensure that generalisations, laws and principles generated through the process of knowledge production, and held to reflect and explain reality, are actually a genuine reflection of reality, and thus knowledge.

Reality is constantly in motion, and this requires that the process of knowledge itself be in a constant state of motion – from the particular to the universal and from the universal to the particular – in order to apprehend and correctly describe reality.

[208] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 232.
[209] Ibid., pp. 193–202.
[210] Ibid., p. 213.
[211] Mitin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, pp. 172–86; also Mitin, *Outline of New Philosophy*, pp. 341–411.

Change in reality is not random, but developmental; there is sequence and progress. This fact of the nature of reality allows, through reflection based on practice, that thought can achieve ever-closer approximations to the law-like regularities of objects and processes, and the manner and direction of their change. On this basis, thought can not only come to know reality, but formulate predictions about the future that have themselves the status of truth.[212] The acquisition of knowledge therefore involves a dialectical process in which thought, through the agency of repeated practice, more closely approaches absolute truth, which itself is concrete truth, for only concrete truth can function as a weapon in practical activity.[213]

A fifth theme in the texts of the New Philosophy is the opposition between formal and dialectical logic. The reason for this opposition is made clear when the three laws of formal logic are examined. The first of these is the law of identity that asserts the content of a phenomenon to be unchanging, the phenomenon being forever equivalent to itself. Its formula is 'A equals A'; it consequently does not recognise that all things change as a result of internal contradictions. The second law of formal logic is its law of contradiction. Unlike dialectical logic, however, formal logic perceives contradiction as an error in thought, it supposedly being impossible for a concept to contain two contradictory meanings. The identity of an object precludes the possibility of its simultaneously containing both affirmation and negation, for only one is possible: 'A cannot be the equivalent of not-A'. The third law, the law of excluded middle, precludes the possibility that a thing or concept can change into something radically different: 'A can be equal or not equal to B, but it cannot be equal to C'. Formal logic thus provides a set of laws that allows only a formalistic, abstract and static appreciation of the relationship between things or concepts. It dismisses the possibility that the existence of internal contradictions is the premise on which the quest for truth must be based; contradiction represents an error that signifies the absence of truth. Advocates of formal logic (such as Plekhanov and Bukharin) had not grasped that logic must reflect the dialectical nature of reality; consequently, the law of the unity of opposites is the essence of dialectical logic. Dialectical logic thus has revolutionary implications, for through its recognition of the contradictions inherent within things, and the ubiquity of change through leaps, it had become a weapon in the hands of the proletariat, which can use the knowledge it supplies to change society and itself.[214]

A sixth and final theme in the Soviet Union's New Philosophy is its response to the dilemma of determinism. It responds, as one would anticipate, in far more activist vein than had Qu Qiubai in his rather tortured attempted resolution of the dilemma of determinism of the early 1920s (see Chapter 4). The New Philosophy frowned on a strictly economic determinist reading of Marxism. 'Economic materialism', as it came to be known in Soviet philosophical and historical circles in the early 1930s, had argued for the decisive role of the economic base in historical change and development; the superstructure and human consciousness were mere reflections of the economic base. However, this position (which had been defended

[212] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 537–82.
[213] Ibid., pp. 240–52.
[214] Ibid., pp. 479–536.

by the historian Pokrovsky who had built his historical interpretation entirely on economic factors) was regarded as out of step with the actual role and significance of the superstructure in Soviet society since 1917, and in particular the role of the state and its planning agencies in the process of socialist reconstruction. Consequently, the orthodoxy that emerged after 1931 recognised the 'active role of the superstructure' and its 'reciprocal influences on the base',[215] and the defenders of economic materialism were forced to recant.[216] The New Philosophy insisted that the 'conscious actions of men' and 'the *tremendous role* of new social ideas'[217] played a dynamic and very significant role in the unfolding of history. The theoretical pendulum had thus swung far from Qu Qiubai's determinist reading of Marxism, with its faint though not negligible attribution of agency to human thought and action.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEW PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

These are the six principal themes that characterise the New Philosophy, and it was these that constituted the philosophical orthodoxy of the international communist movement in the years between 1931 and 1936. It was the Soviet philosophical texts of this period, neither earlier nor later, that were to exert the major impact on the philosophical development of the CCP. Soviet philosophy prior to 1931 had, as we have seen, been branded as 'Menshevising idealism' and proscribed. Those Chinese Marxist philosophers who had fallen under its sway felt compelled to recant, and had embraced the New Philosophy and did so with earnest purpose throughout the early to mid 1930s. Indeed, they carried their enthusiasm for and commitment to the New Philosophy past its use-by date in the Soviet Union, of 1936, for in that year Soviet philosophy experienced yet 'another about-turn'.[218] The writings of the New Philosophy published between 1931 and 1935 were themselves subject to criticism, and Mitin and his colleagues accused of 'abstract and scholastic presentation and political illiteracy'. In other words, the discipline of philosophy had still not sufficiently attuned itself to the needs of the Party, and was guilty of mentioning the writings of proscribed persons such as Trotsky and Zinoviev. Mitin performed a

[215] W.N. Kolosikhov, *Sulian Makesi Lieningzhuyi zhexue shi gangyao (sanshi niandai)* [A Commentary on the History of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy in the Soviet Union during the 1930s]. Translated by Xu Xiaoying and Wang Shuqiu. (Beijing: Qiushi chubanshe, 1985), pp. 111–13.

[216] In 1930, Pokrovsky conceded that '[a]ccording to a purely economic explanation, if appeal were made exclusively to the laws of economics ... it would have been impossible to foresee what actually happened – that we *would break through to socialism*, through every law, in defiance of narrowly economic laws'. Indeed, the concept of 'economic materialism' was linked to the ideas of both Trotsky and Bukharin, its proscription thus becoming the more urgent. See Konstantin F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), pp. 67, 101, 112. In 1938, in his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Stalin summarised his own opposition to 'economic materialism'. See J.V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Peking: FLP, 1976), pp. 871–2.

[217] Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, pp. 871–2. Emphasis in original.

[218] Eugene Kamenka, 'Soviet philosophy, 1917–67', p. 95.

self-criticism, promising to 'follow the party line "on the philosophical front"'.[219] Moreover, with the publication in 1938 of Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, the approved definition of the laws of dialectical materialism altered.[220] The law of the unity of opposites was renamed and given less prominence among the four 'principal features' (no longer three fundamental laws) of dialectical materialism, and the law of the negation of the negation simply disappeared.[221] The definition of orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy, at least in the Soviet Union, had changed.

These post-1936 upheavals in Soviet philosophy were, however, largely irrelevant to the subsequent history of Marxist philosophy in China, for it was through the texts of the New Philosophy, published in the early 1930s, that Marxist philosophers in China and eventually Mao Zedong came to an understanding of Marxist philosophy. For them, the New Philosophy represented orthodoxy, and would continue to do so; they were not especially interested in later Soviet renditions of Marxist philosophy or convulsions in Soviet philosophical circles, and they made little or no effort to modify their earlier substantive elaborations of the New Philosophy in light of these changes. The major change, although not substantive in a philosophical sense, was the rebadging of this philosophy after 1945, and particularly after 1949, as the philosophical thought of Mao Zedong. From then on, and at least until the early 1980s, the extent of Mao's indebtedness to the New Philosophy was conveniently forgotten or overlooked. But even in the more open political environment of the 1980s, philosophers in China continued overwhelmingly to endorse the philosophy that had entered China in the early 1930s, and to laud those philosophers, particularly Ai Siqi and Li Da, who were instrumental in its introduction and elaboration. The implications of the acceptance of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy by these early philosophers to the CCP were thus great indeed, with long-term effects that have still not disappeared, despite the general erosion of confidence in Marxism in contemporary China. That, however, is another story, one beyond the scope of this book.[222]

The years 1931 to 1936 thus represent the historical window, as it were, through which entered into China this particular construction of orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy. The significance of this is twofold. First, correctly identifying the provenance of Marxist philosophy in China is vital to an understanding of the ideological history of the CCP, not only during the 1930s, but following the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 when 'Mao Zedong Thought', with its heavy quotient of

[219] Ibid., pp. 95–6.

[220] See Stalin, 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism', in *Problems of Leninism*, pp. 837–41.

[221] See Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 137; Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Study of Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 355; De George, *Patterns of Soviet Thought*, pp. 193, 210.

[222] For analysis of Marxist philosophy in China during the 1980s, and of contemporary Chinese evaluations of Mao's reliance on the New Philosophy of the 1930s, see Nick Knight (ed.), *The Philosophical Thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989*, *Chinese Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 23, Nos. 3–4 (Spring–Summer 1992), Introduction, and pp. 126–43, 144–67, 190–218, 219–33.

philosophical premises, became the 'Party's only guiding theory and its correct general line'.[223] This cannot be achieved without identifying and exploring the intimate relationship between the Soviet Union's New Philosophy and the rendition of dialectical materialism accepted by the CCP as orthodox Marxist philosophy during the 1930s. Second, analysis of the history of Marxist philosophy in China inevitably raises the thorny issue of 'orthodoxy'. I have argued that 'orthodoxy' is always a construction, and never a given; it is not a static set of immutable principles by which an unproblematic evaluation of claims to orthodoxy can be made.[224] It is consequently imperative, in any exercise involving application of the concept of orthodoxy, to state by which notion of orthodoxy evaluation will proceed. I argue that it is on the basis of the standards and criteria established by the New Philosophy that the level of orthodoxy of Marxist philosophy in China should be evaluated. The significance of this theoretical judgement is that Marxist philosophy in China, and Mao's understanding of it, emerge as more orthodox than many commentators would have us believe.[225] We will explore this suggestion in the following chapters, and note the high level of reliance by Marxist philosophers in China on the core postulates of the New Philosophy.

The New Philosophy's role in the history of Marxist philosophy in China consequently needs to be recognised, indeed recognised more widely than hitherto has been the case. An important dimension of this act of recognition is acceptance that the New Philosophy was just that: a philosophy. It made philosophical claims that were persuasive enough to convince several generations of Chinese philosophers. It therefore deserves to be taken seriously as philosophy. Indeed, the three books of most significance to the development of Marxist philosophy in China – Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy* and *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, and Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* – traverse the entire gamut of issues central to the theoretical and philosophical tradition of Marxism. While there is a good deal of repetition between these texts, they should not on that account be dismissed as a superficial rendition of Marxist philosophy, as has been the tendency amongst many Western critics.[226] While one might not agree (or not agree entirely) with the philosophy elaborated in their pages (particularly its stress on the Party function of philosophy), it does provide a relatively elaborate, if excessively formalised, explication of dialectical materialism. Indeed, criticism and rejection of this philosophy have usually been based on political rather than philosophical considerations, and often on a less than serious engagement with its philosophical doctrines. Moreover, to belittle the New Philosophy as philosophy is to lose sight of the reasons why intelligent and committed Marxist scholars like Li Da and Ai Siqi, now numbered in China amongst the twentieth century's most

[223] See Liu Shaoqi, *On the Party* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1950), pp. 29–37.

[224] See also Nick Knight, 'The laws of dialectical materialism in Mao Zedong's thought: the question of "orthodoxy"', in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 84–116.

[225] See Stuart R. Schram, 'The Marxist', in Dick Wilson (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 64.

[226] See Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, revised edition), p. 88; also Meissner, *Philosophy and politics in China*.

important Chinese philosophers, should have accepted the philosophical claims of the New Philosophy.[227] Their reasons for doing so were, it is true, partly political: its claim to orthodoxy did work its effect on them. But they were not swayed by this alone, but also by the persuasiveness of the philosophical viewpoint propounded by the New Philosophy.

As we have observed, the texts of the New Philosophy consider a wide range of philosophical issues, indeed, encompass the core dilemmas that any philosophy must address. It provides a reasoned if rather strident account of the ontological and epistemological assumptions on which the Marxist theoretical system rests, and poses questions about and provides answers to the nature of reality: How are we to understand the universe and its inner workings; is there an objective reality beyond human consciousness, and if so, of what is it constituted? Is the universe and the objects that comprise it subject to natural laws, and if so how are these laws to be discovered and used? How is knowledge of reality achieved, and how are true perceptions of reality to be distinguished from those that are false? What is the relationship between human thought and external reality? How are movement and change to be explained; is there purpose and direction in change?

All philosophies must pose these or similar questions, and the answers provided by the New Philosophy clearly held sufficient conviction and coherence for Marxist philosophers in China to be swayed philosophically by them. Moreover, the teleological thrust of the New Philosophy spoke to their revolutionary ambitions. For they accepted that philosophy, ultimately, has a political purpose, and that is demonstration of the reasons for the eventual realisation of the telos of human history: the higher phase of communism. The dialectical laws of nature governing motion and change in the universe could be employed to accelerate the speed of historical development in the direction of this goal.

The influence of the New Philosophy on Marxist philosophers in China was thus based on a conjunction of philosophical principles and concrete political purpose. They considered this conjunction as not only defensible in philosophical terms, but vitally necessary politically. They accepted, as we will observe in the next chapter, that philosophy was not an exercise in armchair theorising, but an urgently needed activity that would bring a relevant and useful body of theoretical assumptions and principles to the CCP, the organisation that was struggling to achieve, in China, the historical goals promised by Marxism. Indeed, to be an outspoken advocate of the New Philosophy was not an occupation for the faint-hearted, for the activities of Marxist philosophers in China often attracted adverse political attention and occasional personal danger.[228] It required an intellectual capacity for abstract philosophical thought, a high level of political commitment, and a large dose of courage. Ai Siqi and Li Da possessed these attributes, and each was thus able to bring, through their translations and elaborations, word of the New Philosophy to a Chinese audience, particularly within the CCP and among its supporters.

[227] Li Zhenxia (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo shi zhe* [Ten philosophers of contemporary China] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1991).

[228] See Knight, *Li Da and Marxist philosophy in China*, pp. 14–16

4. READING THE NEW PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA: PHILOSOPHY OR POLITICS?

Reading the New Philosophy and its effects in China thus requires an appreciation of its philosophical content *and* its political origins and function. From a methodological point of view, this two-pronged approach is required in order to comprehend the intellectual influence the New Philosophy exerted on those philosophers who strove to elaborate it in China. However, this balance – involving acceptance of the New Philosophy's philosophical appeal and recognition of its political role – is precisely what is lacking in the only major Western study of Chinese philosophical debates on dialectical materialism in the early 1930s. Indeed, so egregious are the methodological fallacies of Werner Meissner's *Philosophy and Politics in China: The Controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s*, that it is imperative to lay these to rest before moving to consideration of the contribution made to Marxist philosophy in China by Ai Siqi and Li Da, and the influence of the New Philosophy on both of these scholars and Mao Zedong.[229] This exercise, while an unwanted distraction from the main task of analysis, is important as Meissner's analysis represents, in extreme form, the generally dismissive tendency to be found in Western scholarship on Marxism in China. This tendency manifests itself as an unwillingness to accept the possibility that Chinese could arrive at a genuine understanding of the philosophical and theoretical system of Marxism. Their 'Chinese-ness' and Chinese context supposedly constructed a cultural barrier to engaging with and mastering an intellectual system originating beyond the Chinese world. If that intellectual system were European, as was the case with Marxism, the task of understanding became so much the more difficult. They were thus inevitably '*Chinese* Marxists', rather than 'Marxists in China' or just plain 'Marxists'. For some Western scholars, the fact of being Chinese appears an insuperable barrier to cultural transcendence or genuine cross-cultural communication. A Western perspective is not, paradoxically, a barrier to *their* understanding of Chinese attempts to understand Marxism.

Meissner belittles Marxist philosophers in China for their supposed lack of knowledge of Western philosophy and for being mere philosophical mouthpieces in the political struggles of political factions and parties. His approach effectively makes superfluous any reading of Marxist philosophy in China *as* philosophy. Employing a rigid sociology of knowledge approach,[230] Meissner categorises

[229] Werner Meissner, *Philosophy and Politics in China: The Controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s*.

[230] Meissner's approach is heavily influenced by a determinist sociology of knowledge that draws on the theoretical perspectives of Karl Mannheim. See, in particular, Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the sociology of knowledge* (Harcourt Brace and World, 1968). Meissner does not, however, allude to the problem, unsolved by Mannheim, concerning how other worldviews might be objectively reconstructed and how the connection between a worldview and the interests of the 'real' world can be objectively known. Meissner sidesteps this problem and makes the facile assumption that he can know the worldview of Marxist philosophers in China and its connection to political interests. He never explains what allows this confidence, nor why we should accept his own interpretation, in its turn, as anything more than an expression of political interests. Meissner is also

philosophy (or at least, Marxist philosophy) as a mere epiphenomenon to the real theatre of history: the realm of politics and its struggles. Philosophical writings and the activities of philosophers are to be explained by reference to politics. Indeed, Meissner goes so far as to assert that the philosophical concepts of dialectical materialism in China 'possess no intellectual content', and that the 'conceptual apparatus of Chinese dialectical materialism has no more than a symbolic function'; philosophical statements are merely uttered for 'propaganda effect' and are 'not based on logical analysis, but correspond exactly to certain political opinions, which in turn are linked to factions in the party'. Philosophy is a 'myth', employed as a form of esoteric communication by those in power, allowing them to communicate in code to their followers.[231]

One wonders why, with this deterministic and reductionist perspective, Meissner is interested in the philosophy of Marxist philosophers in China at all. Why does he not focus on politics and avoid the laborious and possibly superfluous chore of decoding philosophical discourse to reveal the true, political, message within? Meissner's response is that disputes amongst Marxist philosophers in China can and should be used to test the nature and intensity of political struggles, which may otherwise remain concealed. The purpose is not an understanding of the logic and concepts of dialectical materialism as subjects in their own right; for there is no logic and there are no genuine concepts; these are mere signs of the political struggle, expressing the coded message of a particular faction or party. As he points out, 'the true meaning of the texts emerges from a comparison of the conclusions in the text with the wider political struggles taking place at the time of publication'. Consequently, when philosophers such as Ai Siqi employed words such as 'materialism', 'matter', 'spirit' or 'science', these cannot be accepted as true philosophical concepts, for 'they do not possess any thought-content'; they always have some ulterior political significance.[232] Ai Siqi, Li Da and other Marxist philosophers in China were thus not genuine philosophers, no matter how strenuously they may have declared their interest in philosophy and insisted on their vocation as philosophers. The veil of their philosophical justification must be pierced to access their genuine political purpose.

Meissner rejects the possibility that Marxist philosophers in China could understood Western philosophy, save through the prism of Soviet Marxism. 'Chinese theoreticians', he asserts, 'adopted dialectical materialism as an ideal prescription for their political struggles without ever having grasped the intellectual dimension of Marxism in the history of European thought or having informed

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influenced by the power-struggle model of Kremlinology that perceives all texts as the potential bearer of esoteric communications, allowing party leaders to communicate with their followers in their internecine struggles with rival party leaders. For a critique of the problems in the sociology of knowledge avoided by Meissner, see Nicholas Abercrombie, *Class, Structure, and Knowledge: Problems in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); and for a critique of Kremlinology, see Michael Yahuda, 'Kremlinology and the Chinese Strategic Debate, 1965–66', *China Quarterly* (January–March. 1972), pp. 32–75.

231 Meissner, *Philosophy and Politics in China: The Controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s*, pp. 4, 6, 8.

232 Ibid., p. 61.

themselves of it through other sources'.[233] His reductionist and culturally contemptuous attitude is both illogical and empirically false. Were Meissner's position logical, he would be obliged to concede that non-Marxist European philosophy is nothing more than an expression of contemporary political struggles, with nothing of substance to say about philosophy as such. But this he is unwilling to do. For Meissner, European philosophy (the philosophy of Kant, Hegel, Spinoza) is 'real' philosophy, and its concepts genuine philosophical concepts worthy of study. Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, is not philosophy at all, and those who asserted a philosophical conviction in it and excelled in its elaboration are accorded no respect as philosophers or theorists; they were mere political mouthpieces, little better than propagandists, and tyros philosophically. This blatant lack of balance in Meissner's treatment of these different philosophical traditions reveals only too clearly his real intent, in itself a political one: to attack dialectical materialism, the philosophy of Marxism, and any Chinese philosophers who were its advocates. In this respect, he is true to his approach: discussion of philosophy is always generated by political purpose.

This leads to the second and related fallacy in Meissner's 'logic'. Although never explicitly stated, his analysis is evidently premised on the suspect notion of a 'true' history of Western philosophy, one against which the dubious claims of dialectical materialism and its Chinese exponents can be measured. He asserts that Chinese philosophers, blinded by their belief in dialectical materialism, never 'grasped the intellectual dimension of Marxism in the history of European thought'.[234] The epistemological impropriety of presuming that there is an uncontested 'history of European thought' and Marxism's place in it does not seem to have occurred to Meissner. Nor has he recognised the fallacy of the related assumption that, had Chinese philosophers not fallen under the blandishments of Soviet dialectical materialism, they might have gained a genuine understanding of this 'history'. However, had Chinese philosophers like Ai Siqi not interpreted Western philosophy through the prism of contemporary dialectical materialism, they would, of necessity, have been obliged to find some other perspective. Would this have provided them an objective understanding of 'the history of European thought'? It would have provided them a different perspective, and perhaps one more to Meissner's liking; but it would have been no closer to an objective reading of European philosophy than is Meissner's. There is and can be no single, objective, reading of such a complex intellectual tradition; there are readings and competing readings, but no one 'history of European thought'.[235] It is tempting to assume, because the political orientation of dialectical materialism may be different to one's own and highly overt, that we have a better and truer understanding of matters philosophical, one not distorted by political considerations. It is a temptation to which Meissner has readily

[233] Ibid., p. 29.

[234] Ibid.

[235] For my views on the problems of 'reading' and epistemology, see 'The Marxism of Mao Zedong: Empiricism and Discourse in the Field of Mao Studies', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 16 (July 1986), pp. 7–22. See also Paul Healy, 'Reading the Mao texts: The Question of Epistemology', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1990), pp. 330–58.

succumbed. The result is an unsympathetic, tendentious and arrogant analysis of Marxist philosophy in China during the 1930s, one that attributes Chinese philosophers with little if any capacity to make personal philosophical judgements or to achieve any level of philosophical erudition.

Meissner's suggestion that Marxist philosophers in China lacked a genuine understanding of the history of European philosophy is also empirically false. Li Da, for example, wrote a great deal in the early 1920s on the history of European socialist thought and was clearly conversant with its major thinkers and where their thinking was situated in the history of the European intellectual tradition.[236] Similarly, Qu Qiubai, by 1923, was conversant with the philosophies of Plato, Spinoza, Descartes, Hume, Berkeley, Hegel and a host of other philosophers and theorists, and was capable, as we have seen, of making fine philosophical distinctions.[237] Both Li and Qu were independent and tough-minded thinkers, and it is impossible to accept the suggestion that they suspended their own disbelief in a doctrine that lacked credibility out of pure deference to Party or factional loyalty. The available evidence suggests otherwise. Li quit the Party in 1923 rather than kowtow to what he believed was a mistaken line and an insufficient emphasis on theory.[238] Qu's intellect was too creative and fertile, too unconstrained and expressive, to allow contemplation of the possibility that he had achieved little if any understanding of the history of European thought.[239] Similarly, philosophers like Ai Siqi had, by the early 1930s, access to a mass of material on both European and Chinese philosophy, much of which fell well outside the approved parameters of dialectical materialism, and indeed much of their writing is caste in the form of critique of these philosophies.[240] Ai Siqi had studied philosophy intensively in Japan in the late-1920s, and had read Marx and Engels in the German original.[241] He could converse eloquently on the philosophies of Francis Bacon, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel,[242] and in his early writings, Ai critically addresses the philosophies of Plato, Windelband, Bergson, Dilthey, Husserl, Locke, Feuerbach, Descartes, and many other European philosophers. Ai could quote Hegel in German, one lengthy quote being from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, by 1934, Ai was nicknamed 'Mr. Encyclopedia' for his wide knowledge of philosophy and his capacity to explain its complex problems to others.[243] We could give further examples. The point is that

[236] See Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, esp. Chapter 3.

[237] See, in particular, the notes to his philosophical writings in *Qu Qiubai wenji* [Collected writings of Qu Qiubai] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1988), pp. 376–80, 481–5. Here are listed and explained Qu's references to the figures of Western philosophy.

[238] See Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, pp. 8–12.

[239] Qu had read Hu Shi's *Zhexue shi dagang* [Compendium on the history of philosophy] before his conversion to Marxism. See *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, p. 704.

[240] O. Brière provides a useful annotated bibliography of the numerous philosophical publications, many of them translations of Western volumes, circulating in China in the 1920s and 1930s. It is clear that Ai had access to at least some of these. See O. Brière, *Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy*, 1898–1948 (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), pp. 111–43.

[241] Li Zhenxia (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo shi zhe*, p. 112.

[242] Joshua Fogel, *Ai Ssu-ch'i's Contribution to the Development of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Contemporary China Series, No. 4, 1987), pp. 19–20.

[243] Ibid., p. 22.

these Chinese intellectuals were no mere ciphers, but intelligent and capable philosophers who not only understood the intricacies of dialectical materialism, no mean feat in itself, but who had read widely on the history of philosophy and the writings of its prominent and sometimes not so prominent thinkers.

The fierce philosophical controversy over the merits or otherwise of dialectical materialism in which Ai Siqi and other Chinese philosophers engaged during the early to mid 1930s should not therefore be interpreted as merely a reflection of contemporary political struggles, and dismissed as of no philosophical significance. The historical context (including its political dimensions) is, it is true, extremely important for understanding the process by which the New Philosophy was introduced into China and elaborated for a Chinese audience; one cannot look only at the content of that philosophy. But to ignore or repudiate dialectical materialism and denigrate the erudition of its philosophers on the grounds of the political uses to which it was put is to ignore the reality that philosophers like Ai Siqi and Li Da were persuaded by the *philosophical* superiority of the New Philosophy; and it is evident, as we will see, that Mao Zedong was also persuaded by its philosophical claims, and invested an inordinate amount of time and effort in attempting to master it.

What is required is a balanced approach. It is clear that Ai Siqi and like-minded philosophers were deeply committed politically, and that there was a strong political purpose to their philosophical writings. This was the nature of contemporary Marxist discourse, which had a history, dating back to Plekhanov and Engels, of being highly polemical in tone. But this in itself does not disqualify that philosophy *qua* philosophy. The writings on dialectical materialism by Marxist philosophers in China address in considerable detail the fundamental issues with which any philosophy must deal: ontology, epistemology, the laws of nature and motion, and logic. The fact that they interpreted these issues from the perspective of a conventional Marxist materialist framework should not detract from their erudition as philosophers, nor the persuasive intellectual impact that they had on their audience.

5. THE NEW PHILOSOPHY AND MAO ZEDONG

Among this audience was Mao Zedong, on whom the influence of the New Philosophy was great indeed. It was his endorsement of the basic postulates of the New Philosophy that was to set the seal of orthodoxy on this particular rendition of Marxist philosophy within the CCP, an endorsement that was to heavily influence the nature and direction of philosophical discourse in China for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond. We will explore in subsequent chapters the relationship between Mao and the New Philosophy, and between Mao and those Chinese philosophers influenced by the New Philosophy. For the moment it suffices to draw attention to Mao's deep and active engagement with the texts of the New Philosophy briefly summarised in this chapter. Mao's reliance on these Soviet texts (in Chinese translation) and Chinese volumes on philosophy (themselves heavily influenced by the New Philosophy) ensured that it was contemporary Soviet constructions of Marxist philosophy that influenced his thinking during the crucial

period, between late 1936 to mid 1937, when he had both opportunity and motivation to devote time to a period of intense philosophical study. While, as we will see, Mao interrogated these texts in an active and sometimes critical manner (see Chapter 9), his overwhelming response to them was positive, for they represented, he believed, the orthodox rendition of Marxist philosophy, a viewpoint strongly reinforced by the writings of Marxist philosophers like Ai Siqi and Li Da whose work Mao respected.

However, it was not only intense personal interest in matters philosophical that drove Mao's quest for an understanding of the New Philosophy. It was the realisation, underscored by the New Philosophy itself, that philosophy had considerable political significance. Not only could philosophy serve the interests of the Party in practical ways, it represented the theoretical core of Party ideology, the bedrock of assumptions about the world and how to change it. The New Philosophy's exposition of ontology, epistemology, logic and the laws of dialectics might appear abstruse and complex, but it provided a perspective on the world that included an orientation towards practice, and incorporated criteria that could distinguish between correct and incorrect practice. This practice-oriented tendency of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy gelled with Mao's already clearly established predilection for action based on investigation of concrete conditions, and he was to reinforce this tendency in his own writings on dialectical materialism, and in the manner in which he encouraged the dissemination of philosophical study within the Party. For philosophy was useful. Not only could it enhance the authority of those who possessed the key to its interpretation, it could function as an approved frame of reference by which Party leaders and cadres alike could orient and monitor their own conduct. Mao was thus not only persuaded by the philosophical veracity of the New Philosophy, he recognised its functionality as a technology of power, both his own and that of the Party.[244] It was for this reason, as we will observe in Chapter 11, that Mao encouraged the establishment of institutions whose brief was the elaboration, dissemination and reinforcement of the New Philosophy within the Party, and subsequently throughout China. For that to succeed, a particular mode of philosophical elaboration had to emerge, one that ensured the accessibility of philosophy and its relevance to Chinese conditions. It also required a particular sort of philosopher, one not only well versed in the New Philosophy, but one able to elaborate its intricate formulations and labyrinthine structure in a way that enhanced its comprehensibility and attractiveness to an intelligent lay audience. That philosopher, the one who played the role of philosopher to the Chinese communist movement during the crucial years of the early to mid 1930s, was Ai Siqi. It was he, more than any other Marxist philosopher in China, who grasped the significance of formulating a mode of philosophical explication suited to the realities of China's

[244] Richard Johnson, 'A compendium of the infinite: Exercises of political purpose in the philosophy of Mao Zedong', in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 207–33.

revolutionary movement. And the formulation at which he arrived – one that allowed the 'Sinification' of Marxist philosophy while retaining its universal principles – recommended itself to Mao and was eventually incorporated into his own writings on philosophy. It is to Ai's role as philosopher to the Chinese communist movement and his mode of philosophical elaboration that we now turn.

CHAPTER 6

AI SIQI AND MAO ZEDONG

– The role of philosopher to the Chinese Communist movement –

The year 1937 marks an important watershed in the development of Marxist philosophy in China. In that year, Mao Zedong presented a series of lectures at the Anti-Japanese University in Yanan, a number of which were on the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism, or at least the New Philosophy's interpretation of that philosophy.[245] Sections of the drafts of his lecture notes on philosophy were eventually published in revised form as essays, and after 1949 these came to constitute the cornerstone of the official Chinese interpretation of Marxist philosophy.[246] These essays on philosophy – 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice' – have long been the subject of controversy amongst scholars of Mao's thought and Chinese Marxism (see Chapter 9). Amongst these controversies is the issue of the influence of the Chinese Marxist philosophers who generated the philosophical texts Mao studied and annotated in preparation for writing his lectures on dialectical materialism. The most significant of these texts were their translations of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy. However, the philosophical writings of these Chinese philosophers also constituted a very significant dimension of the body of texts available to Mao in 1936–37 when he turned his attention to the study of Marxist philosophy. It was these texts that provided the ideas and concepts that Mao appropriated and elaborated in his own writings on philosophy.[247]

Perhaps the most important of these philosophers was Ai Siqi (1910–66).[248] Initially individually and later through his relationship with Mao,[249] Ai worked

[245] Wu Jun, 'Mao Zedong shengping, sixiang yanjiu gaishu' [Comment on research on Mao Zedong's life and thought], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai* (1987), No. 1, p. 52.

[246] For an annotated translation of Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', see Nick Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), pp. 84–229. See also Stuart R. Schram (ed.), Nancy J. Hode (associate ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949 – Volume VI: The New Stage, August 1937–1938* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp. 573–670. For the official, post-1949 version of 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice', see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), Vol. I, pp. 295–347.

[247] Chinese Mao scholars have, since 1981, done much to identify the sources on which Mao drew to develop his philosophical thought. See, for example, Su Baoyi (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1993); Wang Jionghua, *Mao Zedong dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Wuhan: Changjiang chubanshe, 1998); Gong Yuzhi, Pan Xianzhi and Shi Zhongquan (eds), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986).

[248] For a brief but useful biography of Ai Siqi and analysis of his work, see Luo Yuanpeng and Feng Guixian (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian* [Dictionary of the philosophical thought of Mao Zedong] (Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993), pp. 1003–5; for an extended biography, see Xie

assiduously to elaborate, disseminate and enforce a version of Marxist philosophy that was eventually enshrined as the philosophical basis of 'Mao Zedong Thought'. That philosophy – the Soviet Union's 'New Philosophy' – was, amongst the various competing currents of Marxist philosophy, the one that Ai accepted as orthodoxy. His unrelenting propagation of it was to have a major impact on China's intellectual climate during the early to mid 1930s. His translations, books, articles and magazine columns all had the purpose of introducing the New Philosophy to a Chinese audience; and his capacity to write for an inquiring but lay audience, to illustrate the abstract formulations of dialectical materialism in a manner comprehensible to non-philosophers, established an approach to philosophy and its elaboration within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that was to persist well beyond Ai's lifetime. Moreover, through his personal and philosophical relationship with Mao, Ai was able to exert a considerable influence, not only on Mao, but also on the establishment and deployment of institutions whose purpose was the propagation of the New Philosophy within the Party and beyond. By 1936, Mao had accepted Ai's status as one of China's pre-eminent Marxist philosophers, and carefully read and annotated those books by Ai to which he had access. Mao was not only persuaded by Ai's orthodox rendition of dialectical materialism, but by his approach to the elaboration of dialectical materialism for a non-specialist audience. Mao not only drew on this approach to philosophical elaboration in his own writings, he encouraged its widespread use to educate Party cadres and the Chinese masses.

Perceived in this light, Ai's contribution to the introduction and dissemination of Marxist philosophy in China was immense. However, there is a conceptual danger, when assessing his significance, of isolating Ai from the intellectual currents of the international communist movement and the Communist movement in China, and of perceiving him as an intellectual force in his own right and consequently exaggerating his influence. There is the particular danger of isolating Ai's influence on Mao from the general influence of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy, and perceiving Ai as the point of generation of the philosophy that Mao studied and endorsed in 1937. These dangers are evident when the conclusions of a number of scholars of Ai's contribution to Chinese Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought are examined. Ignatius Ts'ao, for example, suggests that Ai's philosophical writings on contradiction and practice were 'essentially identical' to Mao's essays on these subjects. It is 'entirely possible', he argues, 'that Mr. Mao [sic] based his lectures or speeches [on philosophy] on Ai's writing', and concludes that Ai's influence on Mao was so significant that he can be considered (along with Chen Boda) as a co-author of Mao Zedong Thought.[250] Similarly, Joshua Fogel argues that 'an examination of the language, ideas, and organisation of his [Mao's] philosophical

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Benshu, *Zhanshi xuezhe: Ai Siqi* [The fighting scholar: Ai Siqi] (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1999).

[249] For analysis of Ai's relationship with Mao, see Sun Qinan and Li Sizhen, *Mao Zedong yu mingren* [Mao Zedong and the famous] (Jiangsu: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 897–905.

[250] Ignatius J.H. Ts'ao, 'Ai Ssu-ch'i: The apostle of Chinese communism', *Studies in Soviet Thought* (1972), No. 12, pp. 15–16. On Chen Boda's contribution to the Sinification of Marxism, see Raymond F. Wylie, *The Emergence of Maoism: Mao Tse-tung, Ch'en Po-ta and the Search for Chinese Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1980).

essays illustrates his enormous debt to Ai'.[251] A similar conclusion emerges from the Japanese Mao scholar Takeuchi Minoru's comparison of Ai Siqi's 'Outline for Study' (*Yanjiu tigang*) with Mao's 'On Contradiction'. Takeuchi points to the similarity between the two texts, and comes to the logical but mistaken conclusion that Mao drew his inspiration for 'On Contradiction' from Ai's text.[252] Werner Meissner accepts Takeuchi's faulty conclusion, also perceiving in the similarity between Mao's 'On Contradiction' and Ai's 'Outline for Study' proof that Mao was heavily dependent on Ai, to the point that Mao had borrowed not only the content of Ai's philosophical essay, but the structure also.[253]

Each of these scholars, by focusing excessively on the apparent relationship between Ai's philosophical writings and those by Mao, has exaggerated Ai's influence. Each has, to a greater or lesser extent, failed to situate Ai's philosophical writings and activities within the broader philosophical and political context within which Ai studied and wrote. It was this context, and in particular the pervasive influence of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy within the international communist movement, which allowed Ai to exert the influence that he did. Not only did the New Philosophy inspire the content of his philosophy, the political context within which Ai operated provided him both the intellectual authority and receptive audience for his tireless efforts to disseminate that philosophy. Only by viewing Ai's philosophical writings and activities in this light is it possible to gain a realistic sense of his contribution to the introduction, elaboration and dissemination of Marxist philosophy in China, and to the formation of the ideology of Mao Zedong Thought. It was the context, particularly the philosophical and political context, which allowed Ai to gain prominence as philosopher to the Communist movement in China.

Nevertheless, without his efforts, the history of Marxism and Marxist philosophy in China would have been very different. His capacity to elaborate the New Philosophy in a form comprehensible to a Chinese audience was a major achievement, and contributed to the complex process of the 'Sinification of Marxist philosophy', and hence its widespread acceptance. Without some understanding of

[251] Joshua Fogel, *Ai Ssu-ch'i's Contribution to the Development of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Contemporary China Series, No. 4), 1987.

[252] Takeuchi Minoru, 'Mō Takutō no "Mujun ron" no genkei nitsuite' [The original form of Mao Zedong's 'On Contradiction'], *Shisō* (1969), No. 538, pp. 55–94. The possibility that Mao might have borrowed from or even been influenced by Ai's *Yanjiu tigang* in the writing of the original text of 'On Contradiction' is made impossible by the dating of the two documents. Ai Siqi's 'Outline for Study' appears as an appendix to his edited collection *Zhexue xuanji* [Selected writings on philosophy] (Yanan: Jiefang she, 1939): Mao's 'On Contradiction' was circulating as a mimeographed, thread-bound volume from September 1937, nearly two years before Ai's work was published. Mao annotated Ai's 'Outline for Study', which appears as the second part of *Zhexue xuanji*, only after May 1939. See *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji* [The philosophical annotations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe. 1988), pp. 359–88; see also Gong Yuzhi, *Lun Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang* [On Mao Zedong's philosophical thought] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), p. 67; and Wu Jun, 'Mao Zedong shengping, sixiang yanjiu gaishu', pp. 52–8.

[253] Werner Meissner, *Philosophy and politics in China: The controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s* (London: Hurst and Company, 1990), pp. 154–60.

the influence of the New Philosophy on Ai Siqi, and the manner in which he responded to the challenge of its elaboration for a Chinese audience, Ai's role and his success as philosopher to the Chinese communist movement must remain incomprehensible.

1. AI SIQI AND THE NEW PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

Ai Siqi became active in Marxist philosophical circles at a critical juncture in the development of Marxist philosophy in China.[254] He was, in terms of context, in the right place at the right time to play a major role in the introduction of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy to China in the early 1930s. Born too late to have been involved in attempts by Marxist intellectuals such as Qu Qiubai and Li Da in the early to mid 1920s to introduce Marxist philosophy to the Chinese communist movement,[255] Ai's interest in philosophy emerged during the years that the Deborinite interpretation of Marxist philosophy was struggling to and then did establish itself as orthodox Marxist philosophy in the Soviet Union (see Chapter 5). Ai's study of Marxist theory and philosophy commenced in the spring of 1927, when he arrived in Tokyo for the first of two periods of study in Japan. He was active in the socialist study group established by the Tokyo branch of the Chinese Communist Party (although he did not formally join the Party until 1935).[256] He studied Japanese and other languages, and works on Marxist philosophy. However, it was only after his return to China in 1931 from his second trip to Japan that he fully immersed himself, as a professional philosopher, in the study and elaboration of Marxist philosophy.[257]

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union's (CPSU) attack on Deborin's philosophy and the victory of the proponents of the New Philosophy in late 1930 and early 1931 had a major impact on Ai Siqi's thinking in the early 1930s, just as he was embarking on his career as a Marxist philosopher. Ai recognised that he had been influenced by Deborin's interpretation of Marxist philosophy, and consequently moved to repudiate the Deborinite version of dialectical materialism in his own writings.[258] He proceeded to accept in toto its Party-sanctioned alternative:

[254] For analysis of Ai's early philosophical activities, see O. Brière, *Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy*, 1898–1948 (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), pp. 78–9; D.W.Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese thought, 1900–1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 192–3; Ma Jihua, 'Ai Siqi zai zhexue xianshihua shang de jiechu gongxian' [Ai Siqi's outstanding contribution to making philosophy practical], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai* (1986), No. 3, pp. 35–8; Song Zhiming and Zhao Dezhi, *Xiandai Zhongguo zhexue sichao* [Philosophical trends in contemporary China] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 93–115; Li Zhenxia (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo shi zhe* [Ten philosophers of contemporary China] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1991), pp. 110–54.

[255] Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), Chapter 4.

[256] Luo Yuanpeng and Feng Guixian (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian*, p. 1005.

[257] Li Zhenxia (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo shi zhe*, p. 113.

[258] See, for example, Ai Siqi, *Xin zhexue lunji* [Collected writings on the New Philosophy] (Shanghai: Duzhe shufang, 1936), pp. 2–4.

the New Philosophy. In so doing, Ai demonstrated his willingness to accept the authority of Stalin and the CPSU in the realm of philosophy. There is no suggestion in Ai's writings that he conceived his role as philosopher as being to test the bounds of philosophical orthodoxy. It was, rather, to translate, elaborate, illustrate and disseminate an existing philosophical system; it was not and could not be personal philosophical speculation and critical reflection. Philosophical novelty was not Ai's goal, as he was later to admit when attacked for his supposedly slavish espousal of the New Philosophy.[259] Indeed, his reputation as a philosopher derives from his sustained and effective capacity to elaborate the New Philosophy for a Chinese audience.

In 1933, Ai published his first major piece on philosophy – 'Abstract function and dialectics' – and from then on, a constant stream of columns, articles and books flowed from his pen.[260] Many of these pieces originated as articles and columns in the fortnightly journal, of which he was assistant editor and later editor, *Dushu Shenghuo* (Readers' Life). Ai later collected these pieces and published them in a number of influential books. These included *Xin zhexue lunji* (Collected writings on the New Philosophy) and *Dazhong zhexue* (Philosophy for the masses).[261] The latter influential volume went through ten editions by 1938, and thirty-two editions by 1948.[262] His other books published between 1935 and 1937 include *Ruhe yanjiu zhexue* (How to study philosophy),[263] *Sixiang fangfalun* (The methodology of thought),[264] and *Zhexue yu shenghuo* (Philosophy and life).[265] Through his prolific publications, Ai had by 1937 established a reputation as the pre-eminent spokesman of Marxist philosophy in China.

Ai Siqi's translations of philosophical texts, while not of the same order of magnitude as Li Da's prodigious output,[266] were nevertheless significant to the process of the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China during the early 1930s. Like Qu Qiubai before him, Ai was able to read the original Soviet texts on philosophy, having learnt Russian in Tokyo in 1929. He had earlier studied Japanese, English and German. His grasp of these languages, and particularly his knowledge of Russian, allowed him an access to the original texts of the New Philosophy not enjoyed by other Chinese Marxist philosophers (including Li Da, who drew on Japanese translations). Ai's translation of Mark Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy* drew on both the Russian and Japanese texts,[267] and became one of the three major Soviet texts on the New Philosophy circulating in China.

[259] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun* [Methodology of Thought] (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1939, fourth edition), p. 160.

[260] Ai Siqi, *Xin zhexue lunji*, pp. 19–40.

[261] Ai Siqi, *Dazhong zhexue* [Philosophy for the masses] (Shanghai: Dushu chubanshe, 1936).

[262] Ma Jihua, 'Ai Siqi zai zhexue xianshihua shang de jiechu gongxian', p. 35.

[263] Ai Siqi, *Ruhe yanjiu zhexue* [How to study philosophy] (Shanghai: Dushu chubanshe, 1936).

[264] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun*.

[265] Ai Siqi, *Zhexue yu shenghuo* [Philosophy and life] (Shanghai: Dushu shenghuo she, 1937).

[266] Knight, *Li Da and Marxist philosophy in China*, Chapter 5.

[267] Ai was, in fact, critical of the Japanese translation of this text for sometimes being incorrect, although he does employ the sub-headings from the Japanese translation. See M.B. Mitin (ed.), *Xin zhexue*

This burst of philosophical writing and translation by Ai Siqi came in the aftermath of the victory in 1931 of the New Philosophy in Soviet philosophical circles and coincided with the spread of its influence internationally, particularly through the agency of the Communist International (see Chapter 5). As the philosophical orthodoxy of the international communist movement, the New Philosophy's appeal was not only philosophical, but also political. Ai accepted the New Philosophy as orthodox Marxist philosophy, and was prepared to work within its Party-defined parameters, and accept the political strictures this imposed. He was thus, in a significant textual and contextual sense, on the inside, and therefore able to play a central role in its elaboration and dissemination within the Chinese Communist movement. When the strategically important moment arose, in late 1936 and early 1937, when Mao Zedong turned his attention to the study of Marxist philosophy, Ai consequently possessed both the philosophical authority and political credentials to enable him to gain Mao's attention and respect.

2. AI'S INFLUENCE ON MAO

Ai's relationship with Mao was both philosophical and personal, although the personal relationship did not commence until October 1937 when Ai arrived in Yanan.[268] This was too late for Ai to have had a direct personal impact on Mao's study of the New Philosophy prior to the writing of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' (July, August 1937), of which 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice' were component parts.[269] However, Mao was familiar with Ai's writings on philosophy and his reputation as a Marxist philosopher, and went out of his way to ensure that Ai's books were available when assembling the texts he would use in his own study of dialectical materialism.[270]

However, the extent to which Mao actually used Ai's books and his translation of Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy* prior to writing his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' in July and August 1937 is not at all clear. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the evidence. While Chinese scholars assert that it is likely that Mao had read Ai's *Philosophy for the Masses* and annotated it as he had the Soviet texts on philosophy he studied between late 1936 and mid 1937,[271] his personal copy of Ai's book has not survived and independent textual verification is therefore not available.[272] Moreover, while Mao's annotated copy of Ai's *Methodology of Thought* has survived, the annotations to this volume are undated, and could thus have been written after mid 1937. This appears to be the conclusion of the editors of Mao's philosophical annotations, for they have placed Mao's rather sparse annotations to

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dagang [Outline of New Philosophy], translated by Ai Siqi and Zheng Yili (n.p.: Dushu shenghuo chubanshe, 1936), p. 3.

[268] Sun and Li, *Mao Zedong yu mingren*, p. 898.

[269] See Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on dialectical materialism*.

[270] *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji* [Selected letters of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 80–1.

[271] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 1–189.

[272] Gong Yuzhi et al., *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo*, pp. 70–1.

Methodology of Thought after other annotations dated 1941.[273] A similar problem arises with Mao's copy of Ai's translation of Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy*, which has also not survived, although here again, Chinese Mao scholars are confident that Mao did use this volume in the preparation of his writings on dialectical materialism.[274]

The level of Ai's influence on Mao prior to and during his initial engagement with the New Philosophy is thus indeterminate. Mao was certainly aware of Ai's writings and reputation, and there is some circumstantial and textual evidence to suggest that he employed them; but the evidence does not allow one to go much further than this, and certainly does not justify the confident assertions, examined earlier, of Ai's overwhelming influence on the development of Mao's philosophical thought from late 1936 to mid 1937.

Mao's intellectual engagement with dialectical materialism did not, however, terminate with the writing of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' in mid 1937. Indeed, he maintained a high level of interest in Marxist philosophy throughout the late 1930s and into the early 1940s. He did not, during this period, write on dialectical materialism other than to annotate various philosophical texts, some of them Ai's. However, he continued to grapple with the philosophical issues presented by the complex philosophy of dialectical materialism, and it was during this period after mid 1937 that Ai exerted his greatest influence on Mao. Ai was physically present in Yanan, and thus able to explain in person his interpretations of the New Philosophy to a sometimes sceptical Mao. Mao also increasingly entrusted Ai with responsibility for establishing institutions whose purpose was the consolidation of Mao's interpretation of the New Philosophy as the Party's philosophical orthodoxy.

In September 1937 (that is, in the month after he had completed writing his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' and the month before Ai arrived in Yanan), Mao carefully studied and wrote extensive notes on Ai's *Zhexue yu shenghuo* (Philosophy and Life), which had been published in April of that year.[275] That Mao was not the passive recipient of the philosophical ideas of others, including Ai's, is attested by his reaction to Ai's explanation of the important distinction between difference and contradiction. Ai had suggested that 'things that are different are certainly not contradictions ...[but] under certain conditions things that are different can also transform themselves into contradictions if at the same time and place these two different things begin to act on each other in a mutually exclusive fashion'.[276] Mao responded:

> The basic principle is correct but the formulation 'difference is not contradiction' is not. One should say that, under certain conditions, all things that are different are contradictions ... Difference is each and every thing, and under certain conditions, these are contradictions, and the reason is that difference is contradiction; this is what is

[273] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 447–52.
[274] Gong Yuzhi et al., *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo*, pp. 70–1.
[275] Ai Siqi, *Zhexue yu shenghuo*; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on dialectical materialism*, pp. 230–66.
[276] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on dialectical materialism*, pp. 258–9.

so-called concrete contradiction. Ai's formulation is unsatisfactory. (Mao Zedong's opinion).[277]

Mao wrote to Ai, after his arrival in Yanan, praising *Philosophy and Life* as 'the most profound' of Ai's books, and telling him that he had made some notes on the book. Mao informed Ai that he would send these notes (some 3,000 characters) to him, and asked him to see if Mao had made any mistakes. Mao politely informed Ai that the notes contained reference to a questionable point (the one above). It was not, Mao assured Ai, a point of fundamental disagreement, but he did ask Ai to reconsider the issue, and would come and see Ai later that day, if time permitted.[278]

This was not Mao's only disagreement with Ai on matters of philosophical detail. At some time after May 1939, Mao carefully studied and annotated Ai's edited *Zhexue xuanji*, which contained philosophical excerpts of a number of philosophers, including Soviet philosophers, and a lengthy section entitled *Yanjiu tigang* (Outline for Study), written by Ai himself.[279] In several places, Mao wrote notes critical of Ai's explanations. In one example, Mao objected to Ai's assertion of a distinction between the fundamental aspect (*jiben fangmian*) and principal aspect (*zhudao fangmian*) of a contradiction. 'This is incorrect', Mao wrote, 'the fundamental aspect is the principal aspect'.[280] In another, Mao disagreed with the way in which Ai had explained the process of the negation of the negation, particularly the distinction between the process and the stages within the process. Mao responded: 'To say that within one process there are three stages of qualitative change is incorrect'.[281]

Mao's notes on *Philosophy and Life*, his letter to Ai, and his annotations to *Zhexue xuanji*, suggest that Mao was indeed grappling intellectually with the philosophy of dialectical materialism, for he was not prepared to meekly accept Ai's authority as a renowned Marxist philosopher. This critical and questioning approach to the New Philosophy is born out by Mao's extensive annotations to Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and Mitin's edited *Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism*, which he had studied from late 1936 to June 1937 (see Chapter 9).[282] Mao's annotations indicate that he was an active reader, one who interrogated the texts in a critical manner, seeking to understand the general principles of dialectical materialism, their appropriate formulation, and how these might be applied to an understanding of China's particular problems. These annotations are also highly significant, in the context of a discussion of Ai's influence on Mao, for they demonstrate that, when attempting to comprehend the New Philosophy, Mao proceeded directly to the original source (in Chinese

[277] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 201.
[278] Ibid., p. 204.
[279] Ai Siqi, *Zhexue xuanji*.
[280] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 376–7.
[281] Ibid., pp. 383–5.
[282] M. Shirokov and A. Aizenberg, *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng* [A course on dialectical materialism], translated by Li Da and Lei Zhongjian (Shanghai: Bigengtang shudian, 1932); M. Mitin, *Bianzhengweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun* [Dialectical and historical materialism], translated by Shen Zhiyuan (n.p.: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936). Mao's annotations of these Soviet philosophical texts are at *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 1–189.

translation), and was not reliant on the elaborations of Ai, Li Da and other Marxist philosophers. Mao was thus in a position to evaluate the elaborations of these Chinese philosophers and to assess the extent to which their writings did conform to and adequately explain the Soviet Union's New Philosophy.

It is quite clear, regardless of his minor disagreements with Ai, that Mao accepted Ai's philosophical elaborations as being in close conformity with the New Philosophy. Indeed, Ai had gone out of his way to ensure his readers that he did not aspire to originality in his philosophical writings, for to do so would have immediately distanced himself from the New Philosophy, the central plank of which was the 'Party-character' (*dangxing*) of philosophy. In a passage from the 'Preface' to *Methodology of Thought*, which Mao may have read in 1937, but at least at some time in the early Yanan period,[283] Ai gladly accepted his opponent Ye Qing's criticism that he was a 'repeater and copier', and openly acknowledged his debt to the New Philosophy.

> The theory in this present book, fundamentally speaking, is absorbed from foreign works on philosophy. In particular, the influence of [Mitin's] *Outline of New Philosophy*, which I translated, is particularly great. In this respect, we can 'frankly admit that we are repeaters and copiers (*chaoxizhe*)'. Ye Qing has attempted to mock us with this accusation, but we do not care because the New Philosophy is not the philosophy of an individual; if you parade yourself as having a 'new philosophical theory', then basically you have already lost the standpoint of the New Philosophy.[284]

By his own admission, therefore, Ai's philosophical writings were significant only in relation to an existing philosophy, the Soviet Union's New Philosophy, and this is evidently how Mao approached them. Mao recognised that Ai's popularisation and dissemination of this philosophy, and his vigorous and effective defence of it against Ye Qing and other detractors, helped ensure that its philosophical integrity had remained intact and had attracted a strong following amongst China's educated youth. Ai projected the New Philosophy to his audience as *the* orthodox interpretation of Marxist philosophy. Mao accepted Ai's assertion that this was the case, and was thus prepared to employ Ai's elaborations of the New Philosophy in his own study of this philosophy. In so doing, Mao ensured Ai's philosophical writings would function as a significant link between the Soviet Union's New Philosophy and the philosophical orthodoxy of the CCP that emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Mao's endorsement of the New Philosophy ensured that it (and renditions of it by Chinese philosophers such as Ai Siqi and Li Da) would be accepted within the Party as orthodox Marxism, and become a central component of Mao Zedong Thought, which after 1945 became the CCP's ideology.[285]

Ai's books – *Philosophy for the Masses*, *Methodology of Thought*, *Selected Writings on Philosophy*, *Philosophy and Life* – were therefore not influences on Mao

[283] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 447–52.

[284] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun*, p. 160.

[285] See 'Resolution on some questions in the history of our Party', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956), Vol. 4, esp. pp. 207–11.

in their own right. Not only did they elaborate the New Philosophy, they represented only several of a larger number of texts on this philosophy available to Mao. The significance of Ai's writings for Mao was that, on the one hand, they provided accessible interpretations of this philosophy and, on the other, reinforced the philosophical viewpoint that Mao was deriving independently from the Soviet texts on philosophy. It was the constellation of these texts in toto, and their configuration as an interlocking and mutually reinforcing body of texts on a common philosophy, that imparts significance to any one of them individually. It is in this light that Ai's influence, and the limits to that influence, should be viewed.

It is therefore important, analytically, to avoid allowing one's focus on Ai Siqi's contribution to the development of Marxist philosophy in China and Mao Zedong Thought to lead to an exaggeration of his influence. This is, as we have observed, the trap into which scholars of Ai's philosophy have fallen. Ai was significant, but not overly significant; his influence was considerable, but qualified by his indebtedness to the Soviet Union's New Philosophy; and the powerful political endorsement received by this philosophy throughout the international communist movement served to reinforce the authority of his philosophical pronouncements. The task of analysis must be to achieve an appropriate balance between Ai's personal significance as philosopher and the significance of the political and philosophical context within which he operated. The balance, I argue, should be slanted towards the latter; and this requires an appreciation of the fact that, without this context – the enormous influence of the New Philosophy on Ai and like-minded Chinese philosophers coupled with Mao's willingness to study and endorse that philosophy in 1937 – Ai's significance as a philosopher would be very much more modest than it is.

3. AI SIQI, MAO ZEDONG AND THE 'SINIFICATION OF MARXISM'

A central focus of Ai's philosophical writings from the early to mid 1930s was the universal laws and principles of dialectical materialism. His purpose was to explain these in a manner accessible to the educated layperson, and he did so by demonstrating how they could be applied to an understanding of Chinese conditions; and he illustrated his elaborations with examples drawn from everyday life familiar to Chinese people. This approach to the elaboration of Marxist philosophy is significant to an understanding of the way in which Mao himself approached the 'Sinification of Marxism', which loomed as a significant ideological and theoretical problem for Mao in the late 1930s.[286] Mao was determined to find a formula by which Marxism, a theory of history of European origins but claiming universal applicability, could be applied in China without abandoning its universality. Mao came to believe that it was first necessary to identify the universal laws of Marxism, and then apply them to analysis of Chinese society to reveal the particular laws of Chinese society that could be used in the formulation of revolutionary strategy and

[286] See Stuart R. Schram, *The Political thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, revised edition), p. 172.

tactics. Marxism's universal laws possessed no specific cultural and historical content (they were not specifically 'European'); it was only through their application to particular concrete historical contexts that they assumed any cultural specificity.[287] Mao made this abundantly clear in his most important statement on the 'Sinification of Marxism'. Marxist theory is, he insisted, 'universally applicable', but it had to be applied to China's particular historical and social conditions for it to have any relevance:

> What we call concrete Marxism is Marxism that has taken on a national form, that is, Marxism applied to the concrete struggle in the concrete conditions prevailing in China, and not Marxism abstractly used. ... Consequently, the Sinification of Marxism – that is to say, making certain that in all its manifestations it is imbued with Chinese particularities, using it according to those particularities – becomes a problem that must be understood and solved by the whole Party without delay.[288]

To what extent was Mao's conceptualisation of the problem of the 'Sinification of Marxism', and the ways to solve this problem, influenced by Ai's expository approach, particularly the balance in his writings between elaboration of Marxist philosophy's universal principles and illustration of their concrete application to Chinese conditions? To answer this question, let us first remind ourselves that Ai was very aware of the importance of applying the abstract formulations of the New Philosophy to Chinese conditions. A good place to commence is with Ai's 'Preface' to *Methodology of Thought*.[289] Having accepted, as we observed above, Ye Qing's snide criticism that he and other advocates of the New Philosophy were mere 'repeaters and copiers', Ai proceeded to stress the importance of the application of this philosophy:

> However, this is not to say that the New Philosophy is entirely concerned with repetition and copying; this would also be a mistaken view. What we can 'copy' is only the basic theory; when it is 'repeated' in China, we need to apply it concretely to the practical problems of China, and we cannot simply copy, but need to concretely develop it in various ways.[290]

In terms of his approach to elaboration, Ai stressed the importance of simplicity in style and connecting with the real experiences of his readers:

> In terms of language, I strove to make it simple, clear and easy to understand; with the content, the principle was to make it practically useful and not vague and general. I always hoped that after reading the book, the reader would understand what the correct methodology of thought is, and moreover be able to apply it practically. This is the

[287] For analysis of Mao's 'Sinification of Marxism', see Nick Knight, 'The form of Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (1983), No. 9, pp. 17–33; Nick Knight, 'Mao Zedong and the "Sinification of Marxism"', in Colin Mackerras and Nick Knight (eds), *Marxism in Asia* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 62–93; Nick Knight, 'Soviet philosophy and Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1990), pp. 89–109.

[288] Schram, *The political thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 172. Translation slightly modified. For the original, see Takeuchi Minoru, *Mao Zedong ji* [Collected writings of Mao Zedong] (Tokyo: Hokubasha, 1970–72), Vol. VI, p. 261.

[289] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun*, p. 160.

[290] Ibid.

> object for which I worked hard ... In terms of content, I strove to employ real examples, and to relate theory to questions of China's national liberation. I believe that this concrete application is very important to the development of theory (at least, to the elaboration of theory).[291]

An example of Ai's sensitivity to the particularities of the Chinese context appears in his explanation of the distinction between dialectical and formal logic, an important theme in *Philosophy and Life*, which we know Mao read (for more on Ai's views on logic, see Chapter 7). Here, as in so many of his writings, Ai is both responding to a reader's query and taking his critic Ye Qing to task for his philosophical errors, in this case his supposedly mistaken understanding of the limits of formal logic. Ai points to Ye's study of the Chinese economy, one based on an attempted eclecticism that combines dialectical and formal logic. This approach, according to Ai, allows formal logic too much significance and leads to certain deductions based on formal logic that are logically accurate but historically incorrect:

> For example, a feudal society requires capitalist revolution; this is a general formula. If one's research conclusion suggests that China's economy is feudal, one then concludes that China needs a capitalist revolution to establish a capitalist society. This kind of deduction is naturally logical in formal logic. However, can we analyse China's concrete social conditions with this formula? Here your deduction won't work; Chinese society cannot be completely deduced from your formula. Although China is a feudal society, its concrete conditions do not allow it to take the path of the Western European capitalist revolution, and neither do they allow it to establish a capitalist society. None of this can be deduced by formal logic. This can only be studied from the point of view of dialectics. Those who adhere to dialectics have to use dialectics in studying China's economy and cannot use formal logic, or empty formalism will assert itself.[292]

The application of dialectical materialism's abstract formulations to analysis of China's concrete conditions is also an important theme in Ai's *Methodology of Thought*. While the purpose of the book is to explain, in relatively simple prose, the nature of dialectical materialism's laws and concepts, Ai repeatedly stresses the importance of applying these laws and concepts to reveal the 'concrete truths' of China's history and society. One might assiduously study dialectical materialism, he warns, but it is only in the concrete application of its laws and principles that 'the truth' will emerge. Without this approach, one cannot arrive at a 'correct methodology of thought', and one will be left with something that is empty and of no value.[293]

As well as emphasising the importance of applying dialectical materialism to Chinese conditions, Ai used an expository approach that employed examples drawn from everyday life and a style of language that made the abstruse formulations of the New Philosophy accessible to the non-specialist reader. 'Philosophy and our everyday lives have an intimate relationship', he asserted in *How to Study Philosophy*.[294] An illustration of this approach appears in Ai's *Philosophy and Life*,

[291] Ibid., p. 159.
[292] Ai Siqi, *Zhexue yu shenghuo*, pp. 155–6.
[293] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun*, passim.
[294] Ai Siqi, *Ruhe yanjiu zhexue*, p. 44.

in which he explains his objection to the notion that difference and contradiction can be equated:

> ... different things of course are not contradictions; therefore a pen, ink and chair, and so on, are not contradictions. However, if we really 'understand' dialectics, 'understand' the principles of motion and change, then we should know that, if two things exist at the same time and reject each other, then these different things under certain circumstances can change to become contradictions. For example, a shop assistant and a writer are as different as chalk and cheese. However, if the shop assistant becomes interested in writing, and discontented with his present life as a shop assistant and wanted to become a writer, then the two occupations are mutually incompatible within a single entity. Could one say that this is not a contradiction? Can one say that this particular shop assistant feels the contradictions of life? If one firmly adheres to the idea that only good and bad, male and female, etc. can be regarded as contradictions and that other things cannot become contradictions, this is a formalistic categorisation.[295]

Ai's simple expository style, drawing on familiar themes and Chinese examples, clearly appealed to Mao and he employed a similar rhetorical device in his own philosophical essays. The following passage from the pre-1949 version of 'On Practice' emulates Ai's popularising approach to the elaboration of dialectical materialism's complex principles:

> In the process of practice, man at first sees only the phenomenal side, the separate aspects, and the external relations of things. For instance, on the first day or two in Yanan, a Guomindang inspection team sees its topography, streets, and houses, they meet many people, attend banquets, evening parties and mass meetings, hear talk of various kinds and read various documents, all these being the phenomena, the separate aspects and the external relations of things. That is called the perceptual stage of cognition, namely, the stage of sense perceptions and impressions. That is, these particular things in Yanan act on the sense organs of the members of the observation group, evoke sense perceptions and give rise in their brains to many impressions together with a rough sketch of the external relations among these impressions: this is the first stage of cognition.[296]

Both 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice' draw heavily on illustrations from Chinese history and provide numerous examples from the Chinese Revolution.[297] The explication of Marxist philosophy, Mao believed, had to illustrate the link between theory and practice, and he strove for this effect in his philosophical essays. An important dimension of this mode of explication was to use language and illustrative material familiar to a Chinese audience. Doing so did not, Mao stressed, indicate any dilution of Marxism's universal principles; but it did allow those principles to be grasped by those to whom the laws and concepts of dialectical materialism appeared alien and incomprehensible. Ai's capacity for what might be termed a 'folksy' rendition of dialectical materialism, one that coated the alien pill

[295] Ai Siqi, *Zhexue yu shenghuo*, p. 34.

[296] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on dialectical materialism*, p. 134; cf. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, p. 297.

[297] Nick Knight, 'Mao Zedong's "On Contradiction" and "On Practice": Pre-Liberation texts', *China Quarterly*, No. 84 (December 1980), pp. 641–68; Vsevolod Holubnychy, 'Mao Tse-tung's materialist dialectics', *China Quarterly*, No. 19 (1964), pp. 3–37; Schram, *the Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, Introduction.

of universality with the sugar coating of the familiar, clearly appealed to Mao. Not only did he emulate this style in his own writings on philosophy, he later exhorted Party cadres to adopt it in their presentation of theoretical matters to the masses.[298] In this respect, and perhaps more so than the theoretical content of Ai's elaboration of the New Philosophy, Ai's influence on Mao was great indeed; for while Mao was able to access information on the universal principles of Marxist philosophy from sources other than Ai's philosophical writings, including the Soviet texts on philosophy, it was primarily from Ai's many articles and columns written for a lay audience that he was able to glean an effective and accessible approach to the elaboration of Marxist philosophy.

4. AI SIQI AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE NEW PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

The appeal of the New Philosophy in China in the early to mid 1930s was not just a result of the lucidity and accessibility of Ai Siqi's philosophical writings. It derived also from the effectiveness of institutions established to disseminate the New Philosophy to a target audience of educated youth, Party cadres and fellow travellers. Ai had participated actively in this early process of the institutionalisation of the New Philosophy in China, and this was to presage the important role he would play after his move to Yanan in 1937 and the commencement of his close personal association with Mao.

Important amongst these early institutional activities was the establishment and editing of journals whose purpose was the elaboration of the New Philosophy. Most important amongst these journals was *Dushu shenghuo* (Readers' Life). This journal had commenced in June 1934 as a Party-inspired tactic, which saw Ai working within *Shen Bao*, answering readers' queries in short essays published as a column. Such was the demand for Ai's essays that the 'Response to Readers' segment was hived off and established as the separate journal *Dushu shenghuo* in November 1934, with Ai as one of the two sub-editors (he later became editor). In June 1937, Ai established the theoretical journal *Renshi yuekan* (Knowledge monthly), whose purpose was the study and propagation of Marxist theory.[299] As well as pursuing an active role in publishing, Ai was involved in various left-wing associations such as the National Salvation Association (*Quanguo jiuguohui*) and the National Salvation Cultural Association (*Wenhuajie jiuwang xiehui*), and he helped establish the Philosophy Study Association.

By the time Ai arrived in Yanan in October 1937, he had thus gained a reputation as an effective organiser and editor. Coupled with his formidable reputation as a philosopher and propagandist, Ai's organisational skills made him a valuable asset to the process, then in its preliminary stages in Yanan, of constructing the intellectual and institutional architecture of the Party's ideology under the rising

[298] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), Vol. III, pp. 11–16, 17–26, 35–52, 53–68.

[299] Luo and Feng (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian*, p. 1005.

leadership of Mao Zedong. Recognising Ai's skills, Mao ensured that Ai was actively involved in this process. In September 1938, at Mao's instigation, the Yanan New Philosophy Association was established, directed by Ai Siqi and He Sijing (see Chapter 11).[300] At the end of that year, the Central Institute for the Study of Marxism-Leninism was established, and Ai assumed the role of Director of its Philosophy Research Unit and was active in a leadership role in the Institute's teaching activities.

In the spring of 1939, Mao established a philosophy study group (*zhexue xiaozu*) of six people, which met every week for more than three months and in which he himself participated.[301] This small group of philosophers and intellectuals included Ai Siqi, and was asked by Mao to engage in discussion on Marxist philosophy and make suggestions for the revision of his 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction'.[302] The Party's Propaganda Department also established a philosophy study group, in which Ai took a leading role, and in which Party leaders such as Zhu De and Li Weihan participated. According to Chinese sources, this study group became a model for study groups in other units of the Party Centre.[303] To facilitate discussion at these study groups, Ai compiled *Zhexue xuanji* (Selected writings on philosophy), constituted of a range of Chinese and foreign (primarily Soviet) texts on the New Philosophy, and including his own *Yanjiu tigang* (Outline for Study).[304] In February 1940, Ai was instated as the editor of the Party's important new journal *Zhongguo wenhua* (China's culture).[305] In June 1940, the First Congress of the Yanan New Philosophy Association was held, to which Ai presented the work report; Mao and other Party leaders approved the direction and achievements of the Association. In July 1941, Ai was appointed as the Director of the Unit for the Study of China's Cultural Thought within the Central Research Institute, and in February 1942, Mao set Ai and his Unit the task of compiling *MaEnLieSi fangfalun* (The methodology of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin) as study material for the Zhengfeng (Rectification) campaign, in which Ai was himself active.[306]

The picture that emerges from this brief history of Ai's institutional work during the early Yanan Period (for more details, see Chapter 11) is of an extremely active and effective organiser, one charged with the establishment and operation of fledgling institutions central to Mao's burgeoning purpose of consolidating and

[300] There is debate amongst Chinese historians as to the actual date of establishment of the Yanan New Philosophy Association. See Xu Sunhua and Yu Lianghua, 'Guanyu Yanan xin zhexue hui jige wenti de zhiyi' [A query regarding some questions regarding the Yanan New Philosophy Association], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 12 (1985), pp. 38–9.

[301] Luo and Feng (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian*, p. 1365; also Guo Huaruo, 'Mao zhuxi kangzhan chuqi guanghui de zhexue huodong' [The glorious philosophical activities of Chairman Mao in the early years of the Anti-Japanese War], *Zhongguo zhexue* (1979), Vol. I, p. 36.

[302] Li Xueming, 'Mao Zedong sixiang yanjiu de kaituozhe: Yang Chao yanjiuyuan yuanjiu gongzuo de jige tedian' [The pioneer of research in Mao Zedong Thought: Several features of the research work of Yang Chao], *Mao Zedong sixiang yanjiu* (1985), No. 4, pp. 119–20.

[303] Luo and Feng (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian*, p. 1006.

[304] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 303–88.

[305] Luo and Feng (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian*, p. 1006.

[306] Ibid.

disseminating his own thought as the Party's guiding ideology. It was not, however, for his organisational skills alone that Mao selected Ai, but for his reputation as China's pre-eminent philosopher of the New Philosophy. Mao's acceptance of this philosophy as orthodox Marxism meant that Ai's qualities as philosopher, especially his ability to simplify and popularise this philosophy, made Ai invaluable to Mao. As Ai had committed himself intellectually to the New Philosophy, now he committed himself to Mao Zedong Thought, the Sinified version of Marxism within which the New Philosophy occupied a core intellectual position. Thus, while Ai may have been an influence on the development of Mao's philosophical thought, it was Mao's influence on Ai, and especially his power to determine the institutional framework within which Ai operated as philosopher and intellectual, that allowed Ai the possibility of establishing as Party ideology the philosophy in which he had believed implicitly since the early 1930s. And it was a possibility realised with the acceptance, by the CCP's Seventh Party Congress in 1945, of Mao Zedong Thought as the Party's guiding ideology.[307]

It is in this light that Ai's role as philosopher to the Communist movement in China should be viewed. It is in this light, too, that his achievements should be measured. For Ai not only provided the Communist movement a rendition of the New Philosophy that was orthodox to a fault, he developed a formulation for its elaboration and dissemination that allowed its adaptation to a Chinese context and acceptance by a Chinese audience. These two seemingly opposite and opposed sides of the coin – orthodoxy and adaptation – were thus reconciled in Ai's philosophical writings and activities. And through Mao's endorsement, Ai's formulation became central to the CCP's ideological orientation and was to have long-term consequences for intellectual life in Mao's China and beyond.

In the following chapter, we turn from Ai Siqi's role as philosopher to the Chinese Communist movement and relationship with Mao to analysis of his philosophical writings. We will analyse Ai's elaboration of the major themes that characterised the philosophy of contemporary Soviet Marxism. It will become evident that, while Ai was consciously operating within the confines of philosophical orthodoxy as defined by the New Philosophy, he was at the same time employing an approach to philosophical elaboration that allowed the application of this philosophy to Chinese conditions and made it accessible to a Chinese non-specialist audience.

[307] See *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956), Vol. IV, pp. 171–220.

CHAPTER 7

AI SIQI ON THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

– The laws and logic of dialectical materialism –

In his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', written in July and August 1937, Mao provided short explanatory summaries of the fundamental themes of dialectical materialism as interpreted by the New Philosophy. There are sections on materialism, motion, time and space, reflection, consciousness, truth, and the laws of dialectical materialism. The longer sections of the 'Lecture Notes', those that later assumed an independent status as 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice', dealt with the law of the unity of opposites and the epistemology of dialectical materialism. 'On Contradiction' also discussed the distinction between formal logic and dialectical logic. In short, Mao's 'Lecture Notes' attempt a wide, though for the most part, schematic coverage of dialectical materialism (see Chapters 9 and 10).

It is these themes, amongst others, which had been of concern to Ai Siqi in his own writings on the New Philosophy prior to 1937. Ai's intention was to understand the philosophical structure of dialectical materialism, its logic and conceptual repertoire, so as to be able to explain these in an accessible manner for those whose philosophical erudition did not match his own. As he pointed out in the 'Postface' of *Methodology of Thought* (1936), 'In terms of language, I strove to make it simple, clear and easy to understand; with the content, the principle was to make it practically useful and not vague and general ... This is the object for which I worked hard ...'.[308] Nevertheless, it was not always easy, as we shall see, for Ai to convert the complex into the simple, for the difficulty of his subject matter served to constrain the extent to which simplification could be achieved. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that important objectives for Ai were to ensure that his elaborations remained faithful to his sources, and that they should be 'correct, appropriate and concrete'.[309]

The extent of Ai's fidelity to the New Philosophy is of considerable interest, for this factor bears materially not only on the issue of his own philosophical orthodoxy but more importantly on the orthodoxy of Mao's understanding of dialectical materialism. To the extent that Ai influenced the development of Mao's philosophical thought (and we cautioned against exaggerating this in the previous chapter), the orthodoxy of Ai's interpretation of the New Philosophy comes into play as a means of evaluating Mao's orthodoxy in terms of the criteria established by Soviet Marxism between 1931–36. As we have seen, Ai had explicitly

[308] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun* [Methodology of Thought] (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1939, fourth edition), p. 159.
[309] Ibid., p. 161.

acknowledged his debt to the New Philosophy, and in particular to Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy*, which he had co-translated. This and other 'foreign works on philosophy' formed the basis of Ai's understanding of the New Philosophy, although he did claim to have been responsible for organising the 'system of elaboration' of the theory; this was not, he argued, taken from some 'original source'.[310] Ai consequently did not perceive himself as a mere philosophical cypher, but his interpretation and elaboration of the New Philosophy, which highlighted its philosophical content in an accessible manner, did not stray far from the approved path.

In this chapter, a number of core themes in Ai's explication of the New Philosophy will be described and evaluated. These are the laws of dialectical materialism (in particular, the law of the unity of opposites), the conflict between formal and dialectical logic, epistemology, and the dilemma of determinism. Each of these themes was of concern to Mao, and two – the law of the unity of opposites and an epistemology based on practice – became central to his understanding of Marxist philosophy, and through his endorsement of them, to the development of Marxist philosophy in China. The chapter also illustrates Ai's style of elaboration by providing a close paraphrase of one of his columns from *Dushu Shenghuo*, which deals with the relationship between knowledge and practice. As we will observe, Ai was able to simplify complex philosophical concepts and make them accessible through reference to the objects and experiences of everyday life. The chapter concludes by returning to the theme of the 'Sinification of Marxism', touched on in the previous chapter, although here the emphasis is on the logic of Ai's conceptualisation of this complex and vitally important concept. The relationship of the general and the particular was central to Ai's understanding of Marxist philosophy and its application to China. It was also a major theoretical and practical problem for Mao as he strove to find an ideological formula that would make Marxism useful to those prosecuting the Chinese Revolution while retaining its universal dimension.

1. THE LAWS OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

In his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' (1937), Mao referred to the laws of dialectical materialism – the law of the unity of opposites (or contradictions), the law of the transformation of quality into quantity and vice versa, and the law of the negation of the negation – as 'the actual laws of the objective world',[311] and he proceeded to elaborate the first and most important of these in his celebrated essay 'On Contradiction'. An understanding of the laws of dialectical materialism, as understood by the New Philosophy and its Chinese Marxist interpreters, is thus essential to an understanding of the origins, content and development of Marxist philosophy in China from the early 1930s, and particularly to Mao's thought. Ai's

[310] Ibid., pp. 160–1.

[311] Nick Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), pp. 123–4.

contribution to this process is significant, for he had expended considerable intellectual energy in unravelling and explaining the laws of dialectical materialism.

The laws of dialectical materialism, according to Ai, grew out of Marx's inversion of Hegelian philosophy; this was the 'critical materialist transformation'.[312] Knowledge of these laws had to be premised on acceptance that motion and change are generated internally, within the things that constitute the material universe.[313] Unlike the earlier equivocations of Qu Qiubai on this fundamental issue (see Chapter 3), Ai is adamant that the 'fundamental source' of motion and change is internal; an external force cannot change things fundamentally.[314] But what is this 'fundamental source'? It is, Ai asserts, contradiction; this 'is the original force for change in things'.[315] For example, humans can only grow physically because of the constant struggle between life and death within them; countless old cells die and new ones emerge. It is the same within society; if there were no contradictions between humans, there could be no change or progress.[316] All things contain within them elements working towards their maintenance (affirmation) and their elimination (negation), and indeed there is negation within affirmation. Within all things, without exception, there is contradiction and consequent struggle. The problem is that some objects appear not to be changing or in motion, and consequently there is a temptation to accept the formulae of formal logic which allow for the unchangeability of things. The mistake resides, according to Ai, in not recognising that there is a phase in development that can be described as 'relative rest' (*xiangdui jingzhi*); but this is only a particular condition within the process of change, for change is the general condition of all things. It is important to move beyond the external appearance of relative rest to the internal condition of a thing, which is not at rest. In this way, it is possible to apprehend that a thing or process is, while itself, constantly changing into something else. If one sees only relative rest, this temporary aspect in the development and change of a thing is generalised to become absolute rest, and this constitutes an abandonment of dialectics.[317] The important point is to see the two opposed elements of a thing – those for affirmation and negation – as not existing exactly in parallel; for affirmation constitutes the thing as it is, whereas negation represents the thing it is to become. Ai consequently urges that, when studying a contradiction, it is essential to make a distinction between these two aspects of it.

The second fundamental law of change and motion in things is the law of qualitative and quantitative change.[318] Motion and change in all things have only two conditions: qualitative and quantitative change. Ai gives the obvious example of the

[312] Ai Siqi, *Xin zhexue lunji* [Collected writings on the New Philosophy] (Shanghai: Duzhe shufang, 1936), pp. 10–11.
[313] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun*, p. 123.
[314] *Ai Siqi wenji* [Collected writings of Ai Siqi] (Beijing: Renimin chubanshe, 1980), Vol. 1, p. 207.
[315] Ibid., p. 208.
[316] Ai, *Sixiang fangfalun*, pp. 123–4.
[317] Ibid., pp. 128–9.
[318] Ibid., p. 134.

change in temperature of water from fifteen degrees to fifty degrees; this is quantitative, and there is no change in the nature – the quality – of the water. However, above one hundred degrees it turns into steam, a change in quality. This process of change is typical of change in all things. Ai recognises that it is not always possible to clearly distinguish between these two sorts of change. When this is so, it is necessary to apply the law of the unity of opposites. In particular, it is necessary to remember that within affirmation there is negation, and, in the same way, one must seek quantitative change within qualitative change, and vice versa. It is a mistake to perceive quantitative change as just quantitative change, or qualitative change as just qualitative change; for within each is the other dimension of change. Ai gives the simple example of a twenty-year old youth who grows to be twenty-five. This is merely a quantitative change in the life of this individual. However, within those five years, the body of the youth is undergoing changes that inevitably culminate in the emergence of middle age (*zhuangnian*). Without piecemeal quantitative changes, this qualitative change from one phase of life to the next would not be possible. Qualitative change occurs only when quantitative change has reached a certain level; quantitative change constitutes the basis of qualitative change. Following qualitative change, a new quality emerges, and on the basis of this new quality there is new quantitative change. For example, after reaching one hundred degrees and changing from water into steam, there will only be quantitative change with any increased temperature; but without this qualitative change, water could not change its form, and neither could any increase of temperature above one hundred degrees be possible. And middle age, once achieved, represents the basis for the quantitative change that will eventually lead to old age. Here can be seen the mutual transformation of quantity and quality; all things rely on this to progress.[319]

This law, of the mutual transformation of quantity and quality, is also of great significance in understanding the concept of 'relative rest'. The change from one quality to another (as in that of youth to middle age, from water to steam) is quite evident, for two different qualities are involved. However, quantitative change is not so evident. Although we can observe a mathematical increase or decrease, there is no qualitative change; this, when reflected in our knowledge, becomes the concept of relative rest. Does relative rest exist objectively in reality? Of course, responds Ai. For quality not to change is a fact. But this condition of rest or 'stasis' is only relative, is only a superficial aspect of quality; it is only rest within definite quantitative limits. In terms of the quantitative aspect, things are in constant change and motion, and when in the course of quantitative change there reaches a definite limit (when qualitative change occurs), the aspect of relative rest of that quality is eliminated.[320]

An understanding of motion and change cannot therefore be achieved separate from an understanding of this law of the mutual change of quantity and quality. A failure to do so often results in recognising quantitative change but ignoring qualitative change, or the reverse. To perceive only quantitative change is to

[319] Ibid., pp. 136–7.
[320] Ibid., p. 139.

perceive only an increase or decrease in quantity; this does not explain the apparent disappearance of a thing or the emergence of new things. From this perspective, all things are as they are (apart from an increase or decrease in quantitative terms), and no genuinely new thing can emerge. This approach repudiates the process of emergence, development, decay and elimination so central to dialectics. Moreover, when applied to social problems, this perspective encourages the view that a new society can be achieved through reformism of a gradualist sort; the old society cannot experience change of a qualitative or revolutionary form. Such a view clearly offended Ai's revolutionary approach to philosophy and social change, for he believed that there are limits to piecemeal reform. However, he also cautioned against perceiving only qualitative change. This too was a mistaken approach, for it leads to neglect of concrete conditions, which incorporate quantitative changes. Ai believed that this approach manifested itself in the 'infantile disorder' of extreme leftism, a refusal to await the maturation of conditions before taking political action, something that frequently ends in failure. To avoid this, it must be recognised that qualitative change is premised on quantitative change.

The third of the fundamental laws of dialectical materialism is the law of the negation of the negation. Ai links this law to the previous law, for the law of the negation of the negation allows an understanding of the stages of development through which a thing passes on its inevitable transition from emergence to extinction. Ai points to the life of human beings – from the embryo through youth to middle and then old age, and finally death – to illustrate this process. Similarly, the transition from primitive society through societies based on private property to communist society exemplifies the operation of the law of the negation of negation in a concrete manner. Ai, as we have seen, stresses that negation does not imply complete negation; rather, there is a unity of opposites between affirmation and negation. This ensures that the positive aspects of a thing in one stage of its development are absorbed into the next stage. This leads to a form of development that is progressive and purposive, as things develop through a dialectical process to higher and higher levels.[321]

These then are the three fundamental laws of dialectical materialism. But which of these is the most important, the law on which the entire materialist universe rests? It is, Ai asserts, the law of the unity of opposites, and this is because all things, without exception, contain contradictions between which there is struggle.[322] This assertion – of the centrality of the law of the unity of opposites to the philosophy of dialectical materialism – was not original, and neither was his elaboration particularly innovative. It was a view already deeply embedded in Marxist philosophical discourse. Ai's elaboration is nevertheless extremely significant in the development of Marxist philosophy in China. He had gleaned the importance of the law of the unity of opposites from his reading of the texts of the New Philosophy, particularly Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy*, and his elaboration of the laws of

[321] Ibid., pp. 141–6.
[322] *Ai Siqi wenji*, p. 209.

dialectical materialism draws directly on this source.[323] From 1933 onwards, he tirelessly reiterated the perspective embedded in Soviet Marxist philosophy regarding the nature and significance of the laws of dialectical materialism. His enthusiastic and frequent endorsement of this view of Marxist philosophy ensured that, not only would his extensive audience absorb this particular view of the hierarchy and operation of the laws of dialectical materialism, but that his politically most powerful reader – Mao Zedong – would absorb that view into the core of his own thinking and henceforth proclaim it as orthodoxy. In this, as in so many dimensions of his role as philosopher to the Chinese Communist movement, Ai's role was pivotal.

2. FORMAL AND DIALECTICAL LOGIC

A similar conclusion is reached when Ai's elaboration of the distinction between formal and dialectical logic is considered. What Ai says on this topic is significant as it faithfully reflects the thinking of contemporary Soviet Marxist philosophy, and was one of the themes addressed by Mao in the original version of 'On Contradiction' (although subsequently excised on its official republication in the early 1950s).[324] Mao was also to address this theme in his annotations to Ai's *Philosophy and Life* of September 1937 (see Chapter 10). Ai's elaboration of this well-worn theme within Marxist philosophy is thus of considerable interest for an understanding of the sources of Mao's views on logic.

Ai's objection to formal logic rested on the premises of the laws of dialectical materialism, built (as we have seen) on the concepts of contradiction, struggle and negation. Formal logic, in contrast, is premised on the centrality of identity and affirmation. Its repudiation of negation is captured in the formula 'A is A and is not-B'. Of the three laws of formal logic (the law of identity, the law of excluded middle, and the law of contradiction), the fundamental law is the law of identity; the other two laws can be inferred from it. The formula of the law of identity is 'A is A', which means, in effect, an object is identical to itself. Dialectical logic, on the other hand, asserts that 'A is A, and at the same time is not-A', which means that 'an object is identical to itself and at the same time is not identical to itself'. The contrast between formal logic and dialectical logic is thus clear. Dialectics insists that, within the thing itself, there are identity and not-identity. However, formal logic perceives only the aspect of identity. Ai argues that, in its ability to grasp both identity and non-identity, dialectical logic is able to incorporate, absorb and sublate (that is, transcend) formal logic.[325]

As Ai points out, the sublation of formal logic by dialectics is not a simple sublation; it absorbs the positive elements of formal logic. He illustrates this process through the example of inductive and deductive logic. The entirety of research is

[323] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun*, p. 150.
[324] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on dialectical materialism*, pp. 159–63.
[325] This summary of Ai Siqi's views on formal and dialectical logic draws on his *Zhexue yu Shenghuo* [Philosophy and Life] (Shanghai: Dushu shenghuo she, 1937), pp. 19–37.

dialectical; in the various facets of the process of research, induction is employed on some occasions, while on others deduction is used. The synthesis of induction and deduction within this methodology results in a research process that is inevitably dialectical. Induction discovers within various complex and individual things a general and simple commonality; its methodology is analysis. Deduction, on the other hand, employs general principles to illustrate particular things; its methodology is synthesis. Induction involves a movement in knowledge from the particular to the general, and from the concrete to the abstract. Deduction, in contrast, involves a movement in knowledge from the general to the particular, and from the abstract to the concrete. In dialectics, in the process of moving from the particular to the general, the methodologies of observation, comparison, and analysis (characteristic of induction) are used. However, these methodologies only abstract from various complex things a simple and one-sided principle. Dialectics not only analyses, it also synthesises; it not only abstracts simple and one-sided principles, but also discovers within things or processes the comprehensive principle of the unity of contradictions. In so doing, dialectics analyses the contradictions within individual things, and discovers the new and general tendencies of those contradictions; there is a movement to and from the general and particular. Therefore, regardless of whether it involves a movement from the particular to the general or from the general to the particular, logic needs to remain fundamentally dialectical if it is to capture the dynamic and contradictory character of reality. Both induction and deduction are absorbed and transformed within a dialectical research process; there is not a merely mechanical combination of induction and deduction.

Ai uses the example of motion and stasis to illustrate this point. Stasis is a special form of motion; things in stasis still are essentially in motion. In the process of quantitative change, the nature of a thing does not change; as far as its nature is concerned, it is relatively static. However, in terms of quantity, change never ceases. Because relative stasis is basically one manifestation of motion, dialectics is needed to gain a deep understanding of things or processes in this phase of development. The objective is to grasp things in their entirety, and not merely to extrapolate from one phase of development and thus gain a one-sided and incomplete picture. Formal logic, if used on its own, sees only the aspect of stasis; and moreover, it tends to exaggerate this aspect, and ignores the fundamental character of motion.

In Ai's various writings on formal and dialectical logic, the dominant themes are the constancy of motion, and the ubiquity of contradictions within things and the struggle between them. This was the nature of reality. No logic that closed its eyes to this ontological truth could hope to represent the real causal relationships between things, or to capture the process of change within them. Formal logic commenced from an entirely incorrect ontology, based on the dominance of identity. Its representations of the relations between things in discourse might well be logical, but were purely formalistic, bearing no resemblance to the real nature of things or the connection between them. Any utility it possessed could only be salvaged through its incorporation within dialectical logic, and then only to provide a discursive representation of one dimension of the process of change and one stage in the cycle of knowledge.

3. THE DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM

Like Qu Qiubai (see Chapters 3 and 4), Ai recognised that a core philosophical problem for Marxist philosophy is the dilemma of determinism. Moreover, Ai's many readers were clearly puzzled by this aspect of his philosophy, and informed him so in their letters. He consequently dedicated a number of his columns and essays to unravelling the apparent mysteries surrounding the issue of free will.

For Ai, the role of human will in an apparently determinist universe was explicable, but only so from the perspective of dialectical materialism. Ai accepted as a foundational premise a materialist universe, governed by knowable natural laws: the universe, and all things and processes within it, are composed of matter in motion; the primal force that impels motion are the contradictions within things and the struggle between those contradictions. Consciousness and thought are matter at its highest level of development.

This unrelievedly materialist perspective on the universe raises the possibility that humans and their will can exert no effect on their natural and social worlds. If all matter, including thought and consciousness, is determined by natural laws, what role can there be for human will? If the 'social sciences' (a euphemism for Marxism) predicts the inevitability of the 'new society' (that is, communism), why should humans strive for its realisation? In a column entitled 'The issue of free will' (February 1935), Ai responded to these concerns by asserting that humans are not machines 'whose behaviour is totally determined by external conditions'. Humans are not slaves to causality; but neither do they possess totally free will. The answer to the dilemma of determinism lies between these two philosophical extremes. Ai concedes that human behaviour is constrained. 'Every person's behaviour is limited by certain conditions. An absolutely free will is possible only in dreams. Even heroes cannot have an absolutely free will; they also act under certain social conditions'.[326] But recognition of the social and natural constraints on human behaviour does not validate the logic of fatalism, for this would mean an acceptance of the status quo, something that Ai, as a revolutionary, could not countenance.

Ai argued that human will is free under certain circumstances. But of what sort and how extensive is this freedom? Ai rejects the notion of absolute necessity. While the laws of causality do govern the behaviour of all things, humans can nevertheless act in accordance with their own purposes. They do have the freedom to choose whether to act or not. While this freedom is not absolute, humans can use their 'relative freedom' to choose correct actions, and, in doing so, strengthen their capacity to overcome the obstacles in their way. 'We should', Ai insists, 'adopt a positive attitude to life, unceasingly struggle with our environments, pursue the correct path, and allow our conduct to become a force in the work of pushing society forward'.[327] However, the capacity to exert human will in a manner that achieves its purpose can only come through a clear understanding of the social environment. With such knowledge, the relative freedom to act that humans possess can be mobilised to achieve social change.

[326] *Ai Siqi wenji*, pp. 82–3.
[327] Ibid., p. 86.

Ai further argues that, while society is governed by necessity, there is a contradiction within society that allows the possibility for human will, appropriately targeted, to achieve change. Social progress resulting in a 'new society' is a necessity; but conservative resistance to progress is also a necessity. If this resistance is not overcome, progress could not be achieved. The role of human will is thus to overcome this contradiction within necessity; human effort, guided by will, is itself necessary. In other words, one necessity (that for progress) is pitted against another necessity (that for conservatism). Human will in action can negate its determined status, but it must be focused on a particular objective, and founded on a clear knowledge of social conditions and the constraints that these place on human action.

Ai extended his attempted resolution of the dilemma of determinism in an essay of February 1935.[328] Here he explicitly linked his rather guarded view of the capacities of human will to the precepts of the New Philosophy. This philosophy recognised that the issue of human will is grounded in a conception of the relationship between the subjective and objective. The subjective is a product of and part of the objective; the objective, under normal conditions, is the dominant partner in this unity of opposites. However, the laws of the objective world do not passively determine the subjective, and to believe so would be to fall into the trap of the mechanical materialists, such as Feuerbach. The New Philosophy regards humans as immersed, mentally and physically, in definite social structures, and as participants in specific historical activities. In the process of material production, humans actively and consciously transform the objects on which they labour, and it is through this conscious human activity that the subjective intentions of humans come into play. Labour is not a random activity, but one defined and made purposeful by the consciousness of humans. Subjective initiative is thus possible, but relative; actions emanating from the subjective are conditional on the nature of the objective material environment. The important point, as far as Ai is concerned, is that the subjective is not passively or mechanically determined. Like Qu before him, Ai rejected 'mechanical fatalism'.[329] In rejecting Spinoza's mechanistic materialism, Ai opts rather for a dialectical materialism that allows the possibility of purposeful (or 'targeted') human activity (*you duixiangxing de huodong*). Purposeful activity can only achieve its purpose through the knowledge provided by the 'social sciences'. While such knowledge is never absolute, it can reveal to humans how and to what extent their purposes can be achieved. Action in conformity with reality allows humans to achieve their purposes, and thus makes them 'free'. But in order to achieve what Ai regards as a relative and conditional freedom, people's intentions must be based on reality, and must be based on an understanding of causality and the laws of change; for 'freedom is knowledge of necessity'.[330]

[328] 'Cong Xin Zhexue suojian de renshengguan' [The New Philosophy's outlook on life], Ibid., pp. 88–98.

[329] Ibid., pp. 93–4. See also 'If you are doomed, you are doomed (or, there is no escape from your fate): Necessity and chance', Ibid., pp. 267–74.

[330] 'A cat is born to catch mice: Possibility and the realisability of purpose', Ibid., pp. 276–82.

Ai's notion of 'relative freedom' represents a simple response to the dilemma of determinism, not approaching the sophistication of Qu Qiubai's extended treatment of this core theme in Marxist philosophy (although he arrives at very similar conclusions). But we must remember that Ai's audience and purpose were different to Qu's. Ai's aim, in his columns in *Dushu Shenghuo* and other essays, was not so much to address the philosophical initiate in erudite terms, but to provide a simple and accessible resolution of philosophical problems, such as the dilemma of determinism, that would have the effect of not only whetting the reader's appetite for a deeper knowledge of philosophy, but also mobilise them politically. The Chinese are, Ai lamented, a semi-colonial and invaded people. If the will to resist is not strong enough to overcome the will exercised by the oppressors and invaders, then the Chinese will remain slaves. It is thus incumbent on them, Ai urged, to use what freedom of action they have to resist oppression; but they must do so in a politically informed and purposeful manner, one grounded on a correct theory of knowledge.[331] Similarly, for those Chinese who desire the realisation of communism, there is work to be done; while the 'new society' is inevitable, it won't happen 'if we sit idle'.[332]

4. EPISTEMOLOGY FOR THE NOVICE

Ai's capacity to simplify Marxist philosophy is nowhere more evident than in one of his *Dushu Shenguo* columns dealing with epistemology. Our purpose here is two-fold: to gain an appreciation of Ai's understanding of epistemology (a theme central to Marxist philosophy in China following Mao's endorsement of a practice-based theory of knowledge in 1937), and to gain an insight into Ai's trademark style of explication. Ai introduces the relationship between knowledge and practice by typically referring to a very concrete and well-known, but seemingly irrelevant, example: Charlie Chaplin. Ai's explanatory narrative runs as follows (and here we are closely paraphrasing, rather than translating).[333]

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Before the cinemas show Chaplin's movies, many advertisements appear depicting a wretched moustachioed tramp. We gain this impression of Chaplin through our sense organs. This is called perceptual knowledge. Perceptions are like photos; both take their images from the outside world directly, and both can thus be termed direct observation. But are the impressions real? We see Chaplin's moustache, and therefore it is real. But we should not be overly confident about the picture we gain of Chaplin. If we put too much emphasis on the moustache, we may come to believe that there is no difference between Chaplin and Hitler. The resemblance between Chaplin and Hitler is superficial, for they are totally different persons. Direct observation can thus provide only a superficial impression; we

[331] Ibid., pp. 86–7.
[332] Ibid., p. 282.
[333] *Ai Siqi wenji*, pp. 179–86. My thanks to Dr Liu Xian for his help with this section.

perceive only the superficial resemblance between Chaplin and Hitler, but we don't see the difference in their personalities. To understand these, we must use our reasoning power. This will allow us to know that Chaplin is a wonderful comedian, whereas Hitler is an evil dictator.

We thus use our reasoning power to gain knowledge of things beyond their superficial and direct appearance; this is rational knowledge. We have demonstrated above that rational knowledge seems to be in contradiction with perceptual knowledge. Rational knowledge finds difference in the similarities found by perceptual knowledge; it finds similarity in the differences found by perceptual knowledge. The cause of this contradiction lies in things themselves. For instance, Chaplin and Hitler are superficially similar but different in nature. The superficial appearances of all things are continuously in contradiction with their fundamental natures. Therefore, contradictions between perceptual and rational knowledge are reflections in our minds of the contradictions in things. There is constant contention between rational and perceptual knowledge. But rational knowledge has the capacity to gain from perceptual knowledge what it needs to provide a clear picture of things, and we can gain in-depth and thorough knowledge through the contradiction between these two forms of knowledge.

However, we must remember that perceptual knowledge is also important. While rational knowledge is important, we cannot rely on it too much. Possession of rational knowledge does not mean the end of the story. We know that Chaplin is a great comedic actor; so are the perceptions of his moustache and shabby hat so important? The answer is that, without them, we do not have the complete Chaplin. All the features of Chaplin make up the great comedian who is Chaplin. Rational knowledge cannot dispense with perceptual knowledge, but integrates fragmentary perceptions to provide a picture of the complete nature of Chaplin. If we know only that Chaplin is a great comedic actor without knowing all his features, our knowledge remains somewhat empty.

Consequently, we can say that relying exclusively on rational knowledge is harmful. Everyone knows that Chaplin is a great comedic actor with specific characteristics. But things are not always so straightforward. Some people rely exclusively on rational knowledge; they pay too much attention to abstract theory, and they forget that there are specific conditions that need to be considered. They thus make serious mistakes. For example, it is commonsense that reading will increase our knowledge. But not all books are necessarily good for increasing one's knowledge. One should be wary of the kinds of books one reads. Our understanding of things should not rely on empty conclusions, for many concrete facts also need to be considered.

We know that perceptual knowledge is inseparable from rational knowledge. When we know things, we firstly gain perceptions through our sense organs. Then we acquire rational knowledge, which represents in-depth and complete knowledge of things. However, rational knowledge is abstract. Relying on such knowledge exclusively provides us with only abstract forms. An abstract form, such as 'a great comedian', is called a concept, and it provides the general and common characteristics of a comedian. A similar abstraction is 'reading increases

knowledge'. These are general principles (or truths), and such concepts, general truths, and scientific laws are abstract things derived from rational knowledge. These abstract things are not without connection to the concrete things of perceptual knowledge. Their connection is, rather, an intimate one. Abstract things derive from concrete things; without concrete examples of comedians, we could have no concept of 'comedian'. Similarly, all the laws and principles of science derive from research on a myriad of concrete objects, and so we can say that concrete objects are the foundation of abstract laws; and perceptual knowledge is the foundation of rational knowledge. Any building without a foundation will collapse; and a theory without the support of concrete things is a useless and empty theory.

When we use rational knowledge to know things, we must therefore also grasp their perceptual foundation. This alone, however, cannot ensure that we gain the truth of things. Our capacity to know is certainly not that of a camera.[334] A camera takes a picture of the appearance of things. Our knowledge, initially through perceptions, also generates a surface view of things. But the picture created by the camera is the end of the story as far as the camera is concerned, but the rational knowledge of humans can go a step further, to see through the superficial phenomena to the essence of things that cannot be directly seen. Our brains do this through their capacity to organise the material gained through perceptual knowledge, creating from it various theories and imaginings. But because theories and imaginings are created by humans, they are not always in conformity with the external world; in fact, on occasion, they are the direct opposite of the external object, and become fantasies. Not even the camera finds itself in this situation! Although such subjective thought is the opposite of the external world, the bearers of it often consider it to be the truth, and we can thus call it subjective truth. Humans have the spontaneous capacity to generate subjective truth, and because of this, their knowledge is often opposed to objective fact. But not having realised that their knowledge is actually fantasy, they believe it to be truth. In fact, it is not easy for people who have a fantasy to realise that it is indeed a fantasy. This is because the fantasy is in their minds. But things reside in the objective world, and cannot themselves enter the human brain to prove the fantasy wrong. Thus it is impossible to get at the truth of things merely by relying on perceptual and rational knowledge. Perceptual senses and reason are both subjective capabilities of humans, but have the capacity to generate fantasy. They cannot correct themselves once they have created a fantasy; this has to be disproved by things in the objective world. For example, if a person believes in ghosts, you cannot change his or her belief unless you can prove there are no such things as ghosts in the world.

How then can the external world be used to test our ideas, and reveal those that are incorrect? The only way to do so is to apply the subjective to the objective world, that is, through the method of practice. Practice, put simply, refers to activities that change the world and the environment. Only through such activities can all our knowledge come into contact with the things of the external world, and thus be tested, and proved or disproved.

[334] For Ai's extended treatment of the camera as a way of introducing and understanding the process of knowledge, see Ibid., pp. 176–85.

Here is an example. We see the Japanese police and army in Shanghai. This is perceptual knowledge; our impression is that they have military prowess. Our rational knowledge tells us they are representatives of an imperialist nation. When we speak of imperialism, we generate the idea that imperialism is aggressive, has huge amounts of capital and a powerful military force, and so we feel that, in comparison, our backward and semi-colonial China is too weak to resist such oppression. When that idea has not yet been tested in practice, it appears to be absolute truth. However, instances of resistance have demonstrated the falsity of this idea, and with the masses rising in resistance, there is hope we can overcome imperialist invasion.

We can now see that practice is a very important element within the process of knowledge: the rational challenges the perceptual; then practice challenges the rational. Rational knowledge is more in-depth than perceptual knowledge, but it is abstract and can easily become fantasy. Practice brings rational knowledge into contact with the objective world, and makes subjective thought more consistent with objective things. This is called the unity of the subjective and the objective, and it is practice that brings about this unity.

We can now bring our discussion to a conclusion. The process of knowledge – from perceptual knowledge to rational knowledge, and from rational knowledge to practice – is full of struggle. Each phase of struggle makes our knowledge deeper and more correct. Moreover, the process of knowledge is not exhausted once and for all through one verification by practice. Practice corrects subjective errors, but meanwhile we gain new perceptual knowledge through this practice, and thus commences another process of knowledge. For instance, if we want to verify that Chaplin is the king of comedians, we must engage in practice, see his movies and determine whether or not he makes people laugh. Viewing his movies demonstrates that Chaplin has brought features to comedy not employed by other famous comedians. While he can make you laugh, he can also make you cry. The practice of viewing his films thus brings into contention the earlier rational view of the comedian; it gives fresh perceptual knowledge, which allows us to move to new rational knowledge. From perception to reason, from reason to practice, and again from practice to new perceptions which in turn leads to new rational knowledge, this process goes on in endless cycles. Each cycle enriches our knowledge. These cycles are therefore not simple repetition, but involve a spiral movement, as the process of knowledge eternally develops and progresses. It can never remain at the original level.

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5. THE LOGIC OF THE 'SINIFICATION OF MARXISM'

It can be seen that a central dimension of Ai's understanding of epistemology was practice. Humans could only verify that their 'knowledge' is correct and in conformity with the objective world through practice. Moreover, the concept of

practice is itself dynamic. Practice is not and could never be once-for-all, for reality is constantly changing and it is only through repeated practice that knowledge can remain in step with it. Ai particularly stressed the importance of testing rational knowledge – concepts, scientific laws and principles, abstractions – through practice. He saw a particular danger in the assumption that the stage of rational knowledge represented the final (and complete) stage in the knowledge process. Those who accepted this assumption – and here Ai is clearly referring to Marxists who uncritically applied the laws and principles of historical materialism to novel social and economic conditions – were in danger of being increasingly out of step with the realities they were committed to changing. And if their knowledge was faulty, undoubtedly so too would be their strategies for change. The key to avoiding this danger was practice, which implied the necessity of continuing observation of and engagement with social reality.

It is thus clear that there was, in Ai's philosophy, an intimate connection between his theory of knowledge and his call for the 'Sinification of Marxism', a theme introduced in the previous chapter. We return to this theme here, as it is imperative to grasp the significance of this concept, not only for an understanding of Ai's philosophical thought, but also for comprehension of the trajectory that Marxism in China was to take under Mao's tutelage and direction. There can be no doubt that Ai's views on the 'Sinification of Marxism' – of ensuring that abstract Marxist principles were applied to reveal the specific characteristics of Chinese society and the Chinese Revolution – confirmed at a theoretical and philosophical level Mao's own inclination to distrust theory not forged through the crucible of practice. While the laws of Marxism applied universally (and Ai never equivocated on this core philosophical position), they could only be applied accurately and effectively through a detailed knowledge of the prevailing social context. And this required a practice-based epistemology in which rational knowledge was continually subjected to the test of reality; and the test was an activist one, for the purpose was not just to know reality, but to change it in a particular direction.

Ai's views on the 'Sinification of Marxism' appeared sporadically throughout his writings of the 1930s, and more frequently during the early 1940s, when he was heavily occupied with the affairs of the Yanan New Philosophy Association, one of whose briefs was to ensure that Party cadres understood the necessity of applying Marxism to Chinese conditions (see Chapter 11). One of his most detailed explanations of the need for the 'Sinification of Marxism' appears during this latter period. In 'On China's Particularities' (*Lun Zhongguo de teshuxing*), written in 1940, Ai treads a careful path between excessive focus on national conditions and neglect of the concrete laws of particular national contexts.[335] The former tendency eliminates the possibility of supra-national universal laws of social development, allowing only for each society's particular characteristics; the latter tendency elevates the significance of universal laws in blithe neglect of social particularities that could well render the application of those laws meaningless, and possibly dangerous. Ai challenges the idea that China's 'national situation' is so distinctive, so unique, as to render irrelevant the applicability of universal laws of social

[335] *Ai Siqi wenji*, pp. 471–87.

development. China's distinctive characteristics were supposedly numerous: China was an agricultural nation, Western countries were industrialised; China's civilisation was spiritual, whereas Western civilisations were material; and China was Confucian, while Western nations were Christian. Foreign science, culture, and revolutionary theory were all, therefore, completely unsuited to Chinese conditions. China could only learn from other nations on the basis of both recognition and protection of China's specific conditions. The slogan 'Chinese learning as essence, Western learning for application' was typical of this misguided perspective. Ai argues this isolationist strand of thought served to reinforce the feudal character of contemporary Chinese society, and consequently resisted change. It was opposed to the introduction of revolutionary ideas from abroad, for it was in sympathy with China's 'particularities': backwardness, decline, feudalism. It was thus inherently opposed to China's independence from imperialism, for China's 'particularities' stood in opposition to the mass movement that could deliver China from the oppression of foreign powers.

Ai compares this isolationist strand of thought to Russian populist thinking. This likewise had argued the extreme specificity of Russian conditions. However, the rise of capitalism in Russia and the emergence of an extensive and militant proletariat had confirmed the universal laws of historical development. Moreover, Marxism – felt by some to be an imported system of thought unsuited to Russian conditions – had demonstrated itself to be correct in its general principles and in its application to Russian particularities. Those who had argued the uniqueness, the national particularity of Russia, were therefore incorrect. Similarly, Ai argues that Marxism does not deny the particularity of Chinese society. However, it premises its acceptance of these particularities on a parallel acceptance of the 'basic scientific laws of social development discovered by Marx and Engels, and the general guiding role of these laws'. These laws operate in varying forms in different countries, and under different conditions. Consequently, the application of Marxism to social practice in China had to pay attention to the particularity of Chinese society; but it could never forget that the particular is inseparable from the general. This means, Ai asserts, that 'in order to grasp the particular, we especially need to understand the general and uphold general laws; because we need the Sinification of Marxism, we need to grasp the basic principles and methodology of Marxism; and because we intend to apply Marxism to China's reality and particular conditions, we must adopt a firm Marxist stand'.[336]

How is Marxism to be applied to China? Ai responds that the Sinification of Marxism requires a specific and objective study of China's socio-economic relations. On this basis, the concrete strategies and tactics of the Chinese proletariat in the Chinese Revolution can be formulated. Underpinning this study of Chinese conditions was both a commitment to Marxist theory and recognition of the need to apply Marxism in practice to discover and alter particular conditions. This necessitated an element of 'creativity', in which the appropriate revolutionary strategies would be formulated on the basis of a reading of concrete social

[336] Ibid., p. 479.

conditions. But these strategies had themselves to be tried and tested to ensure that they were indeed in conformity with the particular laws of the social context.

Ai argued that Marxism was 'universally applicable' for the following reasons. First, Marxism is a scientific theory, one that revealed the laws of development of the objective world. In the same way that natural science revealed the laws of development of the natural world, Marxism revealed the laws of development of human society. These laws manifest themselves differently in different societies, but this did not detract from their general correctness. In fact, this served to demonstrate the general applicability of such laws; it was evidence that these laws could work in particular circumstances. Ai illustrates this assertion by pointing to the development of capitalism in Russia. While different to the development of capitalism in Britain, it had still observed the general tendencies and developmental stages observed by Marx in his detailed study of the rise and character of British capitalism. Marx had insisted that the history of British capitalism would be replicated in other social contexts; and he had been right. The laws of social development he described were thus correct, and clearly had scientific standing. Second, Marxism is a scientific methodology. A scientific method demands the mastering of the correct principles and theories of earlier scientists; it also necessitates their application to current issues. But in applying principles and theories, later researchers must use them as a guide to study, rather than as dogma, for conditions change. The specific words and arguments of Marxism could not be regarded as an absolutely unchangeable creed, and could not be blindly copied. But the basic principles of Marxism are scientific, and it is these that had to be applied to novel contexts. Third, Marxism had general correctness because it is a guide for the revolutionary activities of the proletariat. Wherever the proletariat exists, there exists the possibility and necessity for the development of Marxism. The Marxist movement in China had existed for a considerable time, and therefore Marxism was rooted in China's own socio-economic conditions. Marxism in China was not a 'purely foreign thing', but had grown and developed along with the history and experience of the Chinese proletariat and its political party. The Chinese proletariat possessed its own Marxism, and their success clearly demonstrated that Marxism was relevant to Chinese conditions.

On the basis of these three points, Ai argues that Marxism is an essentially internationalist doctrine. Marxists throughout the world share a common theory, and a common standpoint and methodology. They also share a common goal: the realisation of an international communist society, regardless of the various paths taken to reach it. Because the world is divided into nations, Marxism must adopt various forms adapted to the different conditions of each nation. Internationalism does not imply the identical application of Marxism's general theory. At the current stage, Marxism can only be put into practice by adopting a national form. In China's case, this necessitated giving Marxism a form suited to the Chinese nation and its particular characteristics. Doing so by no means implied a rejection of Marxism's internationalism; to the contrary, it meant grasping Marxism in a specific way; it meant giving internationalism a realistic national form. Applying Marxism in this way revealed that the Chinese Revolution, while conforming to the general pattern of historical development, possessed its own characteristics.

6. PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

It is clear from the flow of his argument that the issue of the 'Sinification of Marxism' represented a difficult logical problem for Ai (as it did for Mao). On the one hand, he was obliged to insist on the universality of Marxism's laws of historical and social development; on the other, he had to allow that individual nations had their own particular characteristics and their own patterns of development. Through assertion, rather than convincing logical argument, Ai argues that these two apparently conflicting tendencies can be rationalised through the application of universal laws to reveal a social context's particular characteristics, and thus its 'particular laws'. These particular characteristics supposedly represent a concrete manifestation of universal laws. In itself, this assertion is not convincing. It is only via the medium of Ai's practice-based epistemology that the two poles – the universal and the particular – can in any sense be brought into alignment. It is practice guided by correct theory that generates 'knowledge' of a particular context. It is the theory that allows the standpoint from which observation can proceed; and it is the theory that provides the methodology whereby observations can be taken and tested. The 'knowledge' that derives from this process is never absolute; social conditions change, and the 'knowledge' generated via the agency of practice must also change. The cycle – from practice to theory to practice – is unending.

What emerges from Ai's elaboration of the problem of the 'Sinification of Marxism' is that the universal laws of historical and social development represent the bedrock on which Marxism stands. Without these universal laws, there could be no international movement that shared a belief in communism as the common historical goal of all humankind. Without these laws, there could be no particular laws that enjoyed any status as concrete expressions of those universal laws; they would merely be laws describing a particular context, with no significance beyond this. For Ai, this was an unthinkable proposition. The Chinese Revolution was, indeed had to be, part of the general movement of history that was driving human society towards a common destiny: the 'new society'. It is no wonder that Ai, and other Marxist philosophers in China, loudly asserted that Marxism's laws were universal. It is no wonder that Ai so stoutly defended the New Philosophy, the Soviet Union's philosophical rendition of the universal laws of Marxism, for without this mantle of orthodoxy, Marxism in China would be destined to remain a purely parochial system of thought, with no international connections or significance. However, the 'Sinification of Marxism' was likewise an absolute necessity, for without it Marxists in China could not respond effectively to the particular characteristics and needs of the Chinese Revolution. The problem was finding a form of words that would effectively demonstrate how the union of universal and particular could be understood in a logical and conceptual sense.

While Ai's elaboration of the 'Sinification of Marxism' does not inspire much confidence from a logical point of view, it does gain credence when set in the context of his unwavering belief in the New Philosophy; for Ai perceived in the New Philosophy a body of immutable philosophical principles that represented the

universal laws of Marxism. These principles – its materialist ontology, laws of dialectical materialism, dialectical logic, and practice-based epistemology – represented a (relatively) coherent response to the core issues of philosophy. Ai believed that if these principles were correctly applied, the result would be knowledge of the natural and social worlds that could function as a guide to action. And it was only through practice inspired by this guide to action that the abstract philosophical system of the New Philosophy gained utility. For the purpose of the New Philosophy was, ultimately, not philosophy itself, but the alteration of the world – both natural and social, but particularly the latter – in the direction of Marxism's communist teleology. Ai understood this only too well. Philosophy was important because it underpinned the accomplishment of historical goals that mattered very much, from a revolutionary perspective. Thus, while it was incumbent on Ai, as philosopher to the revolutionary movement, to elaborate the principles of the New Philosophy, it was even more important to inspire belief that those principles, if properly grasped and acted upon, could deliver tangible political results. In that respect, Ai's efforts to demonstrate the logical precision of a complex idea such as the 'Sinification of Marxism' were of less significance than his capacity to inspire belief in the New Philosophy and so inspire ordinary Chinese to support the revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party, for it was this Party that would deliver a new era in human history of equality and prosperity.

Ai recognised the political function of his philosophy. Indeed, his commitment to the New Philosophy required an unreserved acceptance of philosophy's subordination to politics. He was committed to operating as a philosopher at both ends of the polarity of philosophy and politics, which so resembled the polarity of universal and particular laws central to the concept of the 'Sinification of Marxism'; at one pole, abstract philosophy, at the other, political action. Linking these two poles was central to Ai's vocation as philosopher, and it required a commitment to political struggle and the organisational rigors of building institutions whose purpose was the propagation of the New Philosophy. It was a commitment Ai was more than willing to give; indeed, his entire career as philosopher, from the late 1920s to 1937, and the philosophical creed in which he believed, seemed to move logically towards acceptance of the close relationship he would contract with Mao in 1937. For this relationship was itself inevitably both philosophical and political. As a conduit for the New Philosophy, Ai was *philosophically* able to reinforce in Mao's mind the orthodoxy of this version of Marxist philosophy; in this regard, Ai's influence was considerable. But it was his willingness to implement the *political* purposes of this philosophy that made Ai so useful to Mao, and extended his influence. For once Mao had himself mastered the basic precepts of the New Philosophy, his thoughts turned to how this philosophy could be mastered by the variegated and dispersed membership of the Party to enhance its ideological uniformity and facilitate realisation of its political goals. And Ai was at hand, with the philosophical stature and organisational acumen needed to drive that process. The role that Ai played was thus a dual role: philosophical *and* political. It was a role united by the New Philosophy's political conception of philosophy and by Mao's instinctive recognition of the validity of this perspective on philosophy.

Nevertheless, Mao's initial engagement with Marxist philosophy, like Ai's some ten years earlier, was directed at its philosophical dimension. Before he could contemplate its political purposes, Mao had to comprehend this philosophy *as* philosophy. As we will observe in subsequent chapters, Mao's extended foray into the abstract world of dialectical materialism was no half-hearted gesture; its ultimate objective may have been political, but it was an expression of an inherently philosophical turn of mind and a deep-seated desire to understand the world philosophically. Mastery of Marxist philosophy – in the guise of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy – would reveal the nature of the world in all its complexity; it would also reveal the key to changing the world, a most tantalising possibility. The lure was great, and Mao accepted the challenge with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 8

LI DA AND MARXIST PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

Ai Siqi was, as we observed in the previous two chapters, pivotally important to the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China during the early to mid 1930s. His significance to this process lies not merely in his evident erudition, but in his capacity to write on the arcane philosophical system of dialectical materialism in a manner appropriate to his audience, quite often an audience that lacked his capacity for abstract philosophical thought. Ai was concerned to find a discursive formula that would allow Marxist philosophy to penetrate deeply into the ranks of China's revolutionary movement, and to become a force that would impel members of that movement to commit themselves more fully to the revolutionary cause. His rapidly won renown as philosopher to the communist movement attests to the success of this formula. To the uncommitted but sympathetic bystander, Ai's folksy rendition of Marxist philosophy bespoke a movement whose theoretical perspectives were accessible and non-elitist; for Marxist philosophy was not, Ai asserted, the preserve of philosophers, but a mode of reasoning relevant to the concerns of ordinary Chinese.

Not only was Ai's approach to philosophical elaboration significant as a means of mobilising support for the revolutionary movement, it was an important ingredient in the preliminary phase of the process of adapting Marxism to Chinese conditions. This process – the Sinification of Marxism – was to become a major concern for the leaders and theorists of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and it is not coincidental that Ai was, as we will observe in Chapter 11, intimately involved in the later phase of the process that culminated in 1945, at the CCP's Seventh Congress, with the adoption of 'Mao Zedong Thought' as the Party's guiding ideology. Ai can thus be considered the most important of the Party's philosophers in the crucial phase of the introduction and dissemination of Marxist philosophy after 1931, during the decade in which the philosophical orthodoxy of the CCP was solidifying under the influence of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy.

However, another philosopher equally important to the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China was not, during this period, a member of the CCP. Li Da (1890–1966) is nevertheless considered in China to be Ai's peer, for during his self-imposed exile from the CCP between 1923 and 1949,[337] Li translated into Chinese numerous Marxist and socialist philosophical works of European, Russian and Japanese provenance, and wrote many books and articles on Marxist

[337] For discussion of the reasons for Li Da's departure from the Chinese Communist Party, see Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 11–12.

philosophy. Included amongst the latter is his *Shehuixue dagang* (Elements of Sociology, published 1935, 1937), which is, without doubt, the single most important text on Marxist philosophy written by a Chinese during the 1930s.[338] This text, written under the influence of the New Philosophy,[339] represents the most ambitious attempt by a Chinese philosopher to elaborate the entire Marxist theoretical system of dialectical and historical materialism, as then understood by Soviet philosophers and theorists. In this respect, *Elements of Sociology* represents the definitive Chinese textbook on the contemporary construction of orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy and social theory, but its purpose, in stark contrast to many of Ai Siqi's writings, is predominantly theoretical. The book is far less concerned, if concerned at all, with the application of Marxist philosophy to Chinese conditions, or with discovering a formula for its elaboration for a non-specialist audience. Indeed, in both respects, *Elements of Sociology* is quite uncompromising. Dialectical and historical materialism, it seems to be saying, is a complex theoretical system, and the language in which it is expressed is difficult and at times convoluted; that is the nature of the beast, and those who would master it must, as Li Da himself had done, bend themselves to the rigorous intellectual effort needed to penetrate and comprehend it.

Given this sentiment, and his withdrawal in 1923 from the CCP he had helped establish in 1921, why was Li Da's influence so profound? There are several reasons. First, the sheer volume of Li's translations and writings – on Marxist philosophy, but on many other subjects as well – gave him an aura of intellectual authority that few other Chinese intellectuals of the early twentieth century had achieved.[340] Second, the intellectual rigour with which he wrote, and his evident appeal to the literati within the revolutionary movement, established his reputation as a formidable intellect, one capable of the most abstract and complex forms of reasoning. Third, the magisterial character of his *Elements of Sociology*, written at a time when the influence of the New Philosophy was at its height, both in China and internationally, consolidated his already considerable reputation within the revolutionary movement. Moreover, the willing deference to the New Philosophy exhibited by this volume coincided with the CCP's move to accept this orthodoxy as its own. This provided the book a cachet that it may not have achieved had it adopted a more independent philosophical and political perspective, or had it been written at a different time. Fourth, and perhaps most important, was Mao's

[338] A view shared by Mao Zedong. See Li Siju, Tao Delin et al., 'Li Da yijiusijiu nianqian lilun huodong ji zhuzuo bianian' [The pre-1949 theoretical activities of Li Da and a bibliography of his writings], *Zhongguo zhexue*, Vol. I (1979), p. 364.

[339] For Li Da's acknowledgement of the influence of the New Philosophy on his thinking, see his Translator's Preface to M. Shirokov and A. Aizenberg et al., *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng* [A course on dialectical materialism], translated by Li Da and Lei Zhongjian (Shanghai: Bigengtang, 1932). Li Da's translator's preface appears pp. 1–4.

[340] For a relatively complete list of Li Da's writings and translations, see Dai Dingsu (ed.), *Wuhan daxue zhexue keyan chengguo mulu* [A Bibliography of the research results of the Philosophy Department at Wuhan University] (Hong Kong: Zhonghuakeji (guoji) chubanshe), pp. 1–32; also Zeng Mianzhi, 'Li Da shuyi yaolu' [Bibliography of Li Da's writings and translations], in Zhonggong Hunan weidangshi ziliao kezhengji yanjiu weiyuanhui (ed.), *Hunan dangshi renwu zhuanji zike xuanbian* [Selected materials on the lives of persons in the history of the Party in Hunan] (Hunan: n.p., 1987), pp. 133–52.

endorsement of *Elements of Sociology*, and the evident high esteem in which he held Li. Mao not only spoke highly of Li personally, but referred, not entirely accurately, to his *magnum opus* as 'the first Marxist textbook on philosophy to be written by a Chinese'.[341] As we will observe, Mao bent his energy in early 1938 to a close reading and annotation of *Elements of Sociology*, and it consequently entered the privileged circle of texts from which Mao drew his understanding of the New Philosophy. Mao's study of *Elements of Sociology* confirmed his view that Li Da was one of China's pre-eminent Marxist philosophers, and reinforced his determination to support Li's readmission to the Party when the propitious moment arrived, which it did in 1949.[342]

For these reasons, Li Da occupies a position of considerable significance in the history of Marxist philosophy in China, an influence that extended well into the era of the People's Republic of China. Yet, it was his philosophical writings and translations while outside the Party, during the late 1920s and 1930s, which are of greatest significance. Li Da's contribution to the process of the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China during this period therefore needs to be recounted and evaluated. This will be approached in this chapter by analysis of four dimensions of Li's philosophical activities: his pre-1931 writings on philosophy, his translations, his major work *Elements of Sociology*, and his influence on Mao.

1. LI DA'S PRE-1931 WRITINGS ON PHILOSOPHY

Li Da had written extensively in the early to mid 1920s on themes central to Marxism's materialist conception of history, many of which bear on the issue of the origins and construction of human consciousness. In his *Xiandai Shehuixue* (Contemporary Sociology, published 1926, but based on his university lectures of the previous three years), Li had referred to philosophy as an element of society's superstructure. While the purpose of philosophy was, he stated, to understand the basic principles of life and nature, all philosophical concepts originate in the material world, and philosophical systems represent the organised forms of the ideas of ordinary people under the influence of their social and economic environment. The forms of human thought that develop in a particular society are essentially reflections of the economic conditions of that society, and are appropriate to the needs of its classes. Philosophy is consequently the philosophy of particular classes; it can have no existence independent of classes. Having established the concept of the class basis of philosophy, Li henceforth never resiled from this perspective, and it facilitated his later transition to advocate for the New Philosophy, a philosophy that claimed to serve the needs of the working class and its class allies.[343]

Li's inquiry in *Contemporary Sociology* into the origins and function of human consciousness indicated an emerging awareness of philosophy, but he did not pursue this aspect of Marxist theory in this volume. However, intellectually the scene was

[341] Li Siju, Tao Delin et al., 'Li Da yijiusijiu nianqian lilun huodong ji zhuzuo bianian', p. 364.
[342] Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, p. 19.
[343] Li Da, *Xiandai shehuixue* [Contemporary Sociology] (Shanghai: Kunlun shudian, 1928).

set for Li to move to a deeper inquiry into Marxist philosophy. Not only was Li reflecting on the problem of human consciousness, he was becoming increasingly aware that Marxism incorporated a philosophy that claimed insight into the laws that governed motion and change in both the natural and social realms, and which claimed to be able to provide guidance to the revolutionary movement in pursuit of radical social and economic change. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Li's passing interest in philosophy was to deepen into a major preoccupation, and he henceforth increasingly devoted himself to writing on it and to translating works on philosophy into Chinese.

Li's first excursion into the elaboration of Marxist philosophy appears in *Fundamental Knowledge of Society*, published in 1929, in which he devotes a section to the history of philosophy, culminating in a discussion of dialectical materialism and its superiority over other philosophies.[344] Philosophy, he asserts, is concerned with such questions as human knowledge, and the relationship between knowledge and the world; it is concerned with the question of spirit and matter, namely the relationship between thought and existence. Philosophy represents the pinnacle of human spiritual activity, but it retains a complex and dependent relationship with society's economic realm, particularly its forces of production. Li validates his position by pointing to the increasing complexity of Ancient Greek philosophy as Greek society became more complex; its philosophy developed from a philosophy of nature to a philosophy that incorporated the concerns of human life and the relations of humans to reality.[345]

Li argues that an organised worldview, of the sort that emerged in Ancient Greece, must address the following issues: the relationships between 'I' and 'not-I', 'knowledge' and 'existence', and 'spirit' and 'reality'. These, Li asserts, are the fundamental issues of philosophy. The various philosophies, he suggests, can be grouped into two categories on the basis of their response to these issues. The first category – materialism – includes those philosophies that take the object, nature and reality as their starting point; that is, they perceive nature or reality as the basis, existing independently of humankind, with spirit or thought a product of nature or reality. The second category – idealism – incorporates those philosophies that regard the subject, spirit, and thought as the starting point; they perceive spirit and thought as the basis, existing independently of nature, with nature and the object a product of thought or the spiritual world. Li does allow that there have been philosophies that attempt to harmonise materialism and idealism; these he describes as eclecticism.

The history of philosophy, Li contends, is the history of the opposition and struggle between materialism and idealism. The creator of idealist philosophy, Plato, argued that the only truly existing things are concepts, and that all knowable objects and phenomena are nothing more than the images (*yinxiang*) of concepts. During the Middle Ages, philosophers had taken Plato's notion of concepts and suggested that God originally created all material things. An extreme version of this viewpoint was the philosophy of Berkeley, who stated that all existing things are spirit, everything

[344] Li Da, *Shehui zhi jichu* [Fundamental knowledge of society] (Shanghai: Xin Shengming shuju, 1929); also in *Li Da wenji* [Collected writings of Li Da] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981–1988), Vol. I.
[345] *Li Da wenji*, Vol. I, pp. 505–12.

else being only appearance. Li argues that such idealist views are demonstrably false. However, Hegel's idealism, infused with the concept of the dialectic, was extremely important to the eventual emergence of the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism. Hegel's dialectical idealism perceived the existence of objective reason in the development of the dialectic; all things are a manifest form of the operation of the dialectic.

It was the combination of dialectics and materialism that gave rise to dialectical materialism. The materialist dimension of dialectical materialism commences from the following nine premises: Only nature is real; nature exists independently of the subject (spirit); spirit is a minor part of nature; nature precedes life, and matter precedes spirit; spirit emerges only when matter has appeared in a definite form; spirit cannot exist apart from matter, but matter can exist without spirit; knowledge emerges from experience; consciousness is determined by the external world; and reality is the only object of knowledge, and only when our knowledge is consistent with reality is it truly objective. The dialectical component of dialectical materialism has its origins in the mode of philosophical discourse characteristic of Ancient Greek philosophy. In disputation, the discourse of the first speaker would be negated by the discourse of the second, with a synthesis of elements of both discourses ultimately resulting in the truth. As well as a mode of dialogue, the dialectic represents a method of thought. Hegel had stated that objective reason develops through the dialectical principle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis; it assumes that things are in motion, in change, and interconnected, and that this is an expression of the dialectic.

The dialectical component of dialectical materialism encompasses the laws of development of contradictions, of change and motion of matter, and of change and motion in nature and society. The dialectical mode of thought, Li contends, is the only method for grasping the dialectics of nature, and it is therefore the only scientific method. Whereas idealist philosophy seeks truth in thought, dialectical materialism seeks it in practice; whereas idealism concentrates on abstractions divorced from life, dialectical materialism regards the realities of life as fundamental and the appropriate starting point of analysis and investigation. Li argues that idealism and materialism are thus the manifest forms of consciousness of two classes; idealism is the worldview of the class separated from the practice of production, whereas materialism is the worldview of the class, the producing class, which is physically involved in production.[346]

2. TRANSLATION AND MARXIST PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

The brief philosophical excursion contained in Li Da's *Fundamental Knowledge of Society* is of no great significance in the context of the Marxist philosophical tradition; neither does it compare favourably with Qu Qiubai's extended philosophical treatises of 1923. However, it is significant in that it reveals that Marxist philosophy was increasingly entering the discourse of Marxist theorists in

[346] Ibid., pp. 511–16.

China. Moreover, it anticipates the preoccupation with Marxist philosophy amongst many of China's radical intellectuals in the early 1930s. The flood of European, Russian and Japanese philosophical texts that became available in Chinese translation in the late 1920s and early 1930s may well have triggered their interest.

Li Da had already established himself in the early 1920s as an important figure in the translation into Chinese of foreign works of social and political theory. Numbered amongst his translations from this period are Karl Kautsky's *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, Herman Gorter's *An Explanation of the Materialist Conception of History*, and Takabatake Motoyuki's *An Overview of Social Problems*.[347] Each of these translations deals with economic and social theory, from a Marxist or more broadly socialist perspective. It was not until the late 1920s, however, that Li addressed his translation activities to foreign works on philosophy. One of the first of these was the Japanese socialist Sugiyama Sakae's *A Survey of Social Science* (Shehui kexue gailun), published in China in 1929. This represents an interesting bridge between Li's earlier translations and writings, with their preoccupation with the materialist conception of history, and his later translations and writings in which philosophy appears as a major preoccupation. In Sugiyama's book, there is considerable attention devoted to both of these themes.[348]

The bridge, in *A Survey of Social Science*, between the materialist conception of history and the more overtly philosophical themes within Marxism, comes with Sugiyama's assertion that the most important law of cause and effect in the social realm is that which describes the connection between existence and consciousness. It is not consciousness which determines existence, Sugiyama states, echoing Marx, but existence which determines consciousness; it is not a particular form of thought that determines a particular form of the forces of production, but the reverse. These premises represent the fundamental starting point for Marxist philosophy, in the same way that they represent the conceptual foundation of the materialist conception of history. A philosophical materialism must consequently argue that matter is primary in the relationship between matter and spirit. In particular, it must commence from four propositions: Humans are part of nature, and so must engage in natural production and observe the laws of nature; humans, like other animals, have evolved, and part of this evolution has been the development of thought from matter; thought is manifested as a particular form of matter, such as the brain; and, without thought, matter could exist, whereas thought could not exist without matter. Materialism, however, must be united with dialectics in order to provide an accurate perception of the world and its development. The basic propositions of a dialectical materialism are, Sugiyama suggests: All things are in motion, and motion is a form of the existence of matter; and all things contain contradictions, which continually emerge and are resolved. In addition, dialectical materialism must perceive things in their entirety and in their connection with other things.

Several other works on philosophy translated by Li in the late 1920s are significant, as their interpretation of Marxist philosophy had been heavily influenced

[347] For summaries of these translations, see Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, pp. 117–23.

[348] Sugiyama Sakae, *Shehui kexue gailun* [A survey of social science], translated by Li Da and Qian Tieru (Shanghai: Kunlun shudian, 1929).

by Deborin's stress on the dialectic, which he had drawn from Hegel and Plekhanov. The first of these was August Thalheimer's *Einfuhrung in den Dialectischen Materialismus (Die Moderne Weltanschauung)* [Introduction to Dialectical Materialism (The Modern Worldview)], although Li employed the subtitle, *The Modern Worldview*, as its Chinese title.[349] First published as a textbook for Moscow's Sun Yat-sen University, Li came across its Japanese translation in 1928, and it impressed him as an excellent introduction to the philosophy of dialectical materialism. He believed it to be as important as Plekhanov's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* and Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*.[350]

Thalheimer's exposition commences with the usual assertion that all things are matter in motion, and that spirit too is a form of matter (such as the nervous system and the brain); there is thus an absolute unity of matter. Reality is, however, knowable by human thought, and the criterion of truth is practice. The criterion of truth is not, as the idealists suggest, the absence of contradictions, for all things contain contradictions. Indeed, this is a central premise of dialectics, which Thalheimer sums up in two related propositions: All things, phenomena and concepts are united in one absolute unity, despite their contradictions and differences; there is identity between all things, while at the same time there exists absolute and unconditional opposition. The law that describes this latter condition is the law of the unity of opposites in things, and this is the most basic of the laws of dialectics. It is contradictions that create the impulse for change, development and motion.[351] Thalheimer's emphasis on the dialectic, and especially the law of the unity of opposites, would not have gone unnoticed by Marxists in China, for the book had been republished eight times by 1942.[352]

Li Da also translated I. Luppol's *Lenin und die Philosophie – Zur Frage der Verhaltnisses der Philosophie Zur Revolution*, although he altered its title to *Fundamental Problems of Theory and Practice in the Social Sciences* for the Chinese translation (published 1930).[353] Drawing heavily on Lenin and Deborin, the book introduces a number of themes of considerable importance to Marxist philosophy in China. The first of these is the unity of theory and practice. Practice, Luppol argues, is the criterion of truth, and to ensure that knowledge is scientific, there must be a leap from theory to practice. The acquisition of knowledge is a process, however, and knowledge of reality and the objects in it comes gradually through continual practice. Second, Luppol asserts the Party character of philosophy. Philosophy is not a neutral inquiry into the relationship of humans to their world; it develops from class society and is the articulation of the interests of particular classes. Philosophy is thus a 'class science'. Third, Luppol stresses the dialectical character of reality and development. All things are connected and in motion; all

[349] August Thalheimer, *Xiandai shejieguan* [The modern worldview], translated by Li Da (Shanghai: Kunlun shudian, 1929).

[350] Ibid., pp. 1–5.

[351] Ibid., pp. 144–66.

[352] Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, p. 129.

[353] I. Luppol, *Lilun yu shijian de shehui kexue genben wenti* [Fundamental problems of theory and practice in the social sciences], translated by Li Da (Shanghai: Xinxian shushe, 1930).

things are full of difference, and under certain conditions contradictions manifest themselves and change into other forms through the process of the negation of the negation.[354]

A perhaps more interesting rendition of Marxist philosophy appears in Li Da's translation of Kawakami Hajime's *Fundamental Theories of Marxist Economics* (also published in China in 1930).[355] Although Kawakami's volume is supposedly about Marxist economics, the first 310 pages are devoted to materialism, dialectics and the materialist conception of history. Kawakami had spent the latter half of the 1920s wrestling with Marxist theory and attempting to integrate its philosophical and economic dimensions into a unified theoretical framework.[356] He did this by firstly exploring the materialist premises of Marxism, looking in detail at the history of materialism in pre-Marxist thought, and in particular the materialism of Feuerbach. Marx and Engels had taken the 'rational' part of Feuerbach's otherwise mechanistic materialism, and had deepened and critically extended it by uniting it with dialectics, and through perceiving humans as social and not just natural beings. While building on the proposition that existence (reality) determines thought (spirit), they also recognised that this proposition could not adequately explain why thought did not always and immediately accurately reflect existence in its entirety. Important to the solution of this problem is the fact that humans, while living in society, do not share exactly the same social experiences; in particular, humans belong to different classes, and the reflection of reality as consciousness is consequently mediated by many factors. Correct thought thus emerges gradually, and the truth humans gain as a reflection of reality is thus relative, rather than absolute truth. With the development of new sciences, however, thought does gradually approach closer to absolute truth.[357] The agency that allows thought to progressively approach truth is practice, and it is practice that is the basis of materialism's epistemology.[358]

When Kawakami turns his attention to dialectics, he reiterates that Marx and Engels had overcome Feuerbach's mechanistic materialism by uniting materialism with dialectics to create dialectical materialism.[359] They had recognised the significance of the revolutionary dimension of Hegel's dialectic. But how could the dialectic be placed on a materialist basis? Marx rejected Hegel's idealist view that the world's development depended on the self-motion of the absolute Idea; it was, rather, the self-motion of matter. Nevertheless, the self-motion of matter adopts a dialectical form, and this is why there must be a union of dialectics and materialism. This in turn necessitates investigation of the self-motion of matter as a function of the struggle of opposites in things, for it is knowledge of the contradictions replete within all things that is the essence of the dialectic. Not only is there a unity of opposites, there is struggle and dissociation; it is therefore essential to recognise the

[354] Ibid., pp. 30–161.

[355] Kawakami Hajime, *Makesizhuyi jingjixue jichu lilun* [Fundamental theories of Marxist economics], translated by Li Da and others (Shanghai: Kunlun shudian, 1930).

[356] Gail Lee Bernstein, *Japanese Marxist: A Portrait of Kawakami Hajime, 1879–1946* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[357] Kawakami Hajime, *Makesizhuyi jingjixue jichu lilun*, pp. 85–6.

[358] Ibid., p. 93.

[359] Ibid., p. 101.

role of negation in the process of development, for it is this that allows the emergence of new things.[360] The investigation of reality must thus commence from the premise that the cause of a thing's existence is internal, as are the factors that impel it to move towards its opposite. The existence of contradictions within all things means that the imperative for change is ubiquitous, and there is consequently the necessity to grasp things as in a process of development, as in motion. Development is the result of the struggle of opposites, and it is this struggle that makes development a process involving both qualitative and quantitative change, rather than merely a process of expansion or contraction; development therefore occurs through leaps, as things change from one form of quality to another through the process of the negation of the negation.[361]

Kawakami's exposition of materialism and dialectics is replete with quotes, not only from Marx, Engels and Lenin, but also from Plekhanov, Deborin, Luppol and Thalheimer. This clearly marks his book as a work from the period prior to the 1931 watershed in Soviet philosophy and the emergence of the New Philosophy; for after 1931, the interpretation of Marxist philosophy by Plekhanov, Deborin and Luppol was only referred to negatively, as an abstract view that did not integrate philosophy with politics and that was excessively occupied with the Hegelian dimension of the dialectic.

The most important of Li Da's philosophical translations following this watershed in Soviet philosophy was Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, a work explicitly of the New Philosophy.[362] The main themes of the New Philosophy were introduced in Chapter 5, so there is no need to explore the contents of this substantial volume here. However, it is important to address the issue of the significance of this philosophical text to the history of Marxist philosophy in China. The importance of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* is threefold. First, it was one of the first of the texts of the New Philosophy to be published in China, in September 1932, and it was republished on several occasions throughout the 1930s.[363] Its early publication provided this volume a certain cachet within the circle of texts of the New Philosophy translated into Chinese, for it constituted the harbinger in China of the very substantial shift in Marxist philosophical orthodoxy that had occurred where it mattered most, in the Soviet Union. Second, the influence of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* was multiplied through its influence on Li Da's own philosophical writings, and in particular his *Elements of Sociology*, which was in itself profoundly influential in disseminating the New Philosophy to a Chinese audience. There can be no doubt that *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, and the process of translating it into Chinese, impressed very forcefully on Li the inadequacies of the previous philosophical texts – such as those of Thalheimer, Luppol and Kawakami Hajime – that he had translated, and which were so heavily marked by the influence of Plekhanov and Deborin. As Li points out in his translator's 'Preface' to *A Course on*

[360] Ibid., pp. 108–19.
[361] Ibid., pp. 135–9.
[362] Sirokov and Aizenberg, *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*.
[363] Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, p. 134.

Dialectical Materialism, Deborin was guilty of 'unconditionally accepting (*rongna*) Hegel, uncritically continuing Plekhanov, and in so doing ultimately exposing his "formalism", his Hegelian tendency and his Menshevik colouration'.[364] Li admits that he had himself uncritically adopted the views of these philosophers, and would employ the criteria provided by *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* to 'settle accounts' with the philosophy of Plekhanov and Deborin. The philosophy in this volume is, Li declares, 'our model'.[365]

Third, the influence of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* was extended through its dramatic influence on the development of the philosophical thought of Mao Zedong, and, through his endorsement of it, the course of Marxist philosophy in China.[366] When Mao turned his attention to the study of Marxist philosophy in November 1936, it was this text that he first encountered. The evidence of his deep engagement with it – in the form of numerous annotations – reinforces the suggestion of the profound influence of the New Philosophy on his thinking. Mao was convinced by the central thrust of the New Philosophy, as expounded by *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*. Li Da's *Elements of Sociology*, which had fallen so completely under the sway of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, and which Mao studied in such a disciplined manner in the early months of 1938, likewise persuaded him.

We will return to the influence of these two volumes on the development of Mao's understanding of Marxist philosophy in a more sustained way in Chapters 9 and 10. For the moment, it suffices to conclude that Li's translation of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* was to have a profound impact on the history of Marxist philosophy in China, and for this act alone he deserves mention. When this is added to his numerous other translations of foreign Marxist theoretical and philosophical works, Li's prominent position in the history of Marxist philosophy in China is ensured.[367]

3. *ELEMENTS OF SOCIOLOGY*

It is not just for his prolific translations that Li is regarded as one of China's pre-eminent Marxist philosophers. Li was an author in his own right, and produced a vast corpus of works on diverse areas of intellectual concern to the revolutionary movement in China. Without doubt, however, his crowning achievement was his *Elements of Sociology*, first published in Beiping in 1935, and then in expanded form in Shanghai in 1937. This huge volume, of 420 000 characters in the Shanghai edition, traverses virtually all areas of concern to the Marxist theoretical tradition,

[364] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*, p. 3.
[365] Ibid., p. 4.
[366] *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji* [Selected letters of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), p. 47.
[367] A point recognised in China, but not sufficiently so in the West. See Wang Jionghua, *Li Da yu Makesizhuyi zhexue zai Zhongguo* [Li Da and Marxist philosophy in China] (Hubei: Huazhong ligong daxue chubanshe, 1988); and Li Zhenxia (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo shi zhe* [Ten philosophers of contemporary China] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1991), pp. 313–29.

including the materialist conception of history, the economic structure of society, the political structure of society, and social consciousness. However, the section dealing explicitly with Marxist philosophy is the longest and is placed first in the book. Li obviously considered Marxist philosophy – its ontology, epistemology, methodology, and logic – as the bedrock of Marxist theory. Before turning to other spheres within Marxist theory, it was first necessary to elaborate its fundamental philosophical postulates.

The influence of the New Philosophy on *Elements of Sociology* is explicitly acknowledged at the outset, and its influence is evident in the major themes canvassed in the book. Each of these was to be important to the form of Marxist philosophy that developed within the CCP, and which was eventually accepted as orthodoxy. In the first of these, Li confirms the 'Party character' of philosophy, and that the function of dialectical materialism was 'to guide the life and struggle of the progressive classes' in the current stage.[368] Dialectical materialism thus had to be 'practical', and a unity of theory and practice had to be maintained, a clear rejection of the Deborinite version of dialectical materialism, which was charged with 'formalism', an abstract attention to philosophy separated from the struggles of the Party and the classes it represented.[369]

Second, Li reiterates the materialist ontology to be found in the texts of the New Philosophy. In response to the basic question of ontology – what is matter? – Li refers to the daily experiences of humans as they come into contact with the natural world in countless ways. The myriad aspects of the natural world are constituted of matter, and have a universal and determining characteristic: they all exist independently of human consciousness, and are at the same time the source of human perceptions. Thus, while matter is a philosophical concept, it is also an objective reality that exists beyond thought and yet which can be reflected in thought. Matter is a general concept that incorporates the most highly organised material categories, one of which is thought. Thought is matter, and the opposition between thought and matter is conditional, having significance only in the context of epistemology. The universe and everything within it, including thought, is matter. The primary form of the existence of matter is motion; matter and motion are inseparable. It follows from this premise that there is no such thing as absolutely immobile or static matter. Immobility is a particular form of motion; it is relative immobility. The motion of matter is absolute. Motion cannot be separated from time and space, which are themselves basic forms of the existence of matter, and without them there could be no matter in motion. Time and space exist independently of human consciousness, and are constantly developing and changing, although the reflection of this in thought is relative and developmental. [370]

The third and extremely important theme in *Elements of Sociology* is that of the theory of change, incorporating the basic laws that determine the nature and direction of change. Li reiterates the view, to be found in the Soviet texts, that the law of the unity of opposites is pre-eminent amongst the laws of dialectical

[368] *Li Da wenji*, Vol. II, p. 208.
[369] See Shirokov and Aizenberg, *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*, pp. 1, 8.
[370] *Li Da wenji*, Vol. II, pp. 84–90.

materialism; it is the fundamental law. The dialectical materialist view of development recognises that the essential character of reality is motion and change. Change is permanent and motion is constant, and the reasons for this are the contradictions inherent within all things. The cause of change and motion is thus internal. All things contain opposed aspects, between which there is both identity and struggle; all things and phenomena are thus a unity of opposites. The unity of opposites is conditional, temporary and relative, whereas the struggle between opposites is absolute. This is because the imperative for negation and rejection on the part of the opposed aspects is absolute, eternal and unconditional. The resolution of the struggle between opposites leads to a change in the contradictions within a thing, and thus to the emergence of a new thing.[371]

Change takes the form of continuous change (that is, incremental quantitative change) and discontinuous change (that is, in the form of qualitative change or leaps). The law that describes this process is the second law of dialectical materialism, the law of the mutual transformation of quantity and quality. Quality refers to different things, phenomena and processes, and the multiplicity of different types of quality is to be explained by reference to the many particular forms of the motion of matter. The laws of development of a thing can only be revealed by grasping its particular and determining form of motion. As well as the determining characteristic of quality in a thing, there is also its character of quantity; examples include size, speed of motion, and range of temperature. When quantitative change in a thing reaches its limit, qualitative change occurs, and the thing changes from one form to another, from one form of quality to another. Leaps in development occur as a result of the accumulation of gradual and continuous quantitative change reaching the point at which a qualitative change becomes imperative; at that moment, there is a leap in development, an abrupt change, and the emergence of a new form of quality. The resolution of the contradictions within things occurs through leaps; when a qualitative limit has been reached, when the tension between the contradictions has become extreme, the resolution of the contradictions commences and a new entity emerges.[372]

The new entity that emerges as a result of qualitative change does, however, maintain elements of the previous entity; there is not complete negation. This introduces the third of the laws of dialectical materialism: the negation of the negation. This law explains why change takes place in a purposeful manner, from lower to higher forms. All things contain contradictions, and in the process of development of these contradictions, the lower stage of development represents a preparation for the negation of this stage, a preparation for a transformation to an opposed, new and higher stage. The higher stage overcomes – negates – the lower stage, yet retains the positive elements of the lower stage. The higher stage is in turn negated by the next higher stage, which in turn is negated as development proceeds. Consequently, the first stage (affirmation) is negated by the second stage (negation), and this second stage is in turn negated by the third stage (negation of the negation). At each new level, the positive elements of the previous stage are retained, while

[371] Ibid., pp. 123–31.
[372] Ibid., pp. 135–44.

negative elements are negated. It is this character of change that drives it in a purposeful direction, and which ensures that new and more advanced things emerge.[373]

The fourth theme in *Elements of Sociology* that borrows heavily from the New Philosophy is its epistemology. Li asserts that human knowledge is a process, one moving from matter to perceptions and from perceptions to thought. It is a dialectical process that proceeds from practice and returns to practice. The self-motion of the process of knowledge reflects the self-motion of the objective world. The various moments (*qiji*) of the process of knowledge (perceptions, ideas, concepts, and so on) are originally reflections in thought of the moments in the objective world. However, the bearers of knowledge are humans, who are both social and historical; the subject of cognition is more than a biological organism merely reflecting its external environment. At certain stages of the development of society, the human subject engages in labour and struggle, and the process of knowledge is thus rooted in social and historical practice, and in particular the practice of labour.[374]

According to the reflection theory of dialectical materialism, consciousness is a reflection of the objective world in the human brain, which is a form of matter. Consciousness therefore does not exist outside of matter, and is itself a particular form of matter, one that emerges with the development of language in social life, and following the development of material production. But how is the consciousness that emerges in the brain of the subject of cognition to be judged a true reflection of reality? The answer is: through practice. Through social practice, and in their struggle with nature, humans come to understand the laws of society and nature. In social practice, the development and motion of the relationships of the objective world ceaselessly act on humans, and are accumulated in perceptions and ideas that become the raw material of thought. The movement in thought – from direct perceptions based on practice to the formation of concepts to the synthesis of concepts in the form of theory – reflects the form of motion of the development of the natural and social worlds. However, it is only through a return to practice, to verify ideas, concepts and theory, that verification of the laws of the objective world can be achieved. Practice and knowledge are indivisible: practice is the basis of knowledge; knowledge is the impetus for practice. Practice verifies the truth of knowledge, and actively changes the objective world. The process of knowledge thus moves through a cyclical form of motion – from practice to abstract thought and back to practice – as knowledge continues to develop along with the development of the objective world and social practice. As the objective world develops to higher stages, new contradictions are continually revealed through social practice, and these impinge on human consciousness to impel new movements in thought, which progressively grasp the nature of the objective world more fully, concretely and profoundly. The cyclical motion in the generation of knowledge is

[373] Ibid., pp. 152–61.
[374] Ibid., pp. 208–11.

thus a developmental process that moves from relative truth closer to absolute truth.[375]

The fifth theme in *Elements of Sociology* is the critique of formal logic. Formal logic, Li explains, has three laws: the laws of identity, contradiction and excluded middle. The law of identity has the formula 'A is A' or 'A is equivalent to A'. In other words, a thing or concept has identity with itself or an equivalent thing or concept. This makes for a static view, according to Li, one that does not allow for development or change; it expresses an abstract identity, one that excludes or rejects all identities that are different. Formal logic's law of contradiction has the formula 'A is not not-A'. This is another manifestation of the law of identity, but expressed in a negative form; in other words, things can only be themselves and not something else. This law only expresses abstract difference, according to Li, and cannot perceive that identity can exist between different things. The law of the excluded middle has the formula 'A is B or is not-B'. According to this law, where there are two mutually opposed judgements, one must be the truth and the other must be incorrect. It does not allow for a third possibility, one that allows that both judgements are correct; for example, in mathematics, the possibility that a line is both straight and not straight. The law thus expresses an abstract opposition, and rejects opposition based on the unity of opposites, which is, rather, the universal character of the nature of things. Each aspect of an opposition constitutes the premise for its opposite, and in fact demands the existence of that opposite; at the same time, each aspect is the negation of its opposite and demands that its opposite does not exist. Therefore, each aspect affirms and negates its opposed aspect, and there is a relationship of both affirmation and negation between opposed aspects. The tension within things between identity and contradiction can only be resolved through struggle. However, the law of excluded middle only recognises one aspect of the contradiction and negates the other, thus expressing only a formal opposition. In objective reality, such abstract oppositions do not exist.

Li thus accuses formal logic of being unable to penetrate into the nature of things; it provides only a one-sided, superficial and abstract reflection of the relationships of a complete entity. It thus provides laws of thought that perceive things as eternally unchanging. The truths it provides are thus abstract truths; they are truths that maintain a consistency between truth and the laws of thought, but not between thought and the real world. Formal logic also lacks a developmental perspective, regarding stasis and immobility as the basis for coming to know things, a view that does not allow for the growth and extinction of things. It also lacks a perspective on interconnectedness; things are themselves or not, and there are no relationships. It thus provides a one-sided and partial perspective, seeing things in isolation. Finally, formal logic's greatest weakness is that its principles are isolated from social practice. Whether human thought is in conformity with the objective world is a matter for social practice. Formal logic's laws of thought are abstract constructions separate from the real world; they are formulae without content that cannot be verified through social practice. In contrast, the logic of dialectical materialism is premised on the materiality of the objective world, a world that is

[375] Ibid., pp. 210–23.

changing and developing as a result of the contradictions internal to things and processes. This logic perceives the interconnectedness of things, and recognises that the identity that exists between things is conditional, temporary and relative. The laws it generates are not, like those of formal logic, abstract laws, but laws that reflect change and development in reality.[376]

The sixth theme in *Elements of Sociology* is determinism and its resolution. Li Da's explication of this issue reflects not only the activist tendency of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy, it reflects a position at which he had arrived in the early 1920s through his detailed study of the materialist conception of history. The European and Japanese texts on Marxism and socialism Li had read convinced him that Marxism was not, indeed could not be, a fatalistic doctrine. Li admits a level of economic determination in the unfolding of human history and in the structuring of the social order. However, he insists that there exists a dialectical causal relationship between the various levels of the social totality, between economic base, political superstructure and ideological superstructure. The political and ideological superstructures are not mere passive reflections of the economic base, but interact with and react upon it in ways that affirm the capacity for human thought and political activity to influence the course of history. Nevertheless, the economic base retains overall dominance in its relationship with the superstructures; there is a relationship of unequal reciprocity between them.[377]

Li stresses that humans are social animals and that their lives are intimately connected with the prevailing forms of economic production. In societies characterised by hostile class formations, humans have no alternative but to belong to one or other of the classes, and their political activities and consciousness are inevitably a function of class. However, politics and consciousness are not merely passive social entities, mechanically created by society's structure of economic classes and economic production; they are dynamic entities, and capable of exerting an influence on the economic structure, but not of the same order of influence as the economic structure itself. Moreover, the superstructures' capacity for influence originates with the 'developmental force' that the superstructures derive from the economic base. For Li, therefore, politics could exert a significant influence on economic development, either positively or negatively. But this capacity to facilitate or hinder economic development derived ultimately from developments within the economic base. The same was true of ideology. When ideology correctly reflected the economic structure and political superstructure, it could reveal the laws of social development, thus allowing humans to consciously transform economics and politics and thus facilitate social progress. In the same way, ideology that did not accurately reflect the laws of development of economics and politics could hinder social and economic progress.[378]

Like Qu Qiubai, Li thus rejected the view that Marxism represented a fatalistic doctrine, one in which human beings possessed no agency in the unfolding of history. While Li conceded that the materiality of society and nature constrained the

[376] Ibid., pp. 267–80.
[377] Ibid., pp. 286–9.
[378] Ibid., p. 292.

extent to which humans could influence historical development, he was not prepared to accept that humans – their consciousness and political activities – were merely passive reflections of the economic realm of society. Rather, once created, these dimensions of social life were capable of interacting with and influencing the course of development of the economic realm. Nevertheless, their capacity for influence was of a second order variety; they could not autonomously and *ex nihilo* generate new forms of economic activity. But within these constraints, human action, if based on a correct understanding of society, could exert a considerable historical influence. Given his commitment to the revolutionary movement, Li could scarcely arrive at a different position. In this way, as had Qu before him, Li arrived at a perspective that allowed a resolution of the apparent determinism of Marxist materialism and its revolutionary and activist themes. Li believed that correct theory, based on revolutionary practice and the practice of class struggle, was an essential prerequisite to effective human-driven social and political change. And it was for this reason that he devoted the entirety of his adult life to the elaboration of Marxist theory and its dissemination amongst the revolutionary movement.[379]

Elements of Sociology stands as one of the classic works of Marxist philosophy in China. The thumbnail sketch of the main themes in the book offered above does not do justice to its depth and complexity. Indeed, *Elements of Sociology* elaborates virtually all of the major theoretical issues addressed by Marxist philosophers and theorists in Europe and the Soviet Union, and was to provide a solid theoretical foundation on which other Marxists in China, including Mao Zedong, could build.

4. MAO ZEDONG: THE INFLUENCE OF *ELEMENTS OF SOCIOLOGY*

One of the subjects on which Mao Zedong lectured at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University at Yanan between April and August 1937 was the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism,[380] and this series of lectures on philosophy was later published under the title 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism'.[381] Two of the most influential texts of Marxism in China ('On Practice' and 'On Contradiction') commenced as lectures in this series of lectures. The philosophical influences on Mao at the time of writing these lectures, and later, during their revision, are thus of considerable interest. We know from Mao's philosophical annotations (which we will explore in some detail in Chapters 9 and 10) that, from late-1936, he had embarked on an intensive study of the post-1931 Soviet version of dialectical materialism – the New Philosophy – and that this was to have a profound influence on his own writings on philosophy of July and August 1937. Mao's personal copies of two of the Soviet texts he read between late 1936 and mid 1937 – Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and Mitin's

[379] For a fuller discussion of this theme in Li's thought, see Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, passim.

[380] Wu Jun, 'Mao Zedong shengping, sixiang yanjiu gaishu' [Comment on research on Mao Zedong's life and thought], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 1 (1987), pp. 52–8.

[381] For a detailed analysis and translation of this document, see Nick Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990).

Dialectical and Historical Materialism – have survived, and his numerous annotations to them published.[382] A comparative analysis of these Soviet texts and Mao's own writings on philosophy indicates only too clearly the extent to which he relied on them in the composition of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism'.[383] Given the significant influence of these Soviet texts on Mao's understanding of dialectical materialism, what role might Li Da's *Elements of Sociology* have played?

The answer to this question is complicated by the fact that it is not at all clear whether Mao had read *Elements of Sociology* prior to writing his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' (July, August 1937). Li had sent Mao a copy of the revised and expanded Shanghai edition of *Elements of Sociology* on its publication in May 1937.[384] We have direct textual evidence, in the form of his annotations and reader's diary (to analysis of which we will turn in Chapter 10) that Mao did read *Elements of Sociology* between 17 January and 16 March 1938.[385] But had he read it earlier? A number of factors suggest that he had, but the evidence is far from conclusive. First, there is the possibility that Mao had read *Elements of Sociology* before July 1937, but in its first edition, which had been published in Beiping in 1935.[386] This is the view of Wang Jionghua, one of China's foremost authorities on Li Da, who points to the fact that Mao had repeatedly read Li's *Jingjixue dagang* (Outline of economic theory), also published in Beiping in 1935. And even if the 1935 edition of *Elements of Sociology* had not been sent to Yanan, Mao might still have read parts of it in other sources. Its second chapter, 'The laws of dialectical materialism', and its third chapter, 'Dialectics of the process of knowledge', had been published in issues 1 and 3 (1936) of the journal *Zhongshan wenhua jiaoyuguan jikan*, and in *Faxue zhuankan*.[387] Second, Mao later claimed to have read *Elements of Sociology* 'ten times', a considerable feat since it extends to more than 420 000 characters in the 1937 Shanghai edition (310 000 in the 1935 Beiping edition).[388] Even allowing for some hyperbole on Mao's part, this suggests a considerable engagement with this complex text over a significant length of time, quite possibly extending back to prior to the writing of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism'. A third consideration is the subject matter of *Elements of Sociology* and Mao's own writings on dialectical materialism. Wang Jionghua argues that, while Mao did not plagiarise *Elements of Sociology*, the contents of 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' are

[382] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji* [The philosophical annotations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988); see also Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*.

[383] Knight, (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, esp. pp. 80–3.

[384] Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, p. 160.

[385] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 205–83.

[386] This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Mao recalled, in a conversation with Li Da in August 1961, that he had read and annotated *Elements of Sociology* but had unfortunately lost it while travelling. It is quite possible that Mao had annotated and then lost the 1935 edition of *Elements of Sociology*, for his annotated 1937 edition has survived. See Sun Qinan and Li Shizhen, *Mao Zedong yu mingren* [Mao Zedong and the famous] (Jiangsu: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1993), Vol. 1, p. 333.

[387] Wang Jionghua, 'Du tan "Lianglun" yu "dagang"' [A comment on 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' and *Elements of Sociology*], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 3 (1986), pp. 39–40; see also Wang Jionghua, *Li Da yu Makesizhuyi zhexue zai Zhongguo*.

[388] *Zhongguo zhexue*, No. 1 (1979), pp. 34, 364.

'consistent with it'.[389] This is not, given the inter-textual congruence of the Soviet texts on philosophy and their influence on both Li's and Mao's understanding of dialectical materialism, a particularly convincing argument, for there was a strong element of consistency between the Soviet texts and *Elements of Sociology*, indeed Li openly proclaimed his debt to Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*.[390] Moreover, the possibility that Mao used *Elements of Sociology* in the writing of his essays on philosophy is disputed. Xu Quanxing rejects the assertion of consistency and thus a link between *Elements of Sociology* and Mao's writings on dialectical materialism, arguing that there is 'no direct relation in terms of writing' between them.[391]

There thus exists the possibility that Mao had read *Elements of Sociology* before mid 1937. However, the basis of this supposition is circumstantial, and there is not agreement over this issue amongst Chinese scholars. The available documentary evidence allows us only to be certain of the fact that Mao did indeed read and annotate *Elements of Sociology* in early-1938. What conclusions can be drawn from his references to and annotation of Li Da's *Elements of Sociology*? The most important conclusion is that this text on philosophy, although regarded by Mao as 'the first Marxist textbook on philosophy to be written by a Chinese',[392] had the effect of reinforcing in Mao's mind the essential message he had already drawn from reading the Soviet texts on the New Philosophy. The fact that the author of *Elements of Sociology* was Chinese was, from the perspective of content, of little consequence, for Li made no attempt to illustrate the formulations of dialectical materialism by reference to Chinese examples.[393] Indeed, the book remains from start to finish an abstract treatise, Li making no concession to the possibility that his message may have been more comprehensible, palatable and relevant had he attempted (as Ai Siqi had done) to illustrate the New Philosophy with examples drawn from everyday Chinese life. It was, as we have observed, a book whose target audience was intellectuals; its purpose was to communicate to the reader the contemporary Soviet interpretation of Marxist philosophy. And it was because it so ably achieved this goal that Mao praised its author, and expended a great deal of time and intellectual energy reading and annotating it.

Somewhat surprisingly, the bulk of Mao's annotations to *Elements of Sociology* deal with the philosophy of Ancient Greece (we will return to a consideration of these annotations in Chapter 10). However, Mao did insert a few schematic annotations that illustrate general philosophical points with Chinese examples. This

[389] Wang Jionghua, 'Dagang de chuangzaoxing gongxian ji "lianglun" yu ta de guanxi' ['On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' and the creative contribution of *Elements of Sociology*, and the connection between these texts], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 1 (1984), pp. 20–3.

[390] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*, pp. 1–5.

[391] Xu Quanxing, 'Zai tan "lianglun" yu "Shehuixue dagang" — fu Wang Jionghua tongzhi' [Once again on 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' and *Elements of Sociology* — A response to Wang Jionghua], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 3 (1985), pp. 24–9.

[392] Li Siju, Tao Delin et al., 'Li Da yijiusijiu nianqian lilun huodong ji zhuzuo bianian', p. 364.

[393] Although to be fair to Li, it must be noted that he had originally conceived *Elements of Sociology* as containing a sixth section which would concentrate on the study of Chinese society. However, he never completed the writing of this section. See *Li Da wenji*, Vol. II, p. 5.

was reflective of Mao's oft-repeated view that it was necessary to apply the methodology of dialectical materialism to the task of discovering the particular characteristics of Chinese reality, rather than learning the formulations of this complex philosophy as an abstract theoretical exercise. In this respect, Mao's annotations here parallel (although far more modestly) his annotations to *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, for these earlier annotations contain numerous examples of his attempt to apply dialectical materialism to the Chinese context. While there is no evidence that the abstract nature of *Elements of Sociology* and its lack of Chinese content left Mao dissatisfied, it is clear from the general tenor of his writings, on philosophical as well as political and military issues, that he regarded the study of theory for theory's sake as a distinct waste of time.[394] Li Da's *Elements of Sociology* was thus very useful to Mao insofar as it very fully explained the philosophy of dialectical materialism, and elaborated the current Soviet orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy; but the next stage, and without doubt the more important stage for Mao, was the application of this philosophy to the concrete tasks of the revolution in China.

In order to be able to apply dialectical materialism to Chinese conditions, Mao first had to be conversant with this philosophy's basic themes and categories; he also required familiarity with its mode of discourse. In short, if dialectical materialism were to function as a methodology capable of revealing China's particular characteristics, Mao had to become something more than a philosophical dilettante; he had to become a reasonably competent philosopher. It was to this formidable task that he bent his considerable energy in the pivotal months between November 1936 and July 1937. It was a task to which he turned with relish, for Mao was instinctively drawn to the study of philosophy. And the opportunity to do so provided by a lull in revolutionary activities combined with the delivery to Yanan of a number of Soviet texts on philosophy ushered in one of the most significant chapters in his development as a Marxist theorist.[395]

[394] See in particular Mao's essays 'Reform our Study', 'Rectify the Party's Style of Work', and 'Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: FLP, 1965), Vol. III, pp. 17–26, 35–52, 53–68.

[395] See Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1972), p. 111.

CHAPTER 9

MAO ZEDONG AND THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

Between April and August 1937, Mao Zedong gave more than 110 lectures at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University in Yanan.[396] One of the main subjects on which Mao lectured was dialectical materialism, and his two most famous essays on philosophy – 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice' – originated as lectures on Marxist philosophy and were part of his more extensive 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism'.[397] Mao's essays on philosophy have long been the subject of controversy. There was initially considerable scepticism that Mao had even written these essays in 1937, as official Chinese publications claimed.[398] Some scholars argued (wrongly, as it turned out) that Mao had actually written these essays in the early 1950s, immediately prior to their publication in the official version of his *Selected Works*, and not in 1937.[399] Their claims were based on Mao's supposed inability to write on esoteric subjects such as philosophy so early in his apprenticeship as a Marxist theorist, and the apparent lack of contemporary textual evidence to support the Chinese claim. Controversy has also surrounded the degree of originality demonstrated by Mao in these essays and, related to this issue, the extent of his reliance on his philosophical sources.[400] Was Mao merely parroting a form of philosophical discourse already well established in Soviet philosophical circles; even worse, was he guilty of plagiarising his Soviet sources? These questions in turn relate to the controversy over the degree of 'orthodoxy' of Mao's

[396] Wu Jun, 'Mao Zedong shengping, sixiang, yanjiu gaishu [Comment on research on Mao Zedong's life and thought], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 1 (1987), pp. 52–8. See also Guo Huaruo, 'Mao zhuxi kangzhan chuqi guanghui de zhexue huodong' [The glorious philosophical activities of Chairman Mao in the early years of the Anti-Japanese War], *Zhongguo zhexue*, Vol. I (1979), pp. 31–7. Guo states that Mao had earlier lectured on philosophy at the Northern Shanxi Public School (*Shanbei gongxue*) (p. 34).

[397] For annotated translations of the pre-1949 versions of these texts, see Nick Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990). See also Stuart R. Schram (ed.), Nancy J. Hode (associate ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949 – Volume VI: The New Stage, August 1937–1938* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

[398] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), Vol. 1, pp. 295–6n, 311n.

[399] Arthur A. Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 22–8; Dennis J. Doolin and Peter J. Golas, 'On Contradiction in the Light of Mao Tse-tung's Essay on Dialectical Materialism', *China Quarterly*, No. 19 (July–September, 1964), pp. 38–64; John E. Rue, 'Is Mao Tse-tung's "Dialectical Materialism" a forgery?', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1967), pp. 464–8.

[400] Karl A. Wittfogel and C.R. Chao, 'Some remarks on Mao's handling of concepts and problems of dialectics', *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1963), pp. 251–77; and Arthur A. Cohen, 'How original is "Maoism"?', *Problems of Communism*, Vol. X, No. 6 (November–December 1961), pp. 34–42.

understanding of Marxist philosophy.[401] If he was reliant on the Soviet texts on philosophy, does this necessarily signify conformity between his philosophical thought and the then current orthodoxy in Marxist philosophy? Conversely, did he infuse his philosophical essays with sufficient personal interpretation and Chinese illustration to render them, if not original, at least a strong personal statement of his own philosophical views?[402]

A number of these issues – the extent of Mao's reliance on his sources in the writing of his philosophical essays, the general influence of Soviet philosophy on his philosophical thought, and the degree of orthodoxy of his Marxist philosophy – have remained subjects of controversy and academic debate, in both China and the West.[403] These are important issues for they relate to the process of the introduction and elaboration of a style of philosophical thought that has held sway in China for more than half a century, and which exercised a major impact on the structure and content of Mao Zedong Thought, which remains to this day the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).[404]

In this chapter, the high level of influence of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy on Mao will be established through exploration of his philosophical annotations to two of the Soviet texts on philosophy. This textual exercise will establish the immediate source of inspiration of Mao's philosophical ideas; and will also point to the extent that he drew the tenets of the New Philosophy into his extended writings on philosophy. This will create the basis for a discussion of the extent to which the universal dimensions of Marxism, as understood by Soviet Marxist philosophy of the early 1930s, constituted the basis of Mao's thought and framed his response to the problem of the 'Sinification of Marxism', the creation of a Marxism appropriate to Chinese conditions that yet retained its roots in the universalism of Marxism.

1. READING THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

While Mao's apprenticeship in Marxist theory had commenced long before his intensive study of Soviet philosophy in 1936–37 (his conversion to Marxism dates from 1920), he was sensitive to criticism by his opponent Wang Ming and his supporters that he was a 'narrow empiricist' because of his insistence on the need for detailed empirical investigation of Chinese history and society, and his opposition to

401 Stuart R. Schram, 'Mao Tse-tung as Marxist dialectician', *China Quarterly*, No. 29 (January–March 1967), pp. 155–65; Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, revised ed.), pp. 84–8.

402 See Nick Knight, 'Soviet Philosophy and Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1990), pp. 89–109; and Nick Knight, 'The Form of Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 9 (January 1983), pp. 17–34.

403 For translations of Chinese articles on these issues, see Nick Knight (ed.), *The Philosophical Thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), pp. 126–67. See the Bibliography of this volume for numerous Chinese sources on the influences on Mao's philosophical thought.

404 For the still authoritative view of the position of Marxist philosophy in Mao Zedong Thought, see *Resolution on CPC History* (1949–81) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), pp. 67–9.

what he termed 'book worship', a slavish adherence to the theoretical formulae of Marxism without reference to China's conditions.[405] Consequently, although Mao had read a number of texts on Marxist theory and philosophy before 1936 (including *Capital* and *Anti-Dühring*),[406] he was determined to deepen his understanding of the philosophical and theoretical basis of Marxism, and in late-1936, when there was some respite from the political and military demands imposed by Party leadership, he devoted considerable time to the study of Marxist philosophy.[407]

Mao commenced his intensive study of philosophy in a seemingly inauspicious context. Bisson, who was in Yanan at the time, noticed that Mao and his colleagues were 'severely handicapped by a shortage of books, even to the works of Marx and Lenin. Little in the way of a library had survived the Long March'.[408] It was thus fortuitous that, during this lull in revolutionary activities, Mao gained access to a number of Soviet texts on the New Philosophy (in Chinese translation). Edgar Snow, who was actually on hand when these texts on philosophy were delivered to Mao, comments on the enthusiasm with which he withdrew and studied them: 'Mao was an ardent student of philosophy. Once when I was having nightly interviews with him on Communist history, a visitor brought him several new books on philosophy, and Mao asked me to postpone our engagements. He consumed those books in three or four nights of intensive reading, during which he seemed oblivious to everything else'.[409]

Between November 1936 and July, August 1937, when he wrote his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', Mao carefully read and copiously annotated these books, which constitute the key texts of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy: *A Course on Dialectical Materialism, Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, and possibly *Outline of New Philosophy*.[410] He may also have read a number of books on the New Philosophy by Ai Siqi and Li Da, which were themselves written under the

[405] Guo Huaruo, 'Mao zhuxi kangzhan chuqi guanghui de zhexue huodong' p. 32. For Mao's opposition to 'book worship', see Stuart R. Schram (ed.), Nancy J. Hodes (associate ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912–1949 — Volume III, From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927–December 1930.* (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 419–26.

[406] For a list of the texts on Marxism and philosophy which Mao had studied, see Li Ji, 'Mao Zedong you gemingjia zhuanbian wei gemingjia jian zhexuejia de biaozhi' [The watershed between Mao as revolutionary and Mao as revolutionary and philosopher], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 4 (1987), pp. 37–43; also Li Yongtai, 'Mao Zedong tongzhi dui zhexue de xuexi he changdao' [The study of philosophy by Mao Zedong and his philosophical initiatives], *Xinan shifan xueyuan xuebao*, No. 2 (1985), pp. 9–16. A translation of this latter text can be found in Knight (ed.), *The Philosophical Thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989*, pp. 96–117.

[407] See Mao's letter to Ye Jianying and Liu Ding of October 1936 in which he requests they purchase books on philosophy and social and natural science, including Ai Siqi's *Philosophy for the Masses*, for study in Yanan. *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji* [Selected letters of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 80–1.

[408] T.A. Bisson, *Yenan in June 1937: Talks with Communist Leaders* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 37.

[409] Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 111.

[410] Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji* [The philosophical annotations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988); also Gong Yuzhi et al. (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986), pp. 70–1.

influence of the New Philosophy.[411] It was the Soviet volumes on philosophy that thus constituted the textual basis from which Mao drew his information on the New Philosophy, and it was his endorsement of this philosophy, in 1937 and subsequently,[412] which ensured its acceptance as the CCP's core philosophical orientation. The texts which Mao read and the information he drew from them during this period of intense philosophical study are consequently of considerable moment in the attempt to understand the level of orthodoxy of Marxist philosophy in China, and also the developmental trajectory of philosophy within the Party to 1949 and beyond. However, it is also important to take note of how Mao reacted to these texts. As Arif Dirlik has pointed out, Mao was an 'active reader', one who interrogated the texts from the perspective of his own concerns and experiences.[413] While there can be no doubt that Mao accepted the essential thrust of the New Philosophy, any suggestion that he did so blindly, without any critical personal response or attempt to apply its abstract formulations to the Chinese context, is contradicted by the evidence of his annotations to the Soviet philosophical texts.

Nevertheless, the fact that Mao read the texts of the New Philosophy in an 'active' and sometimes critical way should not detract from the fact that his own understanding of Marxist philosophy came, in very large part, from the Soviet texts. A comparison of the content of these texts and Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', to which we will shortly turn, demonstrates only too clearly the intimate and dependent relationship between Mao's philosophical thought and the Soviet Union's New Philosophy. The observable, textual, link between his 'Lecture Notes' and the texts of the New Philosophy is his philosophical annotations to two of the Soviet texts.

2. MAO'S ANNOTATIONS TO *A COURSE ON DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM*

The text most heavily annotated by Mao was M. Shirokov and A. Aizenberg et al.'s *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*.[414] Mao read and annotated this book between November 1936 and April 1937, covering its margins with nearly thirteen thousand

[411] See Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), Chapter 6.

[412] The revision and republication of Mao's 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' in the early 1950s ensured that the New Philosophy would persist as the philosophical orthodoxy of the People's Republic of China. For an example of the detailed and laudatory philosophical commentary that followed the republication of Mao's philosophical essays, see Li Da, *'Shijianlun', 'Maodunlun' jieshuo* ['On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' – A commentary] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1979).

[413] See Dirlik's review of Nick Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937*, in *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 26 (July 1991), p. 213; see also Arif Dirlik, 'Modernism and antimodernism in Mao Zedong's Marxism', in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 59–83.

[414] M. Shirokov and A. Aizenberg et al., *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng* [A course on dialectical materialism], translated by Li Da and Lei Zhongjian (Shanghai: Bigengtang, 1932,.1935, fourth ed.). For Chinese commentary on Mao's annotations to this text, see Tian Songnian, 'Dui jiben zhexue shuji de pizhu' [On the annotations on several texts on philosophy], in Gong Yuzhi (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo*, p. 70–1.

characters of commentary, some a summary of the book's contents, others reflections on points made by the Soviet philosophers, and yet others illustrations of philosophical principles through Chinese examples.[415] This lengthy volume (582 pages) was particularly important to Mao's understanding of the laws of dialectical materialism, and in particular the law of the unity of opposites, the subject of his famous essay 'On Contradiction'. *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* contains sections on the law of the unity and struggle of opposites, the significance of the principal aspect of a contradiction, the movement of contradiction from the beginning to end of a process, and the relativity of identity and the absoluteness of struggle within the law of the unity of opposites. Each of these subjects is canvassed in Mao's 'On Contradiction'. His annotations throw considerable light on the development of his thinking in preparation for writing the original version of this essay. Let us take just a few examples.

Mao sets the scene in his annotations by referring to the law of the unity of opposites as 'the essence of dialectics'.[416] This comment appears next to a section in *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* that, in keeping with the post-1931 reaction against the Deborinite interpretation of dialectical materialism, is highly critical of Plekhanov's supposed failure to repudiate Bernstein's rejection of the 'determinant element of dialectics – the unity of opposites'. Accepting the premise that the law of the unity of opposites is indeed the essence of dialectics, Mao carefully reads the Soviet text to reveal the various facets of this law. Next to a section of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* titled 'The identity and struggle of opposites as the essence of dialectics', Mao wrote the following annotation:

> ... the dialectical materialist view of development reveals the source of motion within a process. So-called knowledge of a process is the revelation of the various aspects of the contradictions replete within a process, the determination of the mutual relations between these aspects, and the search for the motion of the contradictions of a process.
>
> If we take cognisance of a process during its dissociation, observe the aspects (*bufen*) of the contradictions replete within the process and the mutual relations of these aspects, we can then know the development of a process from emergence to elimination. As Lenin has stated: The essence of dialectics is knowledge of the dissociation of a unified entity and the aspects of the contradictions replete within it.[417]

Mao then extracted the information, extremely important for his own essay, that it is necessary to identify the fundamental or principal contradiction from amongst 'the many aspects and attributes of the mutual opposites of a process'.[418] Against a section of the Soviet text dealing with the principal contradiction as the source of a process's self-motion, contradictions, content and essence, Mao wrote the following annotation: 'The so-called unity of opposites is the dissociation of a unified entity to become mutually exclusive opposites, including the mutual connections between these opposites. This is the source of the so-called principal contradiction, of

[415] See Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 1–136.
[416] Ibid., p. 6.
[417] Ibid., pp. 64–5.
[418] Ibid., p. 66.

so-called self-motion'.[419] He added that knowledge of the principal contradiction is necessary, for it is this 'which allows development of the process ... it is the source of motion of the process ... All other contradictions are determined by this principal contradiction'.[420] The link between this Soviet text and Mao's 'On Contradiction' is here quite evident, for in the original text of his essay Mao refers to the principal contradiction as follows:

> There are many contradictions in a complex process, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions. [421]

Similarly, the extremely important concept for Mao of the particularity of contradictions appears in *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, and is illustrated by a quote from Marx's *The Holy Family* which refers to the proletariat and wealth as the contradictory creations of the world of private property.[422] The Soviet text argues that, in order to understand the principal contradiction of capitalism, it is necessary to understand the particularity of the relationship between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Next to this section, Mao wrote: 'In looking at a problem from a dialectical materialist perspective, it is necessary to expose the particularity of contradictions within any process, and at the same time it is necessary to know the particularity of contradictions of the various aspects of a process'.[423] In the original version of 'On Contradiction', Mao repeated this principle as follows:

> It is necessary not only to study the particular contradiction and the essence determined thereby of every great system of the forms of the motion of matter, but also to study the particular contradiction and the essence of each process in the long course of development of each form of motion of matter.[424]

The issue of the particularity of contradictions was an especially important one for Mao, for while he accepted implicitly the universality of contradictions, he was eager to employ this law of dialectics to investigate and reveal those contradictions particular to the Chinese context. Following a section of the Soviet text highly critical of Deborin and his followers for failing to grasp the significance of the principal contradiction, Mao wrote what is the longest of his philosophical annotations. It is worth reproducing this annotation in toto for it demonstrates that, having read of the abstract formulations of the law of the unity of opposites, his mind immediately turned to how this could be applied to understanding the reality of China:

> A complex process has many contradictions, and amongst these one is the principal contradiction and the others are secondary contradictions. Because the development of the principal contradiction determines the development of the various secondary

[419] Ibid., p. 72.
[420] Ibid., pp. 66, 69.
[421] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 178–9.
[422] For the original, see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, second ed.), p. 43.
[423] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 74.
[424] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 169; cf. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), Vol. 1, p. 321.

contradictions, if one cannot distinguish between the principal and secondary contradictions, between the determining contradiction and those that are determined, one cannot seek out the most essential thing of a process (give examples). However, within a contradiction, regardless of whether it is principal or secondary, the two aspects of the opposites are not only in opposition and struggle, but each is in mutual reliance on the opposing aspect, with which it carries on opposition and struggle. The result of the struggle of the two aspects is the emergence of the change of mutual inter-permeation, namely a transformation to achieve identity, a transformation to its opposing aspect, and this is the indivisible interconnection of the two opposed aspects. However, it is a big mistake to look at the two aspects of any contradiction as though they are equal. Of the two aspects, one is inevitably the principal and the other the secondary aspect, and the former is the aspect that plays the contradiction's so-called guiding role. This book has already provided the four examples of value and use value in which value is the principal aspect, of forces and relations of production in which the forces of production are the principal aspect, of theory and practice in which practice is the determining aspect, and of socialism and capitalism in the Soviet Union in which socialism is the principal aspect; all prove the determining function of the principal aspect in relation to the other aspect. It is not, as Plekhanov's mistaken explanation has it, a simple mutual combination; neither is it, as Luppol's explanation has it, a case of alternating mutual determination; it is rather one aspect performing the principal and determining function. In actuality which aspect is principal? It is necessary to observe the situation of the development of a process, and it will be determined under definite conditions. For a long period in capitalist society, the bourgeoisie were the principal aspect, but on the eve of the revolution and during its aftermath, the proletariat changes to become the principal aspect. In a capitalist state, capitalism is the principal aspect while feudal forces are the secondary aspect. Feudal forces were the principal aspect in pre-revolutionary Russia, as they are in present-day Japan, with capitalism playing a secondary role. In Chinese society, dominance belongs to imperialism and the feudal forces, such that they exercise a determining effect on all else. The invasion by Japanese imperialism determines all manner of changes. Thus, during the vigorous development of the great revolution between 1925 and 1927, in the confrontation between the Southern revolutionary forces and the Northern warlords, the Southern forces changed from secondary status to being dominant, while the power of the Northern warlords changed in the opposite direction. In the example of the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, because the bourgeoisie still has a firm grasp on the flow of economic resources, to this day it still occupies a dominant position; however, in terms of revolutionary leadership, because of the level of consciousness and the thoroughness of the proletariat and the vacillation of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat occupies the dominant position. This particular point has an influence on the future of the Chinese Revolution. The proletariat must unite with the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie if it is politically and materially to occupy the dominant position. If the majority of the workers, peasants, and petty bourgeoisie can become conscious and get organized, then the proletariat will assume the determining and dominant role of the revolution. In the situation of hostility between China and Japan, the Chinese elements are currently changing from a secondary to a principal position, and that is because, if the national united front is established broadly and is consolidated, and with the addition of international factors (the Soviet Union, the Japanese masses, and other peaceful states), there will be created a superiority over the Japanese aspect. In the contradiction between the peasantry and the proletariat, the proletariat is dominant. In the contradiction between industrial workers and handicraft workers, industrial workers are dominant. In the contradiction between skilled and unskilled workers, skilled workers are dominant. In the contradiction between town and countryside, the town is dominant. In the contradiction between economic base and superstructure, the economic base is dominant. In the contradiction between perceptual knowledge and rational knowledge, perceptions are dominant. In the contradiction between the main force of the Red Army and the guerilla units, the main force of the Red Army is dominant. In the contradiction between the military tactics of offence and defence, offence is dominant. In the

> contradiction between strategy and tactics, strategy is dominant. In the contradiction between mobile and positional warfare, mobile warfare is dominant. Of the various arms of the services, the infantry is dominant. In the contradiction between mental and manual labour, manual labour is dominant. And who is to decide? When the development of a process reaches a definite stage, the strength of the two sides in the struggle will determine it. The dominant and the non-dominant change from one to the other.[425]

The first point to make about this very interesting annotation is that Mao had clearly comprehended the complex array of concepts associated with the law of the unity of opposites, and the relationship between these, as elaborated by *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*. He was able to effectively summarise its difficult and often abstract explanation, and he did so in a way that excised much of the polemical content and style of the original text.[426] While Mao does refer in passing to the supposed philosophical errors of Plekhanov and Luppol, it is clear that his major objective was to understand *philosophically* the law of the unity of opposites, and especially the distinction between the principal and secondary contradictions, and the principal and secondary aspects of a contradiction. He obviously achieved this objective.

Second, it is evident that this annotation is the textual link between *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and a very significant section of Mao's 'On Contradiction'. In this essay, Mao includes an entire section entitled 'The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of a Contradiction', in which he makes the following fundamental theoretical point which, in both content and expression, virtually reproduces the opening section of the annotation we have just read: 'There are many contradictions in a complex process, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determines or influences the existence and development of the other contradictions'.[427] Moreover, it is possible that, at the time of writing this lengthy annotation, Mao was already considering the composition of his own piece on the law of the unity of opposites, whether in lecture or essay form. The author's telling note to himself near the beginning of the annotation – 'provide examples' – suggests that 'On Contradiction' was even then gestating in Mao's mind.

Third, this annotation is a very obvious verification of Dirlik's assessment that Mao was an 'active reader', one who interrogated the texts he read rather than passively absorbing the information contained therein. Not only did he draw from

[425] See *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 87–90. Knight's translation.

[426] It is interesting that the original text of 'On Contradiction' contains very little in the way of polemic against Deborin and his supporters. References to them were inserted before the publication of the revised version of the essay in the early-1950s. This supports the proposition that Mao was less interested in the feuds in Soviet philosophical circles than in what the New Philosophy had to say that was of use to Mao and the Chinese Communist Party. See Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 154–229. However, Mao does, in his philosophical annotations, regularly attack 'Chinese subjectivism', a soubriquet for the dogmatism of Wang Ming. For a discussion of this, see the chapter by Shi Zhongquan in Knight (ed.), *The Philosophical Thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989*, esp. p. 130.

[427] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 179; cf. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, p. 331.

this Soviet text information essential to an understanding of the operation of the law of the unity of opposites, he immediately began to conceive of ways in which this theoretical information could be applied to reveal the tendencies and characteristics of actual historical contexts, and particularly the Chinese context. Knowledge thus gained, Mao clearly felt, would be beneficial to those charged with the formulation of political and military strategy in the Chinese revolution.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, Mao's annotation demonstrates only too clearly that he endorsed the New Philosophy articulated by *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*. This may seem an obvious point, but the absence of any major criticism let alone repudiation in this substantial annotation reinforces the argument that Mao accepted, as the appropriate reading of Marxist philosophy, the New Philosophy elaborated and endorsed by the Soviet philosophical texts. It was an appropriate reading for Mao personally, as he was clearly convinced by the universalistic claims of the New Philosophy; it was also appropriate, he believed, as the philosophy of the CCP, with its particularly Chinese concerns. Mao actively worked to propagate the New Philosophy as the Party's philosophy, and his endorsement was, in time, to ensure that it assumed the mantle of philosophical orthodoxy within the Party he led.

When we examine Mao's other annotations to *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, we quickly discover that the core concerns of Mao's other major essay on philosophy, 'On Practice', are anticipated here. The Soviet text contains abundant material on the problem of epistemology within Marxist philosophy and, here again, Mao's annotations highlight the immediate source of many of the concepts and principles to be found in 'On Practice'. A few examples will suffice.

Central to Mao's epistemology is the concept of practice, and it is clear that he drew considerable support for this position from *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, which insisted that practice is the only means of understanding how humans gain knowledge of the world; moreover, the Soviet text argues that knowledge is dynamic and developmental, altering in line with changes in the world, but also in turn helping to alter it. Mao wrote the following annotations next to sections of the Soviet text that exactly articulate this perspective:

> Reflection is not a passive absorption of the object, but an active process. In production and class struggle, knowledge is an active element that leads to the transformation of the world.[428]
>
> No question regarding knowledge of the world can be solved except through practice.[429]
>
> Practice is the proof of truth.[430]
>
> Theory is produced from practice; if the process of development of the objective external world is correctly reflected, and if subsequently this theory is applied in

[428] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 15–16; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 267.

[429] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 22; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 268.

[430] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 33; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 269.

> practice, then this theory can be made manifest in practice, and this thus completes the process of knowledge.[431]

Another very important epistemological issue for Mao was the notion of the stages of the process of cognition, and in particular the movement from perceptual to rational knowledge. Against a section of the Soviet text that stresses the distinction between these two stages of cognition and illustrates it by reference to the growing consciousness of the proletariat in capitalism, Mao wrote: 'From the perceptual stage move to the rational stage, from the rational stage move to revolutionary practice'.[432] He then wrote two substantial annotations elaborating this point:

> Perceptual knowledge cannot be separated from rational knowledge, perceptual knowledge already contains within it the sprouts of rational knowledge. The general is already contained in that which is concrete, but what is contained is only the external and not the internal connection. From the shallow to the deep, from the outside to the inside, from the particular to the general, it is only thought with practice as its basis that succeeds. This is the movement of the deepening of knowledge; it is the sudden change of knowledge. It is only with this deepening and sudden change that nature can be reflected relatively correctly and completely.[433]

> Practice proves: things that are perceived cannot immediately be comprehended, it is only things that are comprehended that can be more deeply and correctly perceived. Perception solves the problem of phenomenon, comprehension solves the problem of essence, and it is only in the process of practice that the essence of a thing can be revealed and understood.[434]

The reproduction of the second of these two annotations in 'On Practice'[435] demonstrates, yet again, that this Soviet text on philosophy was one of the immediate sources of Mao's writings on philosophy; also that his philosophical annotations functioned as preparation for their composition.

3. MAO'S ANNOTATIONS *TO DIALECTICAL AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM*

If we pass to the second of the Soviet texts on philosophy annotated by Mao prior to August 1937,[436] the importance of the New Philosophy to his own writings on philosophy is further highlighted. Mark Mitin et al.'s *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, a volume of 538 pages, contains a wealth of material on the New

[431] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 33–4; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 269.
[432] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 24–5; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 268.
[433] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 28–9; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 268–9.
[434] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 29–30; and Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 269.
[435] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, p. 299.
[436] Gong Yuzhi et al. (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo*, p. 71.

Philosophy.[437] Mao drew on this volume even more heavily than *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, even though he annotated it less than this latter text. Mao's dependence on Mitin's book is evidenced by the fact that over half of the pages of Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' contain material drawn from *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* in a form that sometimes suggests direct appropriation of parts of this Soviet text.[438] There is also a direct textual link between his annotations to this text and his own essays on philosophy. The clearest example is the opening passage of 'On Practice', which first appears as an annotation written next to a passage in the Soviet text criticising Feuerbach for his failure to grasp the dependent relationship of knowledge to social practice:

> Before Marx, materialism examined the problem of knowledge apart from the social nature of man and apart from his historical development, and was therefore incapable of understanding the dependence of knowledge on social practice.[439]

Several other important annotations indicate Mao's debt to *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. Next to a section which argues that there is no other criterion of truth save practice,[440] Mao wrote: 'Practice is the criterion of truth',[441] a core epistemological principle which appears in that form in 'On Practice'.[442] Similarly, a quote from Lenin's 'Conspectus of Hegel's *The Science of Logic*' in the Soviet text is drawn into 'On Practice' via an annotation by Mao; against the quote 'Practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge, for it has not only the dignity of universality, but also of immediate actuality', Mao wrote 'practice is higher than knowledge'.[443]

Mao's reading of Mitin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* also reinforced his understanding of the law of the unity of opposites. On this topic, his annotations are rather more schematic than those to *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, but they do include, significantly, the annotation that the law of the unity of opposites 'is the universal law of the objective world and knowledge, and all processes fall within its ambit'.[444] He also wrote, repeating a section of the Soviet text, that 'identity is relative, struggle is absolute',[445] a theme that occupies an entire section of 'On Contradiction'.[446]

While Mao's annotated copies of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* survived, a third Soviet philosophical text almost certainly used by Mao did not. Chinese Mao scholars believe that Mao did

[437] M.B. Mitin, *Bianzhengfaweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun* [Dialectical and Historical Materialism], translated by Shen Zhiyuan (n.p.: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936).

[438] See the table at Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 80–2.

[439] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 145–6; cf. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, p. 295.

[440] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 141–2.

[441] Ibid., p. 142.

[442] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, p. 296.

[443] Cf. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, p. 297; *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 142.

[444] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 169; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 278–9.

[445] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 171.

[446] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, p. 337; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 187.

read and annotate Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy*[447] as he did the two other Soviet texts on philosophy.[448] *Outline of New Philosophy* contains material that Mao would have found extremely useful in preparing his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', and in particular the sections on the historical origins of dialectical materialism, matter and motion, space and time, as well as the various laws and categories of dialectical materialism. Indeed, these sections in Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' closely parallel those found in *Outline of New Philosophy*, and Mao scholars in the West have suggested that the similarity between the two documents is sufficient to suggest that Mao incorporated parts of this Soviet text directly into his 'Lecture Notes'.[449] However, the similarity between these texts, while evident, should not be overstated as much of the material covered in *Outline of New Philosophy* also appears in *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. The high level of repetition between the Soviet texts on philosophy suggests that Mao could have taken very similar material from any one of them, or for that matter, from Ai Siqi and Li Da's writings on philosophy, as indebted as these were to the New Philosophy.[450] While it is not unimportant to attempt to trace the direct individual sources of Mao's writings on philosophy, even more important is recognition of the overlapping and interlocking character of the texts on philosophy that he studied. While this recognition may diminish the significance of each individually as a source of influence, it elevates their collective significance as an influence on his understanding of the New Philosophy.

4. MAO'S 'LECTURE NOTES ON DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM' AND THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

Mao's annotations to *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* and *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* provide a fascinating insight into the process through which he acquired his understanding of dialectical materialism. His immediate responses to the Soviet texts shed considerable light, not only on his immediate sources of information on philosophy, but the way in which he responded to that information. As we have seen, Mao did not passively accept what the Soviet texts said, but interrogated them and immediately set to work applying the philosophy contained in them. Mao's inquiring intellect was evidently deeply engaged during this intensive

[447] M. Mitin (ed.), *Xin zhexue dagang* [Outline of New Philosophy], translated by Ai Siqi and Zheng Yili (n.p.: Dushu shenghuo chubanshe, 1936).

[448] Gong Yuzhi et al. (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo*, p. 71.

[449] Karl A. Wittfogel and C.R. Chao, 'Some remarks on Mao's handling of concepts and problems of dialectics', *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1963), pp. 251–77; see also Stuart R. Schram, 'Mao Tse-tung as Marxist dialectician', *China Quarterly*, No. 29 (January–March 1967), pp. 155–65.

[450] On repetition in Soviet philosophical writings, see Richard T. De George, *Patterns of Soviet Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 193; also Eugene Kamenka, 'Soviet Philosophy, 1917–67', in Alex Simirenko (ed.), *Social Thought in the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 95.

bout of study of the New Philosophy; his purpose was to gain a mastery of its complex and abstract formulations to the extent that he could elaborate its principles for others less conversant with Marxist philosophy than himself, and to reflect on how the New Philosophy's principles and methodology might be applied to an understanding of the particular needs and characteristics of the Chinese Revolution.

The need to explain Marxist philosophy in a way that philosophical novices could comprehend was obviously an important consideration motivating Mao's study of the Soviet texts on philosophy. It was one thing to read and ponder these volumes in the privacy of his cave; it was another to lecture on the subject to large numbers of Party cadres and soldiers. The latter required Mao to expose to public scrutiny his level of understanding of dialectical materialism, and his capacity to elaborate it. It was, given his position of authority within the Party as well as his own long-term commitment to Marxism, a task he wanted to perform well. His level of preparation for this ordeal is revealed, not just by his philosophical annotations, but also by his lengthier and more coherent 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism'.

Much has been written about Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', a frequent purpose being to denigrate Mao's capacity as a philosopher through revealing his heavy reliance on his Soviet sources.[451] However, it is precisely this intimate relationship between Mao's philosophical writings and the Soviet texts on philosophy which can, when looked at from the standpoint of genealogy, tell us much about the provenance of the philosophical dimension of Marxism in China and its level of 'orthodoxy'. It is not logical to assert, as some Mao scholars have done, that Mao appropriated much of his 'Lecture Notes' from the Soviet texts on philosophy, while claiming at the same time that his views on Marxism and Marxist philosophy were heterodox.[452] The two positions are not compatible. If Mao was so heavily reliant on the Soviet texts on philosophy for his own understanding of dialectical materialism, and we will review further evidence for this proposition in due course, then a logical inference must be that Mao's Marxism, at least in its philosophical dimension and, I would argue, in others as well,[453] was quite orthodox when measured against the defining criteria of contemporary orthodox Marxism.[454]

[451] Wittfogel and Chao, 'Some remarks on Mao's handling of concepts and problems of dialectics'; Stuart R. Schram, 'Mao Tse-tung as Marxist dialectician'; Arthur A. Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Dennis J. Doolin and Peter J. Golas, 'On Contradiction in the Light of Mao Tse-tung's Essay on Dialectical Materialism', pp. 38–64; John E. Rue, 'Is Mao Tse-tung's "Dialectical Materialism" a forgery?', pp. 464–8; Martin Glaberman, 'Mao as a dialectician', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, No. 8 (1968), pp. 94–112; Vsevolod Holubnychy, 'Mao Tse-tung's materialist dialectics', *China Quarterly*, No. 19 (1964), pp. 3–37. On a more positive note, see Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, Introduction.

[452] In particular, Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*; Schram, 'Mao Tse-tung as Marxist dialectician', pp. 155–65; Stuart R. Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Stuart R. Schram, 'The Marxist', in Dick Wilson (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 35–69.

[453] For example, on the issue of the orthodoxy of Mao's views on the working class and peasantry, see Nick Knight, 'Mao Zedong and working class leadership of the Chinese Revolution, 1927–1930', *China Information*, Vol. XII, No. 3 (Winter 1997–98), pp. 28–45; Nick Knight, 'Working class power and state formation in Mao Zedong's thought, 1931–1934', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 32,

It is in this light that a comparison of Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' and the Soviet texts on philosophy is revealing. The first point to make about Mao's 'Lecture Notes' is that their content is very clearly inspired by the Soviet texts, and in some parts incorporates sections of them. The various philosophical themes Mao discusses are all present, in one form or another, in his sources (although the Chinese examples of those themes are, of course, his own creation). Indeed the structure of the 'Lecture Notes' largely reproduces that to be found in the Soviet texts, with early sections on the history of philosophy and the contest between the two opposed philosophical schools of idealism and materialism, followed by sections on the object of philosophy, matter, motion, time and space, consciousness, reflection, truth, and the laws and epistemology of dialectical materialism. There are sections covering each of these in the Soviet texts on philosophy. Moreover, the language used by Mao is, in some cases, virtually identical to that used by the Soviet philosophers. One or two examples will suffice. Near the beginning of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', Mao discusses the historical development of philosophy, and makes the following assertion:

> The occurrence of the earliest idealism was a product of the ignorance and confusion of a primitive and barbaric humankind. The development of the forces of production that followed acted as a spur to the subsequent development of scientific knowledge, and idealism should have declined and materialism should have emerged to replace it. However, to the present day idealism has not only not declined but has developed, to compete vigorously with materialism on an equal footing; and the reason for this is that society has had class divisions.[455]

Apart from a few very minor and inconsequential changes, this passage reproduces a section from Mitin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.[456] Mao also largely reproduces this text when he states:

> Materialism, on the other hand, considers the unity of the universe to derive from its materiality, and that spirit (consciousness) is one of the natural characteristics of matter that emerges only when matter has developed to a certain stage. Nature, matter and the objective world exist apart from spirit and are independent of it. Human knowledge is a reflection of the objective external world. [457]

There is no need to belabour the close textual connection between Mao's 'Lecture Notes' and the Soviet texts on philosophy, as a number of scholars (including myself) have established with some precision the textual source of the various parts of the 'Lecture Notes'.[458] However, this demonstrably intimate connection between Mao's 'Lecture Notes' and the Soviet texts has drawn the

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No. 1 (2002), pp. 29–46; and Nick Knight, 'Mao Zedong and the peasants: Class and power in the formation of a revolutionary strategy', *China Report*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2004), pp. 49–76.

[454] See Nick Knight, 'The laws of dialectical materialism in Mao Zedong's thought: The question of "orthodoxy"', in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 84–116.

[455] Knight, (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 85.

[456] Mitin, *Bianzhengfaweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun*, p. 48.

[457] Cf. Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 87; Mitin, *Bianzhengfaweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun*, p. 51.

[458] See in particular Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 80–2.

understandable, but somewhat misguided, criticism that Mao merely plagiarised his 'Lecture Notes'. The criticism is misguided in that it misses the point, which is precisely the importance of Mao's reliance on the New Philosophy for an understanding of the development of his own philosophical thought and the subsequent development of the philosophical dimension of Marxism in China. An important implication of the criticism of Mao's supposed plagiarism has been that Mao's writings on philosophy have been given little credence and their influence on subsequent Marxism in China often ignored. There are a number of very clear examples of this refusal to take Mao's writings on Marxism and Marxist philosophy seriously.[459] The issue of Mao's supposed plagiarism of the Soviet texts thus has had significant implications for the possibility of a balanced and considered appraisal of Mao's Marxism and the sources of his Marxism. For that reason, the charge of 'plagiarism' deserves closer scrutiny.

A number of considerations suggest that the charge of plagiarism, while in one sense well founded, is excessive and misguided. The concept of plagiarism in the English language (in Chinese, too, for that matter) implies not only the borrowing of textual material from the writings of another person, but also intent to deceive readers into believing that the borrowed material is one's own. There can be no denying that the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' do indeed use a significant amount of material copied almost verbatim from the Chinese translations of the Soviet texts on philosophy. In this sense there can be no doubt that plagiarism took place. But did Mao consciously intend to deceive readers into accepting the material from the Soviet philosophical texts as his own? It seems unlikely. In the first place, it was not the custom for early theorists of Chinese Marxism to attribute their sources.[460] In this they were merely following in the footsteps of the Chinese classical tradition, in which it was not at all common for authors to attribute their sources. Failure to identify the source of quotes or information is not acceptable in the Western intellectual tradition, but the censure reserved for a Western scholar who indulged in such a practice is not appropriate to a Chinese author who did so, even as late as the 1930s. A condemnation of Mao for plagiarism, understood as a conscious act of deception, may thus rest on a cultural misunderstanding, a failure to appreciate different cultural norms of authorial and academic propriety.

Second, the point needs to be emphasised that Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' were just that: lecture notes. The words 'lecture notes' (*jiangshou tigang*) appear clearly in the title, and warn the reader that the document does not presume to be an original or highly polished contribution to its subject matter. They were rough notes drawn from the Soviet texts to serve as the basis of his lectures on dialectical materialism. The 'Lecture Notes' were useful instructional

[459] One of the most egregious examples of this is Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); similarly, Apter and Saich conclude that '... Mao was never much of a Marxist theoretician...' David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 113.

[460] This was clearly the case with Qu Qiubai, who relied heavily and without attribution on only a few books in the compiling of his own lectures and books on philosophy in 1923–24. It was also the case with Li Da. See Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, Chapter 5.

material in a context in which sources on Marxist philosophy were scarce,[461] and indeed they were first 'published' with that purpose in mind. The 'Lecture Notes' appeared first as a mimeographed thread-bound volume in September 1937 *without* Mao's name appended, a fact that suggests he intended to draw no personal kudos from them.[462] The final words of the 'Lecture Notes' also suggest as faulty the view that Mao was attempting to pass the document off as anything more than notes designed for a lecture: 'This talk of mine is far from adequate since I have myself only just begun to study dialectics. There has been no possibility of writing a useful book on the subject as yet, although perhaps the opportunity may present itself in the future. I wish to do so, but this will be decided by how my study proceeds'.[463]

A final point is that the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' have never been published for general circulation in China. Publications of it have been *neibu*, that is, supposedly confidential material intended only for theorists within the Party or government. Mao scholars in China are well aware of Mao's debt to the Soviet texts on philosophy in the writing of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', although this knowledge has not led them to either reject the philosophy contained in them or to denigrate Mao's capacity as a philosopher.[464] Had Mao wished to perpetrate a conscious act of plagiarism in which the motivation was intention to deceive, the 'Lecture Notes' could have been revised and rewritten, as many of his other pre-1949 works were, and published as a product of his own creation. But they were not. This further confirms that, while Mao may have relied heavily on the Soviet philosophical texts, he made no pretence that he had done otherwise, and nor did he attempt to pass the 'Lecture Notes' off as entirely his own work. In this, he followed the precedent established by Ai Siqi and Li Da, both philosophers admired by Mao, and both of whom had openly conceded their debt to the seminal texts of the New Philosophy. Ai had candidly admitted that he was a 'repeater and copier' of the New Philosophy as contained in Mitin's *Outline of New Philosophy*;[465] and Li Da had quite openly acknowledged his own debt to Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*.[466] Why should Mao feel it necessary to conceal his reliance on his sources or pretend to originality when those he regarded as his philosophical mentors felt no such inhibition?

As I have stressed above, the importance of Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' lies not in their originality, but in the evidence they provide of the influence exerted on Mao by the New Philosophy. It is clear that Mao accepted the

[461] Bisson, *Yenan in June 1937: Talks with Communist Leaders*, p. 37.

[462] Gong Yuzhi, '"Shijianlun" san ti' ['On Practice': Three Problems], in *Lun Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang* [On Mao Zedong's philosophical thought] (Hubei: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), p. 67; also Wu Jun, 'Mao Zedong shengping, sixiang yanjiu gaishu', pp. 52–8.

[463] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 126–7.

[464] See the chapter by Shi Zhongquan in Knight (ed.), *The Philosophical Thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989*.

[465] Ai Siqi, *Sixiang fangfalun* [Methodology of Thought] (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1936, 1939 fourth edition), p. 160.

[466] See Li's translator's 'Preface' to M. Shirokov and A. Aizenberg et al., *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng* [A course on dialectical materialism], translated by Li Da and Lei Zhongjian (Shanghai: Bigengtang, 1932), p. 3.

contemporary Soviet interpretation of dialectical materialism, and through his lectures, writings and subsequent philosophical activities, he set in train a process whereby that philosophy would become the philosophical orthodoxy of the CCP. If we dismiss the 'Lecture Notes' on the grounds that Mao copied or summarised his Soviet sources, we close off the possibility of gaining an appreciation of the genealogy, not only of Mao's own philosophical thought, but of an extremely important dimension of the ideology of the CCP itself. This surely is not an insignificant consideration, and one that should not be deflected by the fact of Mao's reliance on the Soviet texts on philosophy.

5. THE NEW PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSAL TRUTHS AND MAO'S 'SINIFICATION OF MARXISM'

It is clear from his 'Lecture Notes' and his two better known essays 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice' that Mao accepted without demur that there are philosophical laws which govern the nature and behaviour of all things in the universe. These universal laws are as applicable to society and human thought as they are to the realm of nature. Mao accepted that it was Marxism, as understood by contemporary Soviet philosophers, which had correctly identified these 'basic laws of materialist dialectics'.[467] As Mao pointed out, 'none of these laws and categories is created by human thought itself; they are the actual laws of the objective world'. Moreover, these laws are 'the most fundamental part of the Marxist world view and methodology'.[468]

Most obvious amongst these laws was the law of the unity of opposites (or contradictions), which Mao regarded as the most fundamental law of the universe. Mao stressed this in 'On Contradiction', and it appears in or informs his later philosophical and theoretical writings. The most striking example is 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People' (1957), where Mao asserts:

> Marxist philosophy holds that the law of the unity of opposites is the fundamental law of the universe. This law operates universally, whether in the natural world, in human society, or in man's thinking. Between the opposites in a contradiction there is at once unity and struggle, and it is this that impels things to move and change. Contradictions exist everywhere, but their nature differs in accordance with the different nature of things. In any given thing, the unity of opposites is conditional, temporary and transitory, and hence relative, whereas the struggle of opposites is absolute.[469]

Such a passage could have been written by Engels or Lenin, and is certainly in conformity with the 1930s Soviet texts on philosophy that Mao studied, as well as his own writings from that period. Engels' writings on philosophy, particularly

[467] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 123.

[468] Ibid., p. 124.

[469] *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung* (Peking: FLP, 1977), Vol. V, p. 392; see also Mao's 'Talks at a conference of secretaries of provincial, municipal and autonomous region party committees', in Ibid, esp. pp. 366–71. For the original version of this speech, see Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek and Eugene Wu (eds), *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 131–90.

Anti-Dühring and *Dialectics of Nature*, are replete with references to the universal significance of this law.[470] Similarly, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* contain a section entitled 'On the Question of Dialectics' in which the unity of opposites is stressed as a condition of all phenomena: 'The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their '*self-movement*', their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites'.[471] The Soviet texts that Mao annotated reinforced this perspective. Mitin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* refers to the law of the unity of opposites as the 'fundamental law of materialist dialectics';[472] Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* describes it as 'the determining element of dialectics';[473] and in his *Elements of Sociology*, which Mao may have read prior to mid 1937 (but certainly between January and March 1938),[474] Li Da referred to this law as the 'basic law' of dialectics which incorporated all other laws and categories of dialectical materialism.[475] Mao echoed these claims of the universal character of the law of the unity of opposites by writing in one of his philosophical annotations that this law was 'the essence of dialectics',[476] and in another that it was 'the universal law of the objective world and knowledge, and all processes fall within its ambit'.[477]

Another highly significant 'universal truth' of Marxism that Mao derived from his reading of the texts of the New Philosophy was that of practice as the criterion of truth, and he endorsed it on several occasions in his annotations.[478] As with the law of the unity of opposites, the principle of practice as the criterion of truth had a long pedigree in the Marxist tradition, going back to Marx himself. In his celebrated 'Theses on Feuerbach', Marx had asserted that '[t]he question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question'.[479] Engels, too, had stressed in his philosophical writings the significance of practice as the criterion of truth; practice was 'the most telling refutation' of the 'philosophical crochets' of such philosophers as Hume and Kant who had questioned 'the possibility of any cognition'.[480] Similarly, Lenin had devoted an entire section of his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* to the criterion of practice in the theory of

[470] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring (Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science)* (Peking: FLP, 1976), pp. 150ff; also *Dialectics of Nature* (Moscow: FLPH, 1954), pp. 280–321.
[471] V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: FLPH, 1963), Vol. 38, pp. 359–60. Emphasis in original.
[472] Mitin, *Bianzhengfaweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun*, pp. 212–13.
[473] Shirokov and Aizenberg et al., *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*, p. 15.
[474] See *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 205–83; also Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China*, Chapter 6.
[475] *Li Da wenji* [Collected Writings of Li Da] (Beijing: Renminchubanshe, 1981–88), Vol. 2, p. 132.
[476] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 6.
[477] Ibid., p. 279.
[478] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 268, 269, 271, 278.
[479] Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 422. Emphasis in original.
[480] In Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes* (Moscow: FLPH, 1951), Volume II, pp. 92–3, 336.

knowledge: 'The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge'.[481] The notion of practice as the criterion of truth was consequently heavily emphasised in the two Soviet texts Mao read and annotated,[482] and it is clear that he took his inspiration from these two texts. *Outline of New Philosophy*, which Mao may have read and annotated, also stresses practice ('practical activity') as the criterion of truth.[483]

The evidence of Mao's unequivocal acceptance of the universal laws of dialectical materialism, contained in the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' and philosophical annotations, illuminates his understanding of Marxism in an important way. Mao accepted the claim that all phenomena, without exception, are subject to fundamental laws. There is, existing beyond the realm of superficial appearances, a material universe characterised by identifiable structures and patterns of development. To that extent, there is a uniformity shared by all things. However, while at this fundamental ontological level there is uniformity, at a concrete level there is difference. Different phenomena, while characterised by a shared materiality, have different histories and different developmental characteristics. It was in its recognition of difference underpinned by uniformity, and its disclosure of the hitherto problematic relationship between the universal and the particular, that the persuasive power of dialectical materialism resided. Mao perceived here the theoretical key that could unlock the secret of China's own specific characteristics. China possessed its own particular laws, and Mao was keen to reveal these; but China also shared certain attributes common to all societies, and at a deeper level, with all material phenomena. It was Marxism's capacity to disclose the particular within the universal and to explain the relationship between the two that so attracted Mao.

Mao's acceptance of the universal dimension of Marxism is an important premise for understanding how he conceived the application of this theory to China, or in other words, the process of the 'Sinification of Marxism'. A number of scholars have mistakenly taken Mao's endorsement of this process as an assertion of the need to subordinate Marxism to Chinese conditions and Chinese cultural peculiarities, and as such a virtual denial of Marxism's claim to universality.[484] However, the fact that he drew so heavily on the Soviet texts on the New Philosophy and the writings of Chinese Marxist philosophers influenced by that philosophy indicates that Mao's Marxism was not a 'Chinese' Marxism constructed with little if

[481] V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Peking: FLP, 1972), p. 161.

[482] Shirokov and Aizenberg, *Bianzhengfa weiwulun jiaocheng*, pp. 212–14; and Mitin, *Bianzhengfaweiwulun yu lishiweiwulun*, pp. 195 ff.

[483] Mitin (ed.), *Xin zhexue dagang*, p. 341 ff.

[484] See Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*; Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung*; Schram, 'The Marxist', in Dick Wilson (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History*, pp. 35–69; also Benjamin I. Schwartz, 'The Legend of the "Legend of Maoism"', *China Quarterly*, No. 2 (April–June 1960), pp. 35–42; Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1951); Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Communism and China: Ideology in Flux* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); and Jack Gray, *Mao Tse-tung* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth, 1973), p. 41.

any reference to the universalistic themes of orthodox Marxism.[485] Indeed, as we have just observed, Mao accepted Marxism's status precisely on the grounds that it had correctly identified and elaborated the fundamental universal laws. It is also quite evident that he drew these universal laws into his own thinking and that they exerted a considerable influence on the way in which he approached the process of understanding reality, whether social or natural. The universal dimension of Marxism thus occupied a significant dimension of his thought. Mao's Marxism cannot, therefore, be categorised as a product only of the Chinese context,[486] of China's culture and intellectual tradition, although he did insist repeatedly that Marxists in China had to understand these in order to be good Marxists.[487] What Mao sought, when he talked of a Sinified Marxism, was a Marxism based on the universal laws elaborated by dialectical and historical materialism and applied to investigation of China's conditions to reveal its particularities (its 'particular laws').[488] An example of Mao's insistence on the universal dimension of a Sinified Marxism appears in his important and well-known essay 'On New Democracy' (1940):

> [I]n applying Marxism to China, Chinese Communists must fully and properly integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution, or in other words, the universal truth of Marxism must be combined with specific national characteristics and acquire a definite national form if it is to be useful, and in no circumstances can it be applied subjectively as a mere formula.[489]

It is evident from this passage that Mao was indeed concerned with China's particularities. By the same token, he recognised that a Sinified Marxism could not be merely an aggregation of information and forms of behaviour specific to China's 'national characteristics'. For Mao, this was not sufficient, for he believed strongly that a Sinified Marxism had to be constructed on the foundation of 'the universal truth of Marxism'. It could not be simply a parochial vision, one fashioned on and limited by national and cultural influences that owed nothing to a universalistic philosophy or international perspective. The legitimacy of a Sinified Marxism thus derived from the fact that its philosophical basis was constituted of a scientific theory of nature, society and history which could be shared by all bona fide members of the international communist movement; there was a philosophical language that Marxists shared, whatever their nationality and historical circumstance. Mao's heavy reliance on orthodox Marxism, in the form of the New Philosophy, demonstrates that a vital constituent of his Marxism, its 'universal' element, owed nothing to the influence of the Chinese context. The abstract and supposedly culturally neutral formulations of dialectical materialism he drew from the texts of the New Philosophy, and which could be applied to China to reveal its

[485] See Knight, 'Soviet Philosophy and Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', pp. 89–109; and Knight, 'The Form of Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', pp. 17–34.

[486] See Brantly Womack, *The Foundations of Mao Zedong's Political Thought, 1917–1935* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982).

[487] See, for example, Takeuchi Minoru (ed.), *Mao Zedong ji* [Collected writings of Mao Zedong] (Tokyo: Hokubasha, 1970–72), Vol. VIII, p. 43.

[488] See, in particular, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, pp. 181–2; *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. V, p. 86.

[489] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), Vol. 2, p. 380.

'specific national characteristics', guaranteed, so Mao believed, that a Sinified Marxism would remain firmly rooted in the universal soil of orthodox Marxism.

The evidence is therefore clear that the Marxist philosophical tradition, and in particular the New Philosophy which was the most immediate influence on Mao's philosophical thought, incorporated claims to a number of 'universal truths'. It is also clear that Mao accepted these claims implicitly. Indeed, the two supposedly universal laws that we have just referred to – the unity of opposites and practice as the criterion of truth – figured prominently in his philosophical annotations and were the focus of his two most important philosophical essays. It is important to stress Mao's acceptance of the universal dimension of Marxism, for the opposite, namely his attention to Chinese conditions and problems and their influence on his thinking, is usually stressed in interpretations of his 'Sinification of Marxism'. Mao believed that the universal principles of Marxism were an essential ingredient in the process of coming to know and change China; without them, investigation of actual conditions would lack focus and purpose. By the same token, Mao believed that abstract universal principles had to be applied if they were to serve any purpose in the revolutionary struggle.[490] This much too is evident in his philosophical annotations and essays, both of which contain numerous illustrations and examples drawn from Chinese society and history. His annotations demonstrate, as we have observed, that no sooner had Mao taken note of a universal principle, such as the law of the unity of opposites, than he began thinking of concrete Chinese examples of this law. The lengthy annotation quoted above is a good example, and there are others.[491]

Mao's philosophical annotations and writings from late 1936 to mid 1937, with their evident debt to the New Philosophy, therefore stand as a repudiation of the suggestion that Mao's Marxism was largely, if not entirely, defined by his focus on the particular problems and needs of the Chinese context, and lacked a universalistic perspective. His philosophical annotations, in particular, illustrate not only the source of his ideas, but the way in which he perceived as necessary the combination ('integration') of the universal and the particular in order to create a 'Sinified Marxism'. An understanding of Marxism's universal laws was a central objective of Mao's excursion into the realm of philosophy. He strove for this understanding in order to grasp the nature of the Chinese context, and so be able to change it. As he pointed out in one of his philosophical annotations: 'Know the laws of the world, find correct theory in order to guide practice effectively, and transform the world'.[492]

[490] See 'Reform Our Study', 'Rectify the Party's Style of Work', and 'Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), Vol. 3, pp. 17–26, 35–52, 33–68.

[491] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 73–4, 83–5.

[492] Ibid., p. 152.

CHAPTER 10

MAO ZEDONG ON DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

A significant imperative of Mao Zedong's study of Marxist philosophy between late 1936 and August 1937 was the need to gain an understanding of the version of Marxist philosophy that then qualified as orthodoxy. He recognised, through the highly polemical nature of the Soviet texts on Marxist philosophy available to him, that orthodoxy was a matter of contention and that the New Philosophy had emerged to claim the status of orthodoxy through a political struggle between competing philosophical camps. He accepted, apparently without demur, the orthodoxy of the New Philosophy, and also accepted its basic premise: the 'Party-character' of philosophy.[493] Mao was thus sensitive to and accepting of the proposition that philosophy and politics could not and should not be separated. Philosophy's basic function was to serve the Party's need for a coherent approach to the generation of knowledge and a philosophical discourse on the nature of reality and how to change it. The New Philosophy filled this need; it provided both the methodology and philosophical language that allowed the Party to articulate and pursue its political goals in a theoretically sophisticated and logical manner.

Despite his acceptance of the core political function of Marxist philosophy, Mao recognised that philosophy was not merely political. It did address fundamental problems: the nature and acquisition of knowledge, the ontological character of reality, the role of logic in expressing the relations between things, the capacity for human agency in an apparently deterministic universe. While he was not a professional philosopher, as Ai Siqi and Li Da may be described, Mao was certainly intrigued by these problems and Marxist philosophy's response to them, for they spoke to issues deeply meaningful to him personally. His philosophical annotations make this abundantly clear. He did not wrestle with philosophy, over many years, in the hope of acquiring the glib response, the prescribed patter, which might pass as philosophical erudition, while leaving his deeper intellect unaffected.[494] Rather, Mao was possessed of a distinctly philosophical turn of mind that found the paradoxes and responses of Marxist philosophy intellectually challenging and rewarding in their own right. The New Philosophy revealed a mode of thinking and an array of categories that allowed him to conceptualise and reflect on issues that had

[493] See, for example, *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji* [The philosophical annotations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988), pp. 307–19.

[494] This is a point repeatedly confirmed in the accounts of Chinese scholars who have analysed and studied Mao's reading and study habits. See, for example, Su Baoyi (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1993); Wang Jionghua, *Mao Zedong dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Wuhan: Changjiang chubanshe, 1998); Gong Yuzhi, Pan Xianzhi and Shi Zhongquan (eds), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* [Mao Zedong's life as a reader] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986).

previously teased him intellectually but which had of necessity remained at the margins of his thinking, and largely unresolved. Now he was in a position to address them directly, and he did so. The results of this exercise in philosophical engagement and reflection are interesting, not only for what they reveal of the history of the New Philosophy in China, but of Mao's own intellectual journey.

In the first part of this chapter, we explore Mao's response to Marxist philosophy's attempted resolution of the dilemma of determinism. As we observed in Chapter 3, this had constituted a pivotal concern for the Marxist theoretical tradition, and it was amongst the first of its philosophical paradoxes to be introduced to a Chinese audience via the reflections of Qu Qiubai. Mao, like Qu, was intrigued by this dilemma, and his reflections traverse, as one would expect, much the same philosophical terrain travelled by Qu. Mao's considered response has a familiar ring, for the options encompassed by the various currents of Marxist philosophy to the resolution of the dilemma of determinism are not limitless. Nevertheless, his approach is worthy of consideration, for it provides an insight into the inner philosophical workings of the mind that drove Chinese Marxism for the next four decades, and left its influence well beyond his own lifetime.

In the second part of the chapter, we move beyond Mao's philosophical writings of late 1936 to mid 1937, and focus on significant themes that emerge in his later annotations on a number of Chinese and Soviet texts on philosophy. These themes include the study of logic, particularly the conflict between formal and dialectical logic, and Mao's fascinating discussion of Ancient Greek philosophy. These themes, interesting in their own right, are also significant in terms of the historical development of Mao's philosophical thought, for he addressed them after he had written his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism'. The widely held impression is that Mao abandoned philosophy after August 1937 because of the exigencies posed by the Anti-Japanese War.[495] Nothing is further from the truth. While he may not, during the Yanan period, have again had the opportunity or leisure to write pieces on philosophy of a length comparable to his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', the evidence, in the form of his philosophical annotations, reveals that he kept returning to philosophy and to an episodic engagement with issues central to dialectical materialism. Indeed, his philosophical annotations and writings during and after the Yanan period suggest that his interest in philosophy never really left him; it remained an abiding intellectual concern throughout his life.

1. MAO ZEDONG AND THE DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM

Qu Qiubai, the pioneer of Marxist philosophy in China, had wrestled with a number of dilemmas at the heart of dialectical materialism. Of these, the paradox of determinism loomed largest for Qu, for he was intent on establishing the possibility of some degree of human agency in an unrelievedly determinist universe. His materialist premises, so stubbornly defended, made this task all the more difficult, but he did arrive at a position that allowed that humans in aggregate (and to some

[495] Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 87.

extent the thoughts and actions of history's 'great personalities') could exercise some influence on the outcome of historical struggles. Qu's rather tortuous attempt to unravel the dilemma of determinism (reconstructed in Chapters 3 and 4), while only partially successful in logical terms, was of immense importance in introducing the conceptual and discursive repertoire of Marxist philosophy to a Chinese audience. Moreover, his preoccupation with the dilemma of determinism alerted fellow Marxists to the philosophical conundrum of allegiance to an ideological system that exhorted its followers to exert every effort, and risk life and limb, to realise historical goals apparently predetermined by history itself.

Qu's concern over the dilemma of determinism thus came to occupy a central position in the gallery of concerns that has confronted philosophers and theorists of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Indeed, there is evidence that Mao was himself aware of Qu's philosophical writings of the 1920s that addressed this issue, and thought sufficiently highly of them to recommend them to others.[496] By the time Mao addressed himself to the challenge of mastering Marxist philosophy in 1936–37, this issue and related intellectual scaffolding were deeply entrenched in Marxist philosophical discourse in China. Mao recognised the philosophical significance of the dilemma of determinism, and recognised the challenge it presented him personally, given his already clearly established orientation to practical action and suspicion of abstract theory unrelated to practice. Mao's philosophical and theoretical response neatly reconciled the two seemingly contradictory impulses in Marxism, of determinism and activism. However, as with Qu Qiubai's confrontation with the determinism of Marxism, one is left with the impression that Mao likewise arrived, through a rather tortuous process of philosophical ratiocination, at the obvious answer that Marxism cannot be a determinist philosophy in the sense that it excluded the possibility of any human influence on the course of history. There had to be the possibility that human agency mattered, that theoretically guided action was more effective than passivity. As a revolutionary, Mao had to discover the formula that revealed the possibilities for purposive historical change inherent in human consciousness and activity. The position at which he arrived, while inevitably controversial, created a theoretical premise from which he never subsequently resiled, and which allowed him to proceed as a revolutionary comfortable in the knowledge that his revolutionary activism was not only theoretically grounded but underwritten by a high degree of orthodoxy (at least as measured by the standards of the New Philosophy).

2. THE DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM: ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

We commence, as we did with Qu Qiubai, by considering the philosophical framework within which Mao conceptualised the dilemma of determinism, and within which he framed his attempted resolution of it. Of the many intellectual

[496] See Sun Qinan and Li Shizhen, *Mao Zedong yu mingren* [Mao Zedong and the famous] (Jiangsu: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 577. See also *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji* [Selected correspondence of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 219–20.

themes within Marxist philosophy relevant to comprehension of the dilemma of determinism, those of ontology and epistemology are the most significant: of what is the universe constructed and how is it ordered; how are humans to know this? Mao's responses to these fundamental and abiding philosophical concerns not only allowed him to address the dilemma of determinism in a particular way, but provide evidence of what might be termed his constrained activist inclination. His defence of materialism, the foundation of Marxist determinism and its bedrock ontological premise, is instructive.

It is often suggested that Mao deviated from or broke with orthodox Marxism by distancing himself from its materialist premises.[497] These accounts suggest that Mao inverted the ontological assumptions of Marxism by attributing thought (consciousness, ideas) with causal priority over matter; in other words, not only did thought exist separate from the material world, but could act independently of and exert an influence on it. From this perspective, the material conditions for the emergence of a particular form of consciousness need not exist, for consciousness could create a particular material environment. Mao is thus accused of being a 'voluntarist', an 'idealist', and the like. Indeed, were these interpretations correct, this would constitute a considerable deviation from the conventionally accepted materialism of 'orthodox' Marxism. Moreover, there would be no dilemma of determinism, for human will would reign supreme, unfettered by any material constraints.[498]

However, the position articulated in Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction' demonstrates that this critique of Mao's supposedly heterodox treatment of Marxism's basic philosophical postulates is without foundation. The ontology contained in these texts is unmistakably a materialist one. From the outset, Mao refuses to entertain the possibility of a dualism between mind and matter predicated on an ontological distinction. In rejecting such a dualism, he argues that everything in the universe (thought included) is constituted of matter, and that the unitary character of the universe derives from its uniform materiality. 'Materialism', he notes, 'considers the unity of the universe to derive from its materiality, and that spirit (consciousness) is one of the natural characteristics of matter which emerges only when matter has developed to a certain stage'.[499]

[497] See, for example, Stuart R. Schram, *The Political thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, revised edition); Stuart R. Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983); Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1951).

[498] See Frederic Wakeman, Jr, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives on Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

[499] Takeuchi Minoru (ed.), *Mao Zedong ji* [Collected writings of Mao Zedong] (Tokyo: Hokubasha, 1970–72), Vol. I, p. 268; also Takeuchi Minoru (ed.), *Mao Zedong ji bujuan* [Supplements to Collected Writings of Mao Zedong] (Tokyo: Sososha, 1983–86), Vol. V, pp. 187–280; Nick Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), p. 87.

Indeed, Mao goes further to define the material character of consciousness as 'a form of matter in movement', as 'a particular property of the material brain of humankind'.[500] Moreover,

> ... this matter is composed of a complex nervous system ... These objective physiological processes of the nervous systems of human beings function in line with the subjective manifestation of the forms of consciousness that they adopt internally; these are themselves all objective things, are certain types of material process.[501]

The unrelenting materialism of Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' reveals the falsity of the view that he juxtaposed thought and matter as distinct and separate ontological realms, and attributed thought with analytical priority because it possessed an ontological character different from matter; rather, thought was matter. Mao insisted on 'the material origins of thought (or, the dependent relationship of thought to existence)'. Moreover, 'the recognition that matter is the origin of thought has as its premise the materiality of the world and its objective existence'.[502]

On the basis of this ontological monism Mao did, however, construct an epistemological dualism. Nevertheless, here again the reflection theory of epistemology articulated in the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' and the deference to experience elaborated in 'On Practice' preclude the suggestion that Mao regarded thought as either independent of matter or was to be attributed with analytical priority in the epistemological relationship between thought and matter. Mao constructed an epistemological dualism on a materialist ontological monism as follows:

> Accordingly, it is apparent that it is conditional when we make a distinction between matter and consciousness and moreover oppose one to the other; that is to say, it has significance only for the insights of epistemology.[503]

It is thus only in the realm of epistemology, and not ontology, that one could speak of a distinction between thought and matter, and much of Mao's epistemology is concerned with the mechanism by which thought can have access to and come to know objectively the realm of reality. Mao commences from the assumption of the 'knowability' (*kerenshixing*) of matter by consciousness,[504] and argues that the theory of reflection of dialectical materialism has positively resolved the problem of 'knowability', and is thus the 'soul' of Marxist epistemology.[505] The principle that

[500] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 282; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 204; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 103.

[501] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, pp. 290–1; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 212; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 113.

[502] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 281; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 202; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 101.

[503] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, pp. 282–3; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 204; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 103–4.

[504] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 292; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 214; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 115.

[505] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 293; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 215; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 115.

human thought is a reflection of objective reality permeates Mao's 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', and a short section ('On Reflection') is devoted to its elaboration. The formulation of reflection theory contained there is essentially the same as the epistemology contained in 'On Practice'. Schram has suggested a more profound epistemology to be found in 'On Practice' than in the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism': '... the extraordinarily simplistic exposition of the "reflection" theory as the beginning and end of Marxist epistemology is a far cry from the sophisticated presentation of "On Practice"'.[506] This judgement cannot be borne out from a close comparison of the two documents. While 'On Practice' does devote a good deal more space explicitly to epistemology, the notions of knowledge as a reflection of natural and social realities, and of deepening knowledge through a process of progressive engagement with reality (that is, practice) are present in both sources. As Mao points out in 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism':

> Objective truth exists independently and does not depend on the subject. Although it is reflected in our sense perceptions and concepts, it achieves final form gradually rather than instantaneously ... In the process of cognition, the material world is increasingly reflected in our knowledge more closely, more precisely, more multifariously, and more profoundly.[507]

Moreover, Mao insists that the 'movement of knowledge is complex and replete with contradictions and struggle'.[508]

A good deal of 'On Practice' is devoted to fleshing out the concepts adumbrated in these quotes: knowledge is a reflection of objective reality, but only comes to reflect it accurately through a process in which the subject of cognition grapples with reality and attempts to alter it. Any suggestion that in either text Mao's epistemology is premised on a simple assumption of a mirror reflection in which thought exactly and immediately mirrors reality is quite wrong. The overly passive epistemology of a simple reflection theory is absent from both texts. Indeed, in the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', Mao explicitly rejects those epistemologies that do not recognise the 'active role of the subject in the process of cognition'.[509] Moreover, the notion of a complex reflection spelt out in the 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' logically precedes the elaboration of the practice-based epistemology articulated in 'On Practice', and also precedes it textually. We would expect nothing less if Mao's three essays on philosophy – 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', 'On Practice', and 'On Contradiction' – are, as Schram has argued, part of 'a single intellectual enterprise, namely Mao's attempt to come to terms with the philosophical basis of Marxism'.[510]

Mao's practice-based epistemology endowed the subject of cognition not only with the ability to engage with reality, but the duty to do so in ways that allowed the

[506] Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 87.

[507] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, pp. 293–4; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 215; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 116.

[508] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 294; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 216; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 117.

[509] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 293; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 214; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 115.

[510] Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 87.

subject to determine that knowledge gained from this process was correct. His was thus an activist epistemology, one in which the subject of cognition is a dynamic agent. While accepting the general tenor of reflection theory, Mao rejected the notion of the subject of cognition as a passive recipient of knowledge in the form of sensory data.[511] It was only through a continual and deepening engagement with reality that true perceptions could be distinguished from the false, and a deep understanding of reality achieved. Knowledge did not come ready packed; neither could it remain static, for reality was constantly evolving. The subject of cognition thus had to engage in a dialectical process in which knowledge generated from practice was continually tested and retested against reality.

Moreover, and as Mao made quite clear, in the attempt to understand reality, the subject of cognition changes the reality that is the object of cognition, and is changed in the process. As he points out in 'On Practice', 'Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world'.[512] From this perspective, the notion of an epistemological determinism – human thought is simply a product of the social and natural environment, and plays no role in the nature and change of that environment – had absolutely no validity. Human thought constituted a significant dimension of any historical context; through their capacity to know their material conditions of existence and to change them, humans were not only the object of history, but its subject also. This dialectical conception of the role of consciousness is quite in keeping with Marx's apparently simple but deeply complex assertion that 'Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted'.[513] The appropriate balance between 'making history' and the 'given and inherited circumstances' was one that could only be determined through an activist epistemology, one that paid due recognition to the 'limitations of historical conditions'[514] while attributing the subject of cognition with the capacity to firstly know those historical conditions and then discover the extent to which the subject of cognition could contribute to changing them.

Thus while Mao's ontology was a materialist one, and his epistemology premised on the notion of a complex reflection, the significance of practice to Mao's epistemology reveals his inclination to adopt an activist position in constructing the process through which humans gain knowledge of their world. Knowledge came through practice, through struggle, a process in which humans actively seek knowledge and in which they change the world and themselves. However, gaining knowledge of the world is constrained by the material context within which this process occurs, and thus involves a dialectical interaction between the human

[511] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 293; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 214; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 116.

[512] *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 229; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 142.

[513] Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 146.

[514] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 294; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 216; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 116–17.

subject and the material world, a world in which the human subject remains materially rooted. Knowledge derives from the material world; the extent to which the process of deriving knowledge and knowledge itself can alter the material world is constrained by the materiality of the human subject and the materiality of their thought processes. The notion that human consciousness is unconstrained materially, and can exert itself unilaterally to achieve historical change, is excluded from Mao's epistemology, as activist in inclination as it is.

3. THE DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM: ECONOMIC BASE AND POLITICAL SUPERSTRUCTURE

Mao, like Qu Qiubai, thus accepted the materialist premise of Marxist philosophy that 'human knowledge is subject to the limitations of historical conditions'.[515] However, again like Qu, Mao was concerned to ensure that this Marxist premise did not constitute a theoretical straitjacket to revolutionary action. The last thing Mao wanted was a theory that endorsed passivity on the grounds of a deterministic materialism and an implied historical inevitability. He was thus intent to discover in Marxism a position that, while retaining its materialist ontology, allowed that human thought and action could play a role in historical change. Mao did so by addressing himself to a core theoretical issue of the Marxist philosophy of history: the relationship between society's economic foundation and political and ideological superstructure. In order to attribute any significance to human consciousness and activity in the historical process, Mao had to unearth in Marxism a formula that reserved for the superstructure some role in either initiating or facilitating historical change. He could not allow that the economic structure of society, while in Marx's famous term 'the real foundation', was the sole agent of historical change, and that human consciousness and the institutions that reflected it could play no role. To do so would be to operate within an inflexible economic determinism already repudiated in the Soviet Union as 'economic materialism'; it would also be to endorse a passivity that was alien to most theoretical currents within the Marxist tradition.

Mao did not approach this core issue of the Marxist philosophy of history in a vacuum. Indeed, many of the versions of Marxist philosophy and social theory to have reached China from the early 1920s had repudiated the notion of an economic determinist interpretation of Marxism. These included the formulations of European Marxists such as Hermann Gorter, the Russian Marxists Plekhanov and Lenin, and the Japanese Marxists and socialists Takabatake Motoyuki, Kawakami Hajime and Sugiyama Sakae.[516] Moreover, the influential Chinese Marxist Li Da had, from the early 1920s, provided a rationale for attributing the superstructure with a qualified

[515] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. VI, p. 294; *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 216; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 116–17.

[516] See Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), Chapter 5.

capacity for historical change.[517] Not only had these theorists criticised economic determinism for its undialectical conception of the relationship between society's economic base and superstructure, they had attacked it for its failure to recognise the significant role that politics and consciousness, under certain historical circumstances, can play in achieving social change. They had, while insisting on the general causal dominance of the economic base in its relationship with the superstructure, recognised the possibility of a reflexive response on the part of the superstructure and, in particular and limited historical situations, the possibility that it could accelerate historical tendencies generated by the economic base, whether through political struggle or the effect of ideology. As we will demonstrate, Mao's attempt to resolve the dilemma of determinism thus stood fore square in this influential current within the Marxist theoretical tradition.

Mao approached the controversial relationship between the economic base and political and ideological superstructure in a particular way, one best categorised as a form of complex economism, one in keeping with his activist epistemology, and one well within the ambit of 'orthodox' Marxism as then understood, for it retained the general notion of economic determination of historical change. The most complete statement of his theoretical position appears in two passages from the 1937 version of 'On Contradiction'. In the first of these, Mao endorses Marx and Engels' identification of the key contradictions whose struggle and resolution underpins the process of historical change:

> When Marx and Engels applied the law of the unity of contradictions to the study of the socio-historical process, they discovered *the basic cause* of social development to be the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction of class struggle, and the resultant (*you zhexie maodun suo chanshengde*) contradiction between the economic base and its superstructure (politics, ideology).[518]

Mao then moves to determine how, within the relationship of the principal and non-principal aspects of these contradictions and their mutual change, humans and their political and ideological institutions, and their consciousness, are able to play a role in historical change.

> I regard all principal and non-principal positions of the aspects of a contradiction as involved in this mutual change.
>
> Some people think that this is not true of certain contradictions. For instance, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the productive forces are the principal aspect; in the contradiction between theory and practice, practice is the principal aspect; in the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base is the principal aspect; and there is no change in there respective positions. It should be realised that *under normal conditions*, and viewed from a materialist point of view, they really are unchanging and absolute things; however, there are *historically many particular situations* in which they do change. The productive forces, practice, and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that sometimes such aspects as the relations of production, theory, and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. When it is impossible for the

[517] Ibid., Chapter 3.

[518] *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, pp. 257–8; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, p. 177. Emphasis added.

> productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production, then the change in the relations of production plays the principal and decisive role. The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement' ... When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that we recognise that in the general development of history the material determines the mental. We also – and indeed must – recognise the reaction of the mental on material things. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.[519]

The following observations can be made on the basis of these two very important passages. First, when reflecting on the dilemma of determinism, it is the orthodox Marxist categories of the productive forces, the relations of production, class struggle, economic base and superstructure (politics, ideology, culture) that Mao employs.

Second, Mao argues that the forces of production are 'under normal conditions' the determining influence in the relationship between the forces of production and relations of production; similarly, the economic base is the determining influence in the relationship between the economic base and superstructure. Mao insists, however, that this conventional formula for understanding social change does not preclude the possibility of reciprocal influence of the relations of production on the productive forces, and of the superstructure on the economic base. The relations of production and superstructure are not passive reflections of the forces of production and economic base respectively. Indeed, in 'historically particular situations' they can become 'principal and decisive'.

What does Mao mean by this? The obvious point is that Mao's attribution of a 'principal and decisive' role to the superstructure and relations of production, both realms involving humans and their consciousness and struggles, is carefully qualified, and is far from the egregiously 'voluntarist' position often attributed to him. Mao makes it abundantly clear that 'under normal conditions' the superstructure and relations of production are *not* 'principal and decisive', and that in order to comprehend the nature of a society during such 'normal conditions' (*yiban qingxing*), one must examine the economic base, and within it, the forces of production; it is these that 'generally play the principal and decisive role'. In other words, for the most part, a conventional materialist economic interpretation is sufficient to disclose the workings of history.

Moreover, Mao argues that the superstructure and relations of production are only able to assume a 'principal and decisive role' at those historical moments when they impede the further development of the economic base and productive forces. At such moments, the superstructure and relations of production clearly take on a dual and contradictory function, that of obstruction and facilitation of change. The potential for both obstruction and change exhibited by the relations of production and superstructure derives not from within these realms, however, but from

[519] *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 264; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 185–6. Emphasis added.

developments within their opposite and normally principal aspect, the productive forces and economic base. For example, the fact that the superstructure has a differentiated function, and hence is capable of obstructing the further development of the economic base, permits it (and the human consciousness and political institutions that inhabit this realm) an increased degree of causal significance in those historically particular situations in which development within the economic base has outpaced the development of the superstructure and is being impeded in its forward momentum by obstructive forces within the superstructure. The capacity for initiating change within the superstructure thus emerges as a result of the development of the economic base, which under normal conditions dictates the outcome of its relationship with the superstructure. Mao thus implies that it is struggle within the superstructure generated by the impulse for change within the economic base that can, in 'historically particular situations' become crucial to the resolution of the contradiction between the economic base and superstructure.

Mao's position does not signify a theoretical shift to an invariably superstructural reading of history, as some commentators have suggested. Rather, the superstructure becomes 'principal and decisive' in obstructing and then facilitating impulses for change generated within the economic base. While it might sometimes take on a principal and decisive role, that could only occur in temporally limited periods in which factors within the economic base had created a context in which the superstructure could assume an enhanced capacity for resolution of forces for change generated outside the superstructure itself. As Mao points out in the first quote above, the contradiction between economic base and superstructure is a result of the major contradiction within the economic base itself.

Mao thus believed that the contradictions and consequent impulses for change generated within the economic base were inevitably reflected within the superstructure, and the struggle between these reflected contradictions within the superstructure could exercise a materially significant influence on the outcome of historical struggles, at least in the short term. Consequently, the superstructure mattered as an arena for struggle and change. As a revolutionary, Mao could not have it other. Mao was convinced that it was Marxism's belief in the capacity for struggle within the superstructure (in the arenas of politics, ideology and culture) to facilitate historical change in the direction of progress that prevented its deterministic tendencies from crossing the threshold into fatalism, with its implied invitation to passivity. But, like Qu Qiubai, Mao recognised that the influence of the superstructure, and of human action within it, was limited. The superstructure could not autonomously create its historical context; not only was its influence historically limited in a temporal sense, it perforce operated within an historical context whose characteristics were initially created by the economic base and the productive forces.

Mao thus arrived, under the influence of the New Philosophy with its rejection of 'economic materialism', at a position that the superstructure was not a negligible force in historical change, but that its influence was, in the broader sweep of history, of less significance than the primal impulses for change generated within the economic foundation of society. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, its effect could be pivotal. Mao believed that twentieth-century China constituted just such an 'historically particular situation'. It was consequently necessary to discover in

Marxism not only the universal laws of historical development, but an approach that allowed comprehension of China's particular characteristics, or 'particular laws', as he elsewhere described them;[520] and these particular laws included the potential for change in the realms of politics, ideology, military action, and culture. In each of these areas, there was work to do, in Mao's blunt estimation, and the historical context, generated by the larger forces of history – China's economic decline and the emergence of new economic forces and classes, Western imperialism, Japanese invasion – provided the possibility for human effort to have an impact; and that possibility had to be exploited to the full.[521] The complexities of China's social structure and the increasingly antagonistic character of its contradictions and consequent rapidity of historical change all alerted Mao to the possibility that humans, armed with correct understanding, could contribute to the resolution of these contradictions and the channelling of historical forces in ways that facilitated the forward momentum of history towards communism. This was the historical goal in which he believed implicitly, during the Yanan period at least.[522]

However, Mao was under no illusion that his own efforts and those of the Party he led would amount to nought if history had not first created the context in which they could play a role. Consequently, while Mao's understanding of Marxism incorporated a flexible and dialectical perspective on social change, one in which activities within the superstructure could exert an influence, his theoretical position retained the notion of ultimate economic determination. This is strongly affirmed in his philosophical writings. As he pointed out in an annotation to a section of *A Course on Dialectical Materialism* dealing with Marx's *Capital*:

> In the contradiction between the social character of production and the private character of ownership can be seen the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, and this is the fundamental contradiction. From this fundamental contradiction emerge all other contradictions, because this fundamental contradiction determines the development of capitalism.[523]

In another of his annotations to this text, Mao noted that 'in the contradiction between economic base and superstructure, the economic base is dominant'.[524] Moreover, in an annotation to *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Mao wrote that 'material production is the foundation of the variegated life of humanity';[525] 'it

[520] *Mao Zedong ji*, Vol. V, p. 86. For analysis of this dimension of Mao's thought, see Nick Knight, 'The form of Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 9 (January 1983), pp. 17–34.

[521] For Mao's analysis of the Chinese historical context and the international situation during the Yanan period, see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), Vol. II, pp. 195–212, 305–34, 339–84.

[522] For analysis of Mao's views on the historical future, see Nick Knight, 'Politics and vision: Historical time and the future in Mao Zedong's thought, 1936–1945', *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (1991), pp. 139–71; also Nick Knight, 'From Harmony to struggle, from perpetual peace to Cultural revolution: Changing futures in Mao Zedong's thought', *China Information*, Vol. XI, Nos 2/3 (Autumn/Winter 1996–1997), pp. 176–95.

[523] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 67.

[524] Ibid., pp. 87–90.

[525] Ibid., pp. 145–6.

is matter that determines spirit, and not spirit that determines matter'.[526] He later wrote, in an annotation to *Zhexue xuanji* (Selected writings on philosophy) edited by Ai Siqi, that 'it is matter that is principal in relation to spirit; and matter incorporates (*baokuole*) the reactive influence of spirit'.[527] Consequently, even the influence of the superstructure, of the realm of spirit, had to be regarded as belonging, fundamentally, to the realm of matter, for it was this which underpinned and activated it.

4. THE DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM: THE PARTICULARITY OF CONTRADICTIONS

Another theme in Mao's philosophical thought that bears on his response to the dilemma of determinism is the particularity of contradictions. At first glance, this may not appear directly related to the issue of the extent of human agency in the unfolding of history. However, Mao's stress on the particularity of contradictions is indicative of his belief that, while contradictions are omnipresent, their universality is invariably made manifest through contradictions at a local level. In other words, it is the contradictions close to hand that must be the focus of attention for those who have assumed the responsibility of contributing to the process of historical change. While it was absolutely necessary to recognise the universality of contradictions, it was just as necessary to recognise and address the particular contradictions whose resolution were more directly amenable to human intervention. An understanding of the process (such as the Chinese Revolution) within which these particular contradictions were embedded required mobilisation of a practice-based epistemology, discussed previously. One had – through experience, practice and careful analysis – to arrive at an understanding of the many particular contradictions within the process, the aspects of these contradictions and their relative strengths, and the intensity of struggle between these aspects. One also had to determine which of these particular contradictions, through its capacity to determine the outcome of the process, occupied the principal position. The knowledge gained from analysis of these many particular contradictions and the identification of the principal contradiction constituted the basis for strategic decisions about where political intervention could exert the most influence to bring about a desired effect. It was thus detailed knowledge of local conditions and their identifying particular contradictions that enhanced the capacity of humans to take purposive action that could influence the historical process.[528]

Mao recognised in the concept of the particularity of contradictions, a theme drawn from the ontology of the New Philosophy, reinforcement of his own instinctive predilection for detailed investigation of local conditions. For it was at this level that the mass of ordinary people could make a difference. While it fell to

[526] Ibid., p. 296.
[527] Ibid., p. 377.
[528] *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, p. 252–65; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 168–87.

the chosen few to address the large contradictions of history, the many nameless supporters of revolutionary change could contribute to this process through a careful theoretically informed study of local conditions. An understanding of the particular contradictions at this level could make an enormous difference in determining how and to what extent political intervention could facilitate the resolution of those contradictions in ways that pushed forward the goals of the revolution. As Mao made clear on numerous occasions, it was through the commitment and struggle of many people, identifying and confronting the obstacles to change at a local level, which could make the difference between success and failure in the Chinese Revolution.[529] While Marxism had identified, correctly in Mao's view, the general sweep of history – the broad stages through which it would pass, and the goal towards which it was flowing – it could not provide the detailed knowledge about how the historical process would manifest itself in the countless local contexts that constituted the warp and weft of history's grand design. It was at this local level that the capacity for human agency was greatest, and hence his concentration on the particularity of contradictions in his 'On Contradiction', and his insistence throughout his writings on the need for detailed investigation of local conditions.[530]

Mao believed that humans could make a difference. Every fibre of his being – expressed through his writings and political action – resonated to the need for political action designed to set right the wrongs inflicted on China's masses and the Chinese nation by history's oppressors and exploiters; one had to gird up one's loins for struggle against them. History was on the move, and would eventually deliver its promise of an end to class exploitation and national oppression; but this process of historical change – its pace, and the configuration of the changes through which it would proceed – relied, in part at least, on the efforts of those who strove to understand and grapple with the particular contradictions of their local arena within the broad sweep of history. This was not a belief in the omniscience of humans to direct the flow and outcome of history. Mao remained mindful, through recognition of the limits imposed by his materialist ontology and his materialist outlook on history, that humans were constrained by their historical conditions of existence, that they were situated historically, and that the ineluctable forces of history generated the particular contradictions that they confronted. But like Marx, Mao believed that humans were not just the objects of history, but its subjects as well. And while their sovereignty as historical subjects might be limited, they were subjects nevertheless, and possessed of a capacity to know, address and resolve those contradictions that confronted them locally.

Mao's attempted resolution of the dilemma of determinism thus shared with Qu Qiubai a determination to identify in Marxist philosophy and social theory the level of capacity of humans to influence the course of history. Both men were, by temperament, inclined towards a more activist reading of history than implied by

[529] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. III, pp. 177–8.

[530] See, in particular, 'Oppose Bookism', in Stuart R. Schram (ed.), Nancy J. Hodes (associate ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949 – Volume III, From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927–December 1930* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 419–26.

mechanistic versions of Marxism. Both thus discovered that Marxism was not a fatalistic doctrine; but both nevertheless arrived at the conclusion that the larger forces of history did limit the capacity for conscious human action. Mao's approach, more so than Qu's, focused on the role of the superstructure and its relations with its economic base. Mao also endorsed an activist approach to the acquisition of knowledge, one based on practice, for this was the key to the comprehension of those contradictions to whose resolution the revolutionary must bend every effort. All of these responses to the dilemma of determinism could find some comfort in the formalised version of Marxism – the New Philosophy – that Mao studied in 1936–37 and subsequently. He thus proceeded in the knowledge that his approach to revolution was theoretically grounded, and sanctioned by orthodox Marxist philosophy. There was thus, at least during the Yanan period, a high degree of coherence between his philosophical beliefs and his approach to the formulation and implementation of his revolutionary strategy.

5. MAO ON DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM: FORMAL AND DIALECTICAL LOGIC

Mao's study of philosophy from late-1936 to August 1937 resulted in his extensive 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism' as well as numerous philosophical annotations. In these philosophical texts, Mao wrote at length on the many dimensions of dialectical materialism, but the centrepiece of his philosophical writings was clearly 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction'. These essays capture Mao's belief in a practice-based epistemology and an ontology grounded on a materialist reality whose objects were invariably inhabited by contradictions. While in their official post 1949 versions these are apparently separate texts, they were, as Schram has argued, part of 'a single intellectual enterprise, namely Mao's attempt to come to terms with the philosophical basis of Marxism from the time he was first exposed to it in July 1936 until the Japanese attack of September turned his attention to more practical things'.[531] While Schram was correct in recognising that Mao's writings on philosophy from 1936 to mid 1937 form part of a 'single intellectual enterprise', not so is his suggestion that the imperatives of the Japanese attack banished philosophy from Mao's mind or precluded him from pursuing his interest in its study during the ensuing period of the Anti-Japanese War. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, some of Mao's most extensive philosophical annotations were written in the period following the composition of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', and it is clear, both from his own writings and his encouragement of the study of Marxist philosophy within the CCP (see Chapter 11), that his own interest in and active study of the subject extended well into the 1940s. In fact, Mao retained an interest in Marxist philosophy until late in his life, although he never returned to its study as intensely as during the Yanan period.[532]

[531] Schram, *The Political thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 87.

[532] The last of Mao's philosophical annotations was written at some time after 1965. See Mao *Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 501–7.

Mao's post August 1937 annotations are interesting not just for the light they shed on his continued interest in philosophy, but for the fact that numbered among the books he annotated from late 1937 to the early 1940s are several by Ai Siqi and Li Da, China's pre-eminent Marxist philosophers, whose philosophies and influence we have already evaluated (see Chapters 6–8). Indeed, it was their books that Mao annotated most heavily in the period following the composition of his 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', and it was their concerns that occupied his thoughts when he reflected on Marxist philosophy. Several themes stand out: the philosophical distinction between formal and dialectical logic, and the materialist history of ancient Greek philosophy. Both of these themes are significant to an evaluation of Mao's developing understanding of Marxist philosophy.

In September 1937, Mao wrote extracts of Ai Siqi's *Philosophy and Life* amounting to some 3,000 characters.[533] Mao thought highly of this book, and said so in a letter to Ai.[534] However, as we observed in Chapter 6, Mao disagreed with Ai's elaboration of the distinction between difference and contradiction, and took this disagreement up with him personally. However, the bulk of Mao's extracts of and annotations to this book are approving of Ai's interpretation of the New Philosophy. Especially approving are those annotations dealing with the contradiction between dialectical and formal logic, an important theme in the texts of the New Philosophy (for Ai's views, see Chapter 7). This was obviously an issue within dialectical materialism that interested Mao deeply,[535] for he had written in 1937 a substantial section on it in the original version of 'On Contradiction' (although later excised on its publication as part of Mao's *Selected Works* in the early 1950s).[536] There, Mao had written in some detail on formal logic's three laws – identity, excluded middle, and contradiction – and had elaborated his objection to their formulation and application. Mao's opposition to formal logic centred on its incapacity to explain a universe in constant motion and change, and in which objects could change to become their opposite. Such a universe could not be apprehended and understood through a static conception, one in which objects could only be themselves and not something else. The inherent imperative to change – the existence of contradictions within things, between which there was both identity and struggle – meant that objects were always in a state of becoming something else. A logic that denied this basic ontological characteristic of the universe could not hope to grasp the nature of reality and the relations between things. Only a form of logic that commenced from an ever-changing reality and the possibility of things emerging from struggle to become their opposites could hope to pierce the apparently static external veil of reality to grasp the dynamic processes that lay beneath. At the very heart of Mao's

[533] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 191–203. For these extracts in Mao's own calligraphy, see *Zhongguo zhexue*, No. 1 (1979), pp. 5–24.

[534] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 204.

[535] Indeed, between 25 and 27 March 1938, Mao read Pan Zinian's *Luoji yu luojixue* [Logic and the study of logic], published in October 1937, a book of 204 pages. If Mao annotated this text as he did other texts on philosophy, his annotations have unfortunately not survived. See *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 282–3, and 524.

[536] *Mao Zedong ji bujuan*, Vol. V, pp. 244–7; Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 159–63.

objection to formal logic was thus a rejection of its law of identity, that a thing could only be itself and no other. Mao accepted without equivocation that the nature of things could and did change, that things were not just themselves, but potentially other things as well. How to explain this constituted a core problem of philosophy, and Mao was satisfied that the Soviet texts on philosophy, containing the New Philosophy's interpretation of this problem, had provided the appropriate *dialectical* formulation of the principles and method of logic.

Mao was thus not only interested in what Ai Siqi had to say, in *Philosophy and Life*, on the distinction between formal and dialectical logic, but was well placed to respond in an informed and critical vein, having already mulled over this problem at some length and having informed himself of the technical deficiencies of formal logic. Of particular interest to Mao was the fact that Ai was not merely reiterating the New Philosophy's position on logic, but utilising this to press his advantage in his ongoing battle of words with Ye Qing, his arch philosophical rival. Ai had taken Ye to task for his supposedly spurious concession that dialectical logic occupied a superior position to formal logic; for Ai perceived in Ye's own logic an attempt to preserve the significance of formal logic and place it on an equal footing with dialectical logic. In particular, Ye had not properly comprehended or accepted the notion that, for formal logic to be correct, it must assimilate dialectics into its very content and method; it was not merely a matter of preserving formal logic and utilising it only for analysis of those spheres of reality 'at relative rest'. For Ai, 'relative rest' was a specific form of motion, and it was not therefore possible to distinguish rest and motion in the way Ye had, and retain formal logic for analysis of those things at relative rest. This was tantamount to preserving a function for formal logic separate from dialectics, one premised on a perspective of reality that had not genuinely accepted that motion was reality's dominant characteristic. Ye's rendition of logic, and the relation between formal and dialectical logic, thus represented a form of eclecticism, an 'eclectic distortion', in which formal logic retained an unwarranted significance.[537]

Mao's written extracts on *Philosophy and Life* largely echo Ai's critique of Ye Qing's approach to formal and dialectical logic. Of particular note is Mao's acceptance of a universe in motion, and the implications of this for logic. It was not a case of things being in motion and then at rest, as though these phases were distinct. As Mao points out, things are both at rest and not at rest.[538] This is because things are both themselves and not themselves; they are constantly in a process of change brought about by the contradictory impulses within them. It is for this reason that dialectical logic is able to assimilate formal logic, and why both inductive and deductive logic must be incorporated within a dialectical approach to the investigation of things. Mao thus joined with Ai Siqi in rejecting the suggestion raised by Ye that the Chinese economy, apparently in a state of rest, could be explained by formal, rather than dialectical, logic; for the use of formal logic would lead to the conclusion that 'China needs a capitalist revolution and the establishment of a capitalist society'. However, a dialectical logic, one that understood 'China's

[537] Knight (ed.), *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, pp. 245–9.
[538] Ibid., p. 243.

specific conditions' and did not simplistically operate from a formal premise of the necessary transition from feudalism to capitalism, would recognise that China was not limited historically to a capitalist revolution.[539]

Formal logic's uses, and both Mao and Ai admit that it does have its uses, are thus limited; it is dialectical logic, with it acceptance of the ubiquity of motion, and its grasp of the apparently illogical notion that a thing is both itself and something else, that can apprehend the true nature of a material universe in which there is ever-present change and the constant struggle of contradictions. For both Mao and Ai, things are not what they seem; the key is understanding what they are becoming, and it is the operation of contradictions and the consequent struggle within and between things, that is central to any form of logic that presumes to link things in a logical sequence that mirrors the causal sequence in reality.

Central to this perspective on logic is the insistence that the primary force for change is internal. Mao's annotations to Ai's *Philosophy and Life* make this quite clear. Ai had portrayed Ye's position on the significance of internal and external causality in a way that recalls Qu Qiubai's rather ambivalent response of the early 1920s to this core philosophical problem (see Chapter 3). Neither Mao nor Ai was in two minds on this. As Mao points out, '[a]lthough external cause may not be overlooked, it cannot determine necessity in things. What determines necessity is internal change'.[540]

Mao's perspective on the distinction between formal and dialectical logic, arrived at during the early Yanan period, remained with him and informed his later thinking on how the causal relationship between things in reality could be depicted discursively.[541] He recognised the significance of this philosophical problem, for unless a methodology and a form of words could be found to describe causal relationships and causal sequences in reality, human deductions would be either incorrect or locked within the realm of logical necessity, bearing little if any resemblance to causal necessity. At the heart of his logic is a conception of a material reality that is in constant motion; only a dialectical logic could hope to capture the complexity and dynamic quality of this reality, and Mao unequivocally committed himself to this form of logic.

6. MAO'S MATERIALISM AND ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Some of Mao's most significant philosophical annotations written after mid 1937 are those to Li Da's *Elements of Sociology*. Interestingly, Mao wrote a diary to record his progress through this massive tome (of 852 pages in its second edition).[542] Between 17 January and 1 February 1938, Mao read the first half of *Elements of Sociology*, some 385 pages dealing with dialectical materialism, and between 2

[539] Ibid., pp. 255–6.
[540] Ibid., p. 261.
[541] See Mao Tsetung, *A Critique of Soviet Economics* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1977), pp. 74, 108, 114; also Stuart R. Schram (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters: 1956–71* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 240–1.
[542] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 277–83.

February and 16 March 1938, he read the second half dealing with historical materialism. As with the Soviet texts on philosophy he had studied in 1936–37, he covered the margins and spaces of *Elements of Sociology* with numerous annotations, and the text of the book is heavily scored with under linings. The most numerous annotations occur in the first section of the first half of the book, that which deals with the emergence of dialectical materialism in the history of human thought. Mao's annotations here are significant, for they provide an insight into his familiarity with the major themes and thinkers of Western philosophy. Indeed, it is the only source available to us in which Mao writes at any length on the early history of Western philosophy, and is significant insofar as he applies a uniformly materialist test to the philosophers and philosophies of Ancient Greece. While Mao accepted that the Ancient Greek philosophers constituted an appropriate starting point for the history of philosophy, he was not by any means overawed by their reputations, and he proceeded to give them a characteristically critical treatment.

Mao commences by endorsing the premise that an historical perspective (*lishizhuyi*) is necessary for an understanding of 'the process of the emergence and development of materialist dialectics'.[543] Mao's scribbled reflections then loosely parallel the content of Li Da's analysis of the development of dialectical and materialist themes in Western philosophy, commencing from the appearance of animistic thought in early primitive societies. The two characteristics of primitive thought were, Mao suggests, 'first, that nature, as with humankind, is living, and second, that nature and humankind can transform into one another'.[544] For Mao, this was an example of primitive dialectics. The development of the labour process, even in these early times, had the effect of both transforming nature and human beings, and as this occurred language developed. 'Language is a product of labour', Mao notes, 'a means of communication, and the premise of knowledge. It is only with concepts that can be expressed as language that thought can commence'. Similarly, the development of the human brain was a product of labour.[545] Mao elaborates the relationship between labour and the development of human thought in primitive society in the following annotation:

> The means for the struggle with nature are transformed, as is the way in which life is lived, because of the continual cognition of new aspects of nature during the process of production. Where production is in surplus, technology is improved, and human control over nature is expanded. At this time, animism emerged in the system of thought, and this allowed the division of the world into matter and spirit. This was the earliest attempt by humanity to know nature, and the commencement of a conscious struggle with nature.[546]

Mao notes that, with increasing human understanding of nature, one of the main sources of religious inspiration declines. However, the emergence of class society brought on by the development of the process of production was the basis for the emergence of philosophy, initially a pastime of the economically dominant and

[543] *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, p. 210.
[544] Ibid., pp. 211–12.
[545] Ibid.
[546] Ibid., pp. 212–13.

therefore leisured class. While the initial form of class society was based on slavery, it was the slave owning class, especially of Ancient Greece, which introduced a philosophy incorporating materialist themes:[547]

> Why was it that materialist philosophy could emerge during the Greek era and not before? First, knowledge of the laws of nature must attend progress in the techniques of production, and it is only when this has occurred that humans can gradually discern the character of nature, can start to employ perspectives different to those of religion to explain the world. Second, only when there are handicrafts and commerce, and a commercial slave owning class which has time and money, is there the motivation for there to emerge sophisticated scholarship. Third, only with the experience of commodity exchange is there generated the capacity for abstract thought, and only then can philosophy be engaged in. Fourth, only when the leading nationalities came into contact and geographical vision was extended, could there be an enlargement of the field of vision of the spirit. Fifth, only when there had been a preliminary development of the natural sciences, and thus the foundation of knowledge, could those factors that constitute necessity and which are universal be determined and a philosophy of nature established. These all represented the new anti-religious worldview, namely the historical foundation of the ancient philosophy of nature. Prior to this, humankind was restricted by the oppression of the forces of nature and society, and could only employ spiritual or supernatural concepts to explain the world; and materialist thought consequently could not appear.[548]

Having established the basis on which materialist forms of philosophy emerged in Ancient Greece, Mao turns his attention to individual Greek philosophers. The first of these is Thales who was, according to Mao, the first to offer a naturalistic explanation for the emergence of the universe. For Thales, the universe emerged from water, the source and true noumenon of all things in reality; and as all matter is constituted of the same simple medium it is possible that there could be transformation of one thing into another. This was, Mao suggests, the first manifestation of materialism and dialectics, although in an extremely simple form.[549]

The second philosopher of ancient Greece considered by Mao is Heraclites. Mao asserts that Heraclites was also a materialist, perceiving the universe as constituted of four elements (water, fire, air, and earth), but of these he designated fire as the basic element, and Mao suggests that in this can be perceived the monism of Heraclites' materialism. However, the main importance of Heraclites, as far as Mao is concerned, lay in his discovery of the two fundamental concepts of dialectical thought: there is constant change of all things, and change emanates from the internal struggle of opposites. Heraclites also perceived the universe as limitless in time and space and in a constant state of change; he recognised that in the internal struggle of opposed entities, one form could change into another. Contradiction, for Heraclites, was central to the process of change, and Mao quotes the Greek philosopher to the effect that 'struggle is the father of all things in reality'. Heraclites can thus be designated, according to Mao, as the 'father of dialectics'.[550]

[547] Ibid., pp. 214–16.
[548] Ibid., pp. 217–18.
[549] Ibid., p. 219.
[550] Ibid., pp. 220–2.

The main achievement of Democrites, the next Greek philosopher considered by Mao, was his materialist atomic theory. Mao comments that, while Democrites' materialism was a very primitive and mechanistic one, his atomic theory had had a major philosophical influence on science. Democrites proposed that matter is constituted of extremely small and impenetrable particles, namely atoms; the various dissociations and associations of these atoms in space created the multifarious character of the material world, one in which the myriad things of reality have their own particular and relative forms. For Democrites, there were only atoms and the void of space; he consequently negated spirit. Motion could not be separated from matter, and space was the condition for the motion of matter. Although his views on the motion of matter are mechanistic, Mao suggests, Democrites did apprehend the basic laws for the transformation of matter, perceived causal necessity at work in the universe, and sought the basic reasons for motion within matter itself.[551]

Mao pauses to consider the reasons for the emergence of idealist forms of thought representative of the reactionary aristocracy in ancient Greece. He lists six 'historical reasons' why materialism was supplanted by idealism: 1) The deterioration of the Greek slave economy and the production of deep class divisions and struggle led to an ideological struggle between the aristocratic mentality and democracy, the former becoming the basis for idealist philosophy; 2) because the system of slavery impeded technological progress, the slave owning class did not concentrate its attention on those natural phenomena which may have improved technology, concentrating rather on social phenomena, and this gave rise to moral philosophy and state theory; 3) because those divorced from manual labour denigrated it and exaggerated spiritual matters, there arose idealist philosophy; 4) consequently, in the realm of consciousness, the aristocracy belittled a philosophy which studied 'base matter', considering that only idealist philosophy represented the truth; 5) because materialist philosophy had been limited by the level of science achieved at that time, it could not avoid naivety and internal contradictions, and was thus derided by idealist philosophers; and 6) due to the fact that materialist philosophy had only involved itself with the dialectics of objective reality and had given no attention to the dialectics of subjective thought, idealism, which did emphasise this, displaced materialism.[552]

Mao then turns his attention to Socrates, the first of the idealist philosophers to struggle against materialism. Mao credits Socrates with raising the issues of moral philosophy and epistemology. In moral philosophy, Socrates spoke of the dialectical relationship between knowledge and action, and in epistemology, he referred to the dialectics of the relationship between the universal and particular. Nevertheless, Mao judges his moral philosophy to be reactionary, for Socrates had supported the traditional aristocratic system and had rejected the newly emergent democracy. Mao also condemns Socrates' idealism, for he had asserted that knowledge determines action. Mao asserts, rather, that action (practice) is the basis that determines knowledge and is the criterion for the determination of what constitutes knowledge. Mao allows that Socrates' epistemology was partially correct insofar as he had

[551] Ibid., pp. 222–4.
[552] Ibid., pp. 225–7.

perceived the purpose of knowledge as the movement from the particular at the level of perception to the universal at the level of reason; however, he was idealist in believing that the latter constituted the basis of the former.[553]

The last of the ancient Greek philosophers considered by Mao is Plato. Mao judges Plato's thought to be idealist, reactionary and incorrect. Plato had believed that only concepts (*linian*) had permanent and real existence, and that they had existed prior to the world and humankind; both the world and human thought were a product – a reflection or shadow – of concepts. He consequently created conceptual logic, perceiving concept as the object of thought, not perception of the world; his method of knowledge was thus to engage in thought on the basis of concepts empty of any material substance. However, it is only in Plato's conceptual logic that his positive contribution lies; for his conceptual logic expressed the function of concepts (*gainian*) in relation to thought.[554]

Mao's extended annotations on Ancient Greek philosophy and philosophers are interesting for several reasons. First, although Mao had annotated the Soviet texts on philosophy far more extensively than Li Da's *Elements of Sociology*, he made no substantial annotations regarding the philosophy of ancient Greece on these Soviet volumes. And the reason for this is simple: neither of these Soviet texts contains sections that dwell at any length on ancient Greek philosophy. Indeed, Mao's own 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', so heavily influenced by these Soviet texts, likewise does not contain any extensive reference to Ancient Greek philosophy. Consequently, these annotations to Li Da's *Elements of Sociology* represent Mao's most concerted intellectual engagement with the early history of Western philosophy. While his other writings on dialectical materialism contain plentiful references to the major figures of Western philosophy, particularly Kant and Hegel, they do not delve into the early history of Western philosophy to anywhere near the extent of these annotations to Li's *Elements of Sociology*. While these annotations do not suggest any erudition on Mao's part, they do indicate a familiarity with the subject matter and an interest in the topic sufficient to expend the time and energy required to jot down these extensive annotations.

Second, Mao's annotations concerning Ancient Greek philosophy are significant in that they demonstrate, yet again, that he had accepted one of the basic premises of dialectical materialism: philosophy and developments within philosophy can only be understood by reference to the social conditions of the time, and in particular the extent to which the existing mode of production limits or encourages the development of production and technology, and thus the development of thought. Mao invokes this materialist premise when explaining both the flowering of philosophy in Ancient Greece and the rise of idealist forms of philosophy there. It confirms the point, made earlier in this chapter, that Mao did not at any time, in his investigation and elaboration of Marxist philosophy and its approach to historical explanation, abandon its materialist premise. A consistent theme is that matter is the dominant aspect in the relationship between matter and spirit.

[553] Ibid., pp. 227–30.
[554] Ibid., pp. 230–1.

7. MAO'S POST-1939 PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS

Mao's interrogation of the texts inspired by the Soviet Union's New Philosophy did not cease with his study of Li Da's *Elements of Sociology* in February and March 1938 that lead to his detailed annotations on Ancient Greek philosophy. In March and April 1938, he read Pan Zinian's *Logic and the Study of Logic*, although no annotations to this text are available. He also read Bo Gu's translation of Stalin's 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism' at some time after December 1938. While Mao may have been intrigued by some of Stalin's apparent modifications to the New Philosophy, he was sufficiently circumspect not to say so in his annotations. While he did permit himself the occasional marginal question mark to express his perplexity, his annotations suggest general agreement with the materialism advocated by Stalin. As Mao notes in one of his annotations: 'Matter determines spirit, it is not spirit that determines matter'.[555]

Of far more significance are Mao's annotations, made at some time after May 1939, to *Zhexue xuanji* (Selected writings on philosophy), edited by Ai Siqi. Mao read it carefully and wrote copious annotations. The first half of the book contains excerpts from texts on philosophy already read and annotated by Mao, and it is probable that Mao regarded reading *Zhexue xuanji* as an opportunity to revisit the seminal texts that had inspired his study of the New Philosophy.[556] He read again of the Party-character of philosophy and the way in which the politically inspired struggles within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union expressed themselves as a struggle between dialectical materialism and various philosophical deviations. His annotations here focus on the way in which these philosophical deviations had manifest themselves in the Chinese context. He also revisited the issue of the division in philosophy between materialism and idealism, and the basic characteristics of dialectical materialism – its materialist ontology and theory of reflection. However, the bulk of this repeat reading of the Soviet texts focused on the laws of dialectical materialism. This confirmed the appropriateness of his view, expressed in 1937, that the law of the unity of opposites occupied the principal position in dialectical materialism's gallery of philosophical laws, and reinforced his view that the primary cause of the self-motion of all things was internal contradictions.[557] He also carefully reread the sections on the other laws of dialectical materialism – the law of the mutual transformation of quality and quantity, and the law of the negation of the negation – and studied again the various stages of the process of knowledge, from perception through to inference. Nowhere does Mao give any indication that the years since 1937 and his subsequent philosophical studies had led to any diminution in his belief in the veracity of the New Philosophy. If anything, the impression is of a deepening commitment to and identification with the philosophy of dialectical materialism, as interpreted by the New Philosophy.

[555] Ibid., p. 296.
[556] Ibid., pp. 303–59.
[557] Ibid., p. 339.

The second half of *Zhexue xuanji*, that written by Ai Siqi himself under the heading 'Yanjiu tigang' (Outline for study), was of particular interest to Mao, if the length and asperity of his annotations are any guide. What is interesting about Ai's 'Yanjiu tigang' is that it contains summaries of the material on the laws, categories and epistemology of dialectical materialism already canvassed in the first half of the book. This did not deter Mao, and he obviously set to with a will, again critically considering the claims of dialectical materialism, and Ai's elaboration of them. His annotations indicate he did not always see things Ai's way. For example, Mao objects to Ai's suggestion that the basic aspect of a process is not necessarily the principal aspect in its development. 'This is incorrect', Mao responded, 'the basic aspect is the principal aspect. Matter is principal in relation to spirit; it incorporates the counter reaction of spirit on matter'.[558] Similarly, Mao objected quite strenuously to Ai's suggestion that the law of the negation of the negation involved three distinct stages. Not so, asserted Mao: 'It is incorrect to say that there are three qualitative changes in a process .... emergence, development, and elimination are all part of one process, and not three processes'.[559]

Nevertheless, while Mao showed through his annotations that he was anything but overawed by Ai's stature as a Marxist philosopher, he does express general agreement with the thrust of Ai's elaboration of the New Philosophy which must, by now, have been very familiar territory to him. Yet, the repetition inherent in elaborations of the New Philosophy does not appear to have deterred Mao, for he returned at some time after March 1941 to a study of the fourth edition of Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*.[560] This must have seemed like a trip back in time for Mao, as it had been the third edition of this book that had constituted one of the two main texts on the New Philosophy he had studied and annotated so carefully in 1936 and 1937, at the outset of his engagement with the New Philosophy. Yet here again, in the early 1940s, Mao gives no indication of an interest flagging through repeated exposure to it; there is, rather, renewed recognition of the truths claimed by the New Philosophy and reaffirmation of his identification with this philosophy.

The last two texts on philosophy annotated by Mao during the late 1930s and early 1940s are Ai Siqi's *Methodology of Thought* and the famous Japanese Marxist theorist and philosopher Kawakami Hajime's *The Fundamental Theory of Marxist Economics* (*Makesizhuyi jingjixue jichu lilun*, 1930, the first 310 pages of which are on Marxist philosophy).[561] Chinese scholars have not been able to date Mao's annotations to these two books, but they are clearly part of the larger project by Mao, in which he engaged throughout the early to middle years of the Yanan period, to master Marxist philosophy. Kawakami Hajime's book on Marxist philosophy and economics is singular among the texts studied by Mao in that it is the only text written prior to the ascendancy of the New Philosophy in the Soviet Union in 1931. This indeed underscores the enormous impact of the New Philosophy on Mao, for

[558] Ibid., p. 377.
[559] Ibid., p. 384–5.
[560] Ibid., pp. 389–446.
[561] Ibid., pp. 447–92.

all of his philosophical influences, bar Kawakami Hajime's book, were restricted to texts written by Soviet philosophers of the New Philosophy or Chinese philosophers converted to it. Is it any wonder then that Mao's interpretation of Marxist philosophy demonstrates such a marked consistency with the New Philosophy's rendition of it? It was not just that he incorporated portions of the Soviet texts into his own philosophical writings; it was a function too of his repeated exposure to a relatively closed body of texts all of which operated within the same philosophical discourse. The inter-textual congruence of these texts – their virtually uniform treatment of the laws of dialectics, materialist ontology, epistemology and logic – helps explain why Mao's own elaboration of Marxist philosophy should have so closely paralleled his sources. With this largely unified influence, of limited and overlapping sources all standing on the ground of orthodoxy, Mao did not have to strive to be an orthodox Marxist; he could not be otherwise. Neither the philosophical nor political context was conducive to heterodoxy; and Mao certainly did not go seeking it.

The influence of the New Philosophy is thus an essential feature in the development of Mao's philosophical thought. Yet, it is not the only feature. While Mao was deeply committed to understanding the universal aspects of Marxist philosophy, and drew almost exclusively on the New Philosophy in this project, he was also deeply committed to ensuring that Marxist philosophy be applied to analysis of the particular conditions – the particular contradictions – that characterised the social, political and economic context of the Chinese Revolution. This latter exercise did not betoken a diminution in his belief in the New Philosophy for, as we will see in the next chapter, he was to encourage the establishment of an organisation, bearing its name, dedicated to its elaboration and dissemination within the CCP. However, it is no coincidence that this organisation – the Yanan New Philosophy Association – was to go beyond its initial brief and commit its formidable philosophical talents to identifying a theoretical formula that would constitute a truly Sinified Marxism that nevertheless retained the core philosophical postulates of the New Philosophy. In doing so, the Yanan New Philosophy Association became a central player in the process whereby Mao's thought, which had drawn so heavily on the premises of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy, came to represent Sinified Marxism and, under the rubric of 'Mao Zedong Thought', was invested in 1945 as the Party's 'guiding theory'.

CHAPTER 11

FROM THE NEW PHILOSOPHY TO 'MAO ZEDONG THOUGHT'

– The role of the Yanan New Philosophy Association –

Mao's continuing study of and annotations to a number of philosophical texts by Soviet, Chinese and Japanese Marxist philosophers is evidence that he did not after mid 1937 abandon his interest in Marxist philosophy as a result of the exigencies of the Anti-Japanese War.[562] Indeed, throughout the period of the late 1930s and into the early 1940s, the study of philosophy remained an important theme in Mao's quest to deepen his understanding of Marxism.[563] Mao was concerned to understand the universal dimension of the theory of Marxism – its universal laws, it methodology and its logic – and he was also concerned to find ways to apply these universal principles and categories to the resolution of the serious challenges confronting the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He remained convinced that a knowledge of the universal laws of Marxist philosophy – such as the law of the unity of opposites, so central to his own ontological beliefs – was of no benefit if not applied in a quite practical way to the essential task of gaining knowledge of the particular characteristics of China and the Chinese Revolution. Knowledge of the particular, gleaned through an understanding and application of the universal, could function as a basis for purposive and carefully reasoned political and military strategies and tactics. It was therefore imperative, Mao believed, that the insights he had gained into Marxist philosophy, or at least the New Philosophy's rendition of it, be also understood by the Party's members and applied in the performance of their duties. It was not just a matter of him individually grasping the content and significance of philosophy, for this would achieve only limited effect. Only when Party members possessed a firm grasp of Marxist philosophy could the Party expect with any confidence that its widely dispersed body of cadres be able to apply the laws and categories of dialectical materialism to an understanding of their own localised contexts and problems, and in so doing arrive at a clearer understanding of how to advance the Party's broad policy agenda. Dialectical materialism, Mao believed, held the key to the link between the universal and the particular, and grasping this link was an imperative need for those whose historical objectives rose above concern for the localised context of their operation. And Mao firmly believed

[562] Compare Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, revised edition), p. 87.

[563] See *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji* [The philosophical annotations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988), pp. 205–492.

that the revolution that he led would not, could not, represent a merely parochial event possessed of no general historical significance. Without comprehending the universal sweep of history and the part played in it by the particular characteristics of China and its revolution, the CCP was destined to play a role at the margins, a mere eddy in the torrent of history. Mao was determined that this would not be the case; hence his determination to unravel the mysteries of dialectical materialism, to grasp its universal laws and principles, and to employ these to penetrate the surface reality of Chinese society and grasp the dynamic web of contradictions that lay beneath. Far from being a scholastic exercise, the study of Marxist philosophy thus represented an imperative task, one that had to be pursued, not just by Mao himself, but by all members of the Party.

Mao was therefore not content to merely satisfy his own evident curiosity about Marxist philosophy, although this was an important motivation for his deep engagement with it. He was concerned to find ways in which the knowledge he had gained from his study of philosophy might be used to achieve the fundamental goals of the Chinese Revolution and the process of socialist construction that would follow its victory; and he recognised that the effective dissemination of the principles and categories of dialectical materialism amongst the Party's membership required organisation, a skill he possessed in abundance. Mao thus initiated the establishment of an organisation whose brief was the study of Marxist philosophy and its dissemination throughout the Party. That organisation, the Yanan New Philosophy Association (YNPA), represented a significant initiative in translating Mao's interest in Marxist philosophy into an institutional form, and its establishment and operation constitute an important chapter in the history of Marxist philosophy in China up to and including the Seventh Congress of the CCP in April 1945. It also represents a very significant, although largely ignored,[564] chapter in the process of the emergence and consolidation of 'Mao Zedong Thought', which became, at the Seventh Party Congress, the 'guiding theory' of the CCP.[565]

This chapter provides a sketch of the history of the YNPA, looking in particular at its establishment, its personnel and their functions, its publication activities, and its role in the ideological campaigns of the early 1940s. It reflects too on the emphasis of leading intellectuals within the YNPA, including Ai Siqi, on the need for a Sinified Marxism, and the significance of their formulations for the emergence of 'Mao Zedong Thought' as the Party's ideology, representing the 'thought that unites the theories of Marxism-Leninism with the actual practice of the Chinese revolution'.[566]

[564] Perhaps the most detailed treatment of the 'revolutionary discourse' of the Yanan period does not even mention the Yanan New Philosophy Association. See David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also Boyd Compton, *Mao's China: Party Reform Documents, 1942–44* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1952, 1966), Introduction.

[565] Liu Shao-chi, *On the Party* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1950), pp. 29–36.

[566] Ibid., p. 29.

1. THE YANAN NEW PHILOSOPHY ASSOCIATION: ESTABLISHMENT

There are a number of reasons why the CCP felt it appropriate, in late June 1938, to establish the YNPA.[567] First, the ending of the Long March and the consolidation of the Yanan base area with the formation of the Second United Front with the Guomindang had made Yanan a relatively secure environment in which to encourage the widespread study of philosophy. Second, intellectuals from many parts of China had converged on Yanan. Some were drawn to the Communist cause by patriotic sentiments aroused by the Japanese invasion of China; others were communists or communist sympathisers whose activities had been rendered dangerous through the repression of the Guomindang government, and who sought the possibility of open participation in revolutionary activities. Whatever their motivation, this influx created the critical mass of intellectuals necessary for the leadership of the CCP to consider the establishment of institutions whose role would be to develop the cultural and theoretical level of the Party.[568]

Third, there is a direct connection between Mao's intensive bout of philosophical study and writing from 1936 to early 1938 and the establishment of the YNPA in mid 1938. He felt strongly that what he had been studying was important for the Party as a whole, and he personally advocated the establishment of the YNPA and took a strong interest in its operation. He proposed that Ai Siqi and He Sijing put in place the groundwork for the YNPA.[569] Ai Siqi, perhaps China's most famous Marxist philosopher, had arrived in Yanan in October 1937, quickly established a close personal relationship with Mao and had engaged in philosophical dialogue with him (see Chapter 6). Mao was aware of Ai's involvement in the establishment and administration of cultural and philosophical organisations in Shanghai in the early to mid 1930s, and also of his demonstrated flair for editing journals and periodicals.[570] He clearly felt that Ai Siqi was the right person to entrust with the task of establishing and nurturing a fledgling organisation charged with disseminating and encouraging the study of Marxist philosophy within the Party. Similarly, Mao knew of He Sijing's reputation as a philosopher and legal theorist. He Sijing had studied philosophy and law in Japan from 1916–27, and on his return to China in 1927 had taken up a post as professor at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou. In the early 1930s, he actively participated in the CCP's anti-Japanese activities in Shanghai, and in March 1938, he travelled to Yanan, and was welcomed

[567] There is not agreement amongst Chinese scholars regarding the date of establishment of the YNPA. See Xu Sunhua and Yu Lianghua, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – yi' [An introduction to historical materials on the Yanan New Philosophy Association – Part 1], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 5 (1984), pp. 7–11. Scholars had earlier considered August–September the probable date for the establishment of the YNPA. However, research in China during the early 1980s found that late June 1938 was the date it was established.

[568] Ibid., pp. 8–9.

[569] Ibid., p. 9.

[570] For analysis of Ai's philosophical and political activities during his 'Shanghai period' (1931–1937), see Xie Benshu, *Zhanshixuezhe: Ai Siqi* [The fighting scholar: Ai Siqi] (Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1999), Chapter 8.

by Mao and other Party leaders and asked to take up a post teaching philosophy at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University.[571] The presence in Yanan of Ai Siqi and He Sijing, two Marxist philosophers of national reputation, at the very time Mao was himself deeply involved in the study of Marxist philosophy, was without doubt a factor that encouraged Mao's thinking regarding the possibility of establishing an organisation to foster the study of philosophy within the Party.[572]

Mao's proposal to establish the YNPA was supported by other leaders within the Party centre (Zhu De, Luo Fu [Zhang Wentian]), and there was an enthusiastic response from senior cadres involved in theoretical and cultural work. On 30 September 1938 eighteen of these wrote an article, published in the weekly journal *Liberation*, which announced to the Party and its supporters the foundation of the YNPA, and set out its objectives. The authors of the article were Ai Siqi, He Sijing, Ren Baige, Zhang Qinfu, Chen Boda, Zhang Ruxin, Wu Liping, Gao Siqi, Zhou Yang, Liu Zhiming, Ke Bainian, Wang Xuewen, Yang Song, Jiao Minzhi, Cheng Fangwu, Xu Maorong, Wang Sihua and Guo Huaruo. These were not only philosophers; they were representatives of a wide range of disciplines – philosophy, economics, political science, history, literary theory, education, military science and international studies.[573] These intellectuals had well-established reputations in their respective fields; some were to go on to forge national reputations and positions of considerable power and influence in post-Liberation China. Their endorsement of the YNPA's establishment indicates the impetus generated by Mao's encouragement of the study of philosophy within the Party.

The endorsement of the YNPA by these well known intellectuals underlines the point that, while this fledgling organisation's brief was the study of philosophy, that brief was to be interpreted quite broadly, to include a variety of cultural and intellectual concerns (some with quite practical applications, such as the dialectics of military science). Nevertheless, the core function of the YNPA was to create the context for the widespread study of philosophy within the Party. Moreover, while the YNPA did undertake the study of some other philosophical traditions, its focus was clearly on Marxist philosophy. More specifically, it focused, at least initially, on the study of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy that had exerted such a profound impact on Marxist philosophers in China during the early to mid 1930s. Indeed, so important was the New Philosophy to Mao and those charged with establishing this philosophical association that the words 'New Philosophy' were emblazoned on its masthead. The naming of this organisation in this way is of considerable significance, for it demonstrates only too clearly the perspective on Marxist philosophy that had come to dominate the thinking of Marxist philosophers in China, and particularly the thinking of Mao himself. In their minds, the New Philosophy was synonymous with Marxist philosophy; it was also synonymous with philosophical orthodoxy. While, as we will observe, an important theme in the discussions of the YNPA was how Marxist philosophy could be rendered relevant to

[571] See Luo Yuanpeng and Feng Guixian (eds), *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang cidian* [Dictionary of the philosophical thought of Mao Zedong] (Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993), pp. 1104–6.

[572] Xu Sunhua and Yu Lianghua, 'Yanan xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – yi', p. 8.

[573] Ibid., p. 9.

the Chinese context, debates on this issue were firmly grounded in the belief that the Marxist philosophy being applied in China and to Chinese conditions was orthodox Marxist philosophy. Given the contemporary significance of the Soviet Union within the international communist movement and the enormous impact that its philosophy had had amongst Marxist intellectuals in China from the early 1930s, that belief appeared well founded.

2. ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE YNPA

The establishment of the YNPA initiated a flurry of philosophical study within the Party in Yanan and further afield. Under the auspices of the YNPA, many philosophy study groups were organised in schools, colleges and Party organisations. Following Mao's call in October 1938 for 'the spreading and deepening of the study of Marxism-Leninism',[574] he established his own philosophy study group (*zhexue xiaozu*), which included Ai Siqi, He Sijing, Yang Chao, He Peiyuan and Chen Boda.[575] This group met in Mao's cave one evening a week, and met regularly for about three months. Many philosophical issues were discussed, but discussion revolved around the theory of contradictions and theoretical issues concerning strategies in the Anti-Japanese War. Mao also initiated discussion of the theory of process (*guochenglun*), and gave the group's members mimeographed copies of his essays 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction', and asked them to give him their opinions.[576] Central Party units, including the Propaganda Department, the General Political Department and the Organisation Department, followed Mao's initiative, and established their own philosophy study groups.[577] This was an institutional pattern that was employed throughout the late 1930s and into the early 1940s, as the YNPA worked to introduce consideration of philosophy into the regular work patterns of Party units.

The push by Mao and the YNPA to encourage the study of philosophy was bolstered by the decision of the Party Centre, taken in March 1939, to launch a campaign for the study of theory. The campaign commenced in June 1939, and involved cadres at all levels in numerous organisations – offices, schools, army and mass organisations – participating in study for two hours every day. The campaign was initiated by a series of lectures attended by hundreds and sometimes thousands of cadres. This phase of the campaign was transformed into the by now familiar pattern of the establishment of philosophy study groups within units. An example

[574] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), Vol. II, p. 499.

[575] Guo Huaruo, 'Mao zhuxi kangzhan chuqi guanghui de zhexue huodong' [The glorious philosophical activities of Chairman Mao in the early years of the Anti-Japanese War], *Zhongguo zhexue* (1979), Volume I, pp. 31–7. Guo's recollections are somewhat imprecise on both the timing and membership of Mao's philosophy study group. See also Wang Liang, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – er' [An introduction to historical materials on the Yanan New Philosophy Association – Part 2], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 6 (1984), p. 1.

[576] Xie Benshu, *Zhanshixuezhe: Ai Siqi*, p. 149.

[577] Wang Liang, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – er', pp. 1–2.

was the high power group re-established within the Propaganda Department in early 1940. This group, led by Zhang Wentian with Ai Siqi as its instructor, met every Saturday for three hours, and was attended by more than a hundred people. This institutional approach was gradually formalised in a series of central directives as the Party moved to regularise the study of theory and culture, including philosophy, within Party units.[578] The influence of the YNPA thus extended beyond the narrowly philosophical to the forms of organisation established to inculcate appropriate study habits within Party units.

The powerful influence of the YNPA in the formation of theory and ideology within the Party can also be perceived in the convening of its First Annual Conference. The opening session of this Conference was held on 21 June 1940 in the Yanan Cultural Club, and was attended by Mao Zedong, Zhang Wentian, Zhu De, Mao Dun, Ai Siqi, He Sijing, Chen Boda, Zhou Yang and some fifty other leading intellectuals.[579] It was intended that the Conference last for some three months, with one meeting held each week to allow members of the YNPA to present the results of their research. Mao addressed the opening session of the Conference, expressing his pleasure at the achievements of the YNPA in the two years since its establishment had been mooted. He reaffirmed the importance of theory and expressed regret that the development of theory had lagged behind, for without a theory that could reveal the nature of the revolution, victory in the revolution could not be achieved. He noted the auspicious circumstances in Yanan for the study of theory, particularly the influx of cultural workers and philosophers whose task it was to shoulder the burden of raising the Party's low level of theory. If this could be achieved, 'the future of the New Philosophy is bright'.[580]

The conference was also addressed by Zhu De who, like Mao, spoke of the importance of theory, and of the achievements of the broad masses of cadres in studying the New Philosophy. He also expressed the hope that the YNPA could produce concise and relatively simple textbooks on philosophy suitable for the needs of those at the front, a sentiment echoed in Zhang Wentian's speech. Zhang also called on the YNPA to work hard to integrate the study of the New Philosophy with practical struggle and, as part of this imperative, to foster the study of the New Philosophy in areas beyond Yanan. Both of these imperatives were picked up in Ai Siqi's address, and he expressed the hope that the link between the YNPA and the philosophy study groups in the Party's various units outside Yanan could be strengthened.[581]

An important theme in the opening speeches of He Sijing and Ai Siqi, the co-directors of the YNPA, was affirmation of the importance of three key theoretical texts written by Mao Zedong: 'On Protracted War', 'On New Democracy', and 'On the New Stage'. The language used by He and Ai in praise of these essays anticipates the role that the YNPA would play in the formation of Mao's ideas into

[578] Ibid., 1–3.

[579] For a description and evaluation of the YNPA's First Annual Conference, see Xu Sunhua and Yu Lianghua, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – yi', pp. 9–11.

[580] Ibid., p. 10.

[581] Ibid., pp. 9–11.

an identifiable ideology, eventually to be given the title of 'Mao Zedong Thought', and enshrined in April 1945 as the Party's 'guiding theory'. While He and Ai continued, at the First Conference, to speak of the New Philosophy as the object of their study and the focus of the YNPA's research and organisational activities, it would not be many years before that theoretical rubric was to be replaced by 'Mao Zedong Thought', within which the core principles of the New Philosophy were to be incorporated and their origins in Soviet philosophy increasingly obscured. The YNPA was to play a significant role in this transition from New Philosophy to Mao Zedong Thought, and its commitment to this process was born of a belief that the universal principles of Marxism, as enshrined in the New Philosophy, had to be integrated with the practice of the Chinese Revolution, the latter being an area in which Mao was held to have excelled. There was thus a very substantial meeting of minds between Mao and his intellectual supporters, for the issue of how a national form for Marxism could be created – one that was genuinely Marxist while authentically Chinese – was to become a major topic of concern for the YNPA's leading philosophers and theorists. We will turn to a consideration of their deliberations shortly.

The presence of Mao and other senior Party leaders at the opening session of the First Conference of the YNPA and their endorsement of its achievements and program indicate the important position that it had come to occupy in the theoretical life of the CCP. Its putative objective – of creating the organisational basis for encouraging the study of the New Philosophy throughout the Party – was deemed crucial to the theoretical and ideological development of the Party.

3. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION ACTIVITIES OF THE YNPA

While He Sijing and Ai Siqi's time and energies were heavily committed to the organisational duties attendant on co-directors of a busy and rapidly growing organisation in which the Party Centre had invested considerable faith and resources, they never lost sight of the importance of generating the texts necessary for the rapid and effective dissemination of the New Philosophy throughout the Party. While, as we have seen, China's Marxist philosophers had had access to the seminal texts of the New Philosophy since the early 1930s and had often played a vital role in their early translation and dissemination, these texts constituted a rather limited and undifferentiated collection from which an understanding of Marxist philosophy might be gleaned by the Party's extensive membership. Ai and He were very conscious of this paucity of philosophical texts, particularly in the rather spartan environment of Yanan. To meet the demands emanating from the Party Centre for a Party-wide study of theory and philosophy, the YNPA set itself an ambitious program of research, writing and translation. Its prolific publication record in the late 1930s and early 1940s reveals how successful the YNPA was in this endeavour, and also provides an indication of its significance for the Party's study and ideological campaigns (particularly the *Zhengfeng* or rectification campaign of 1942–44), which would have been much more modest had not the

YNPA contributed to the creation of an appropriate and appropriately large textual basis for them.

The YNPA's research and publication activities were divided into three categories. The first was translation. While a number of key texts on Marxism and the New Philosophy had earlier been translated into Chinese, some by senior members of the YNPA,[582] many documents central to the Marxist theoretical tradition remained unavailable to the exclusively Chinese reader. The YNPA set out to remedy this deficiency. For example, He Sijing translated Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*.[583] Another important translation was *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) – Short Course*, a text with considerable significance for the study of Marxist philosophy, as it contained Stalin's 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism' (this section translated by Bo Gu).[584] The YNPA rapidly mobilised a large number of theorists and translators in the effort to make this document quickly available in Chinese, and it spawned a number of interpretative texts, one by Ai Siqi.[585] Ai also translated *Makesi Engesi guanyu weiwushiguan de jiufeng tongxin* (Marx and Engels: Nine letters on the materialist conception of history), and He Bonian translated '*Liening lun zhandou de weiwuzhuyi de yiyi*' (Lenin on the significance of militant materialism).[586]

Second, the YNPA was involved in the editing and compilation of documents in a form suitable for study campaigns. Party leaders had called for the production of books suitable for rank and file cadres, who had not the time or educational background to grapple with the weighty tomes spawned by the New Philosophy.[587] Ai Siqi and his colleagues consequently brought together in individual volumes extracts from the seminal texts of the New Philosophy. An example is *Zhexue xuanji* (Selected writings on philosophy, 1939), edited by Ai.[588] The first section of this volume contained extracts of Shirokov and Aizenberg's *A Course on Dialectical Materialism*, Mitin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* and *Outline of New Philosophy*, Li Da's *Elements of Sociology* and Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. The second section contained 'Outline for Study', written by Ai himself.[589] Another significant example is *MaEnLieSi sixiang fangfalun* (The methodological thought of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, 1942), again edited by

[582] For discussion of the significance of translation to the introduction of Marxism to China, see Nick Knight, *Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), Chapter 5. For a list of Marxist texts translated into Chinese in the late 1920s and early 1930s, see Song Zhiming and Zhao Dezhi, *Xiandai Zhongguo zhexue sichao* [Philosophical trends in contemporary China] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 53–4.

[583] Both of these translations were published by Jiefang chubanshe (Liberation Press) in Yanan. See Wang Liang, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – er', pp. 1–3.

[584] See Sun Kexin, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – si' [An introduction to historical materials on the Yanan New Philosophy Association – Part 4], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 2 (1985), pp. 2–3.

[585] Ibid., p. 3.

[586] Wang Liang, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – er', pp. 1–3.

[587] Xu Sunhua and Yu Lianghua, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – yi', p. 10.

[588] Ai Siqi, *Zhexue xuanji* [Selected writings on philosophy] (Yanan: Jiefang she, 1939).

[589] For Mao's annotations to this text, see *Mao Zedong zhexue pizhuji*, pp. 303–88.

Ai Siqi, this time at the direct request of Mao Zedong for use in the *Zhengfeng* campaign.[590]

Third, members of the YNPA devoted considerable time to the writing of books and articles on Marxist philosophy, its application to the study of history and to the prosecution of military struggle. The latter represents a somewhat unorthodox though, given the exigencies of the time, entirely understandable preoccupation for the YNPA's philosophers and theorists. He Sijing, for example, translated Clausewitz's *On War* in 1938, and at Mao's behest had turned to a study of military science from the perspective of dialectical materialism. Others within the YNPA also responded, including Guo Huaruo, whose 'Introduction to Military Dialectics' was presented at the YNPA's First Annual Conference and subsequently published in the *Journal of the Eighth Route Army*.[591] Other philosophers within the YNPA adopted a more clearly recognisable philosophical focus. Ai Siqi, for example, wrote *Lectures on Philosophy*, Bo Gu wrote *Basic issues in Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, and He Peiyuan wrote 'Formal Logic and Dialectics'. Some of its members examined the implications of dialectical materialism for the study of history, and particularly for the study of Chinese history. Examples are Wu Enhua's 'On the question of the motive force of development in socialist and communist societies', published in *Chinese Culture* in 1941, and Ai Siqi's 'How to apply dialectical and historical materialism to the study of the history of society'.[592]

It is evident that members of the YNPA, some of them philosophers and theorists with national reputations, worked with great commitment to make available to Party members elaborations of pure and applied Marxist philosophy. While the YNPA did not publish its own journal, its members published widely in Yanan and beyond in journals such as *Chinese Culture*, *Liberation*, the *Military and Political Journal of the Eighth Route Army*, and *Liberation Daily* (all published in Yanan), and in *New China Daily*, *The Masses*, and *Theory and Reality* (published in Chongqing). Their books were normally published by Jiefang chubanshe (Liberation Press).[593]

4. THE YNPA AND THE SINIFICATION OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

The title of the Yanan New Philosophy Association is, as I have suggested, significant in that it overtly drew its inspiration from the New Philosophy, the rendition of Marxist Philosophy deemed orthodox by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after 1931. In the act of naming it, the founders of the YNPA were firmly identifying the philosophical orientation of this fledgling organisation, and in so doing asserted its activities and publications could rightfully assume the mantle of

[590] See Compton, *Mao's China*, pp. xlix–l. Also Wang Liang, 'Yanan xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – er', pp. 1–3.

[591] Dong Yukun, 'Yanan xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – wu' [An introduction to historical materials on the Yanan New Philosophy Association – Part 5], *Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai*, No. 5 (1985), pp. 5–10.

[592] Wang Liang, 'Yanan xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – er', pp. 1–3.

[593] Ibid., pp. 1–3.

orthodoxy. They accepted that the New Philosophy *was* Marxist Philosophy, and not merely a Russian or Sovietised version of it. It had universal significance, and was consequently as relevant in China and to the understanding of Chinese conditions as it was in Europe or the Soviet Union.

While the evidence points to their general acceptance of the universality of the New Philosophy, it is clear that Marxist philosophers in China were also cognisant of the need to apply this universal philosophy to the particular historical context of China. This had been evident in their writings of the 1920s, and particularly so from the early 1930s.[594] Many of those who had expressed concern that Marxist philosophy had to be applied in China for an understanding of Chinese conditions were the very philosophers and theorists who came to occupy leading positions within the YNPA. They were now in close personal contact with Mao and other Party leaders who, from a more overtly political perspective, considered the application of Marxism to the resolution of the problems of the Chinese Revolution an urgent necessity. There was thus a meeting of minds between the political leadership of the CCP and its elite cadre of philosophers and theorists on the imperative need to discover a theoretical formulation that would allow the application of Marxism to China's particular conditions without appearing to abandon its universal dimension. It was on this task that the YNPA was to focus much of its energy.

The issue of the 'Sinification' of Marxist philosophy was not a novel one for the YNPA's philosophers. Indeed, in an essay of April 1938 entitled 'The current situation of philosophy and its tasks', Ai Siqi had argued the need for 'a movement for the Sinification and actualisation (*xianshihua*) of philosophy'. He suggested that the movement of the early 1930s to popularise Marxist philosophy, in which he had been an active participant, had to be taken a step further through a new movement whose purpose was to Sinify Marxist philosophy.[595] Ai thus anticipated Mao's call of October 1938 for the Sinification of Marxism: '... the Sinification of Marxism – that is to say, making certain that in all of its manifestations it is imbued with Chinese particularities, using it according to these particularities – becomes a problem that must be understood and solved by the whole Party without delay'.[596] It is thus no coincidence that, under Ai's influence and with Mao's encouragement, the YNPA moved quickly to instate the Sinification of Marxism and Marxist philosophy as one of its theoretical priorities, and in a series of articles in *Chinese Culture* and *Liberation*, published the results of its deliberations.

The conclusions of the nine philosophers and theorists who undertook the exercise of explaining the Sinification of Marxism and its significance can be

[594] See Ai Siqi's 1936 'Preface' to *Sixiang fangfalun* (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1939, fourth edition), p. 160. Here Ai talked of the need to 'apply it [the New Philosophy] concretely to the practical problems of China'.

[595] Xie Benshu, *Zhanshi xuezhe: Ai Siqi*, pp. 143–4.

[596] Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 172. Translation modified. For the original, see Takeuchi Minoru, *Mao Zedong ji* [Collected writings of Mao Zedong] (Tokyo: Hokubasha, 1970–72), Volume VI, p. 261.

summarised as follows.[597] First, China could only establish a new culture if there was a successful Sinification of Marxism-Leninism. Taking Mao's call for New Democracy in China as their point of departure, they argued that practitioners within all fields and disciplines – Chinese history, political economy, philosophy, literature, music, fine arts, drama, poetry and the natural sciences – had to use Marxism-Leninism, and particularly dialectical materialism, to establish, consolidate and develop a New Democratic culture. In the context of the United Front and the Anti-Japanese War, this necessitated the formulation of a culture that would unite the Chinese people on the basis of opposition to imperialism and feudalism, and which would build a culture that had a recognisably Chinese national form. Second, Marxism-Leninism would itself be enriched through its Sinification, through its application to Chinese conditions; it was not a one-way street, of Marxism only influencing China, for an understanding of China's historical conditions contributed to the development of the theoretical dimension of Marxism-Leninism. Third, the significance of the Sinification of Marxism-Leninism lay not just in its capacity to reveal the particularities of Chinese society, but in transforming China. There was thus an activist purpose to the process of Sinifying Marxism, and it was accepted implicitly that this was in keeping with the revolutionary thrust of Marxism and Marxist philosophy.

A major figure in the YNPA's quest to formulate a perspective on the Sinification of Marxism was, as one would expect, Ai Siqi. Ai argued, in 'On China's particular characteristics' (1940), that the Sinification of Marxism imposed on Chinese Marxists the obligation to adopt the standpoint, fundamental principles and spirit of Marxism, and to use the scientific methodology of dialectical materialism and political economy as formulated by Marx and Engels. These had to be used in the concrete study of China's society and economic relations, and to determine the tasks and strategies of the Chinese proletariat in the context of the Chinese national revolution. The Sinification of Marxism implied, above all, rejection of an abstract and scholastic perspective on Marxism; it had to be made concrete through its application to China's concrete problems.[598] Marxism could not be separated from practice; Marxists not only had to engage in the study of theory, but also put Marxism into practice and in so doing foster the Marxist project within the particular conditions of a specific country. Ai stressed that this did not constitute any loss in significance of the Marxist standpoint, for it was only when Marxism was applied in practice that the possibility of generating Marxist theory existed. One can perceive in this position on the Sinification of Marxism a logical, if considerably more explicit, extension of Ai's position on the mode of elaboration of Marxist philosophy for a Chinese audience perfected by him in the early 1930s. At that time, Ai was convinced that Marxist philosophy had to be explained in a way that connected with the everyday experiences of ordinary Chinese people (see Chapters 6

[597] For a useful summary of the YNPA's writings on the 'Sinification of Marxism' see Dong Yukun, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – wu', pp. 1–6.

[598] Ibid., p. 2. See also *Ai Siqi wenji* [Collected writings of Ai Siqi] (Beijing: Renimin chubanshe, 1980), Vol. 1, pp. 471–87.

and 7). This did not mean resiling from Marxism's universal principles, but necessitated discovering instances of their manifestation within a recognisably Chinese context and using these as illustrations with which his readership could identify. It was precisely this double engagement – with the universal principles of Marxism and Chinese particularities – that so attracted Mao to Ai's expository approach. In the Yanan of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ai was in a context that encouraged him to articulate a formula that described at the level of theory his rhetorical approach to the elaboration and dissemination of Marxist philosophy in the specific conditions of China. The formula Ai arrived at satisfied the requirements of both universality and particularity (so Mao believed), and specified their relationship in a dialectical manner.

Another philosopher within the YNPA, He Peiyuan, formulated the expression subsequently often used to articulate the relationship between the universality of Marxism and China's particular characteristics. In an article entitled 'On the New Philosophy's characteristics and its Sinification', He expressed the view that the Sinification of the New Philosophy involved the 'integration' of the universal principles of dialectical and historical materialism and the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution. According to He, this integration was an organic, not a mechanical, one. It derived not just from an understanding of dialectical materialism's categories and formulae, but had to be based on actual research (*shiji yanjiu*) of the laws of the Chinese revolution and their connection to China's history and society. Only if this approach was used could the New Philosophy become a powerful ideological weapon.[599]

Given their focus on the Sinification of Marxism, it is no wonder that the philosophers of the YNPA gave special attention to the issue of methodology, for a correct methodology was essential if Marxism was to be correctly applied to China. They branded two methodologies as incorrect. The first, Zhang Zhidong's famous aphorism 'Chinese learning as the basis, Western learning for application' represented a negation of the universality implicit in the particular characteristics of Chinese society; it betokened an unwillingness to perceive the commonalities between China and other societies. In this respect, it was on a par with 'the Trotskyist' philosopher Ye Qing's insistence that the Sinification of Marxism represented a theory for only grasping China's particularities, a theory of specifically national conditions (*guoqinglun*). These theories were opposed to dialectical materialism, and hence reactionary and anti-scientific. The second, the methodology of mechanical materialism, repudiated China's particular characteristics, endorsing a mechanical application of the experiences of European and Soviet revolution to China.

In contrast to these two incorrect methodologies – one focused too much on China's particular characteristics, the other disregarding them – stood dialectical materialism, the worldview and methodology of Marxism. This allowed a dialectical understanding of the laws that described the commonalities characterising all societies and their manifestation in particular form in different societies. An understanding of the latter was based on a comprehension of the former, but the

[599] Dong Yukun, 'Yanan Xinzhexuehui shiliao jieshao – wu', p. 3.

development of theory at a general level depended crucially on the contribution made by an understanding of particular historical instances. Only with this 'correct methodology', one that integrated the universal and the particular, could the process of the Sinification of Marxism be successfully achieved. The implications of this methodology were that Marxist philosophers in China could not separate themselves from the practice of the Chinese Revolution; it also implied that they were under an obligation to systematically study Chinese history, and particularly the history of Chinese philosophy. Ominously, it necessitated philosophers gaining a theoretically informed awareness of the distinction between correct and incorrect philosophy, and employing this knowledge in the struggle with those parties and factions who expressed and acted on an incorrect methodology.[600]

5. FROM MAO ZEDONG'S THOUGHT TO 'MAO ZEDONG THOUGHT': THE ROLE OF THE YNPA

Having explored the theoretical character of the Sinification of Marxism, the philosophers and theorists of the YNPA bent their energies to extolling Mao Zedong's contribution to the actual Sinification of Marxism. It must be remembered that, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Mao's thought had not yet become the Party's 'guiding theory'. For this to occur a process of transformation had to occur, one in which the disparate ideas and thoughts of Mao Zedong, the individual person, became 'Mao Zedong Thought', a codified body of ideas and policies provided the aura of authority through their identification with Mao Zedong, the historical persona and leader figure. The YNPA was to play a major role in this transformative process of codification and identification. Its philosophers and theorists readily assumed the responsibility of generating ideology out of ideas, of constructing a mode of discourse in which this ideology could be expressed, and of reinforcing its asserted superiority through mapping and defending the discursive tracks along which acceptable internal Party dialogue could proceed. The role of the YNPA in the formation of 'Mao Zedong Thought', the ideology of the CCP after the Party's Seventh Congress in April 1945, consequently deserves greater recognition than it has received.

The philosophers and theorists of the YNPA defined Mao's contribution to the process of the Sinification of Marxism in a manner that was to become recognisable and familiar in subsequent years, particularly after 1949, but which during the late 1930s and early 1940s still possessed a sense of novelty, of an ideology in construction.[601] First, Mao had clarified the nature of Chinese society and its class relations, and the particular characteristics of the Chinese revolution. Mao had recognised that China was a colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, and that China had, following the First World War and the Russian Revolution, entered the stage of the New Democratic revolution. In so doing, he developed Lenin and

[600] Ibid., pp. 5–6.
[601] The following summary is drawn from Ibid., pp. 3–5.

Stalin's theory of the stage that the Chinese Revolution had reached. Second, Mao enriched and developed Lenin's and Stalin's theory and tactics of the United Front, particularly in the context of the Anti-Japanese War. Mao had dialectically identified the relationship between the CCP and the Guomindang as being one of both identity *and* struggle, in contrast to the First United Front of the 1920s in which there had been insufficient attention paid by the CCP to struggle with its partner in the United Front. Third, Mao successfully addressed the question of political power within the context of the Chinese Revolution. He recognised the need for worker-peasant Soviet power, and provided a political theory and strategies appropriate to the New Democratic revolution during the Anti-Japanese War, in particular pointing out how the political form of New Democracy was distinguished from both Western democracies and the proletarian dictatorships of socialist societies. Fourth, Mao recognised the need for the CCP to have its own armed force, and gained considerable experience in the appropriate strategic and tactical deployment of the military in establishing and defending revolutionary base areas. He developed tactics – of mobile guerrilla warfare and protracted war – that allowed the possibility of a successful outcome in engaging a far more powerful enemy. Mao's strategic military perspective allowed him to predict that the revolution would ultimately triumph. Fifth, Mao recognised the importance to the Chinese Revolution of China's peasants and the land question, and through lengthy experience developed and enriched Marx and Lenin's theoretical approach toward the peasantry. Sixth, Mao made a major contribution to the Marxist-Leninist theory of party building by establishing a new form of communist party in the context of internal Party struggles against the deviations of opportunism and adventurism.

Seventh, and of most interest to the primary focus of this book, Mao had made a very significant contribution to the Sinification of the New Philosophy. In his 1937 'Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism', Mao had explained in an accessible way the materialist dialectics of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. He had made clear the distinction between the principal and secondary laws of dialectics, and had demonstrated the close integration of dialectics, the political activities of the Chinese proletariat and the practice and experience of the Chinese Revolution. In particular, Mao's treatise on the law of the unity of opposites was a fine example of a Sinified Marxism-Leninism. Not only had Mao explained the New Philosophy in an exemplary way, he had stressed the importance of its application to the Chinese Revolution.

While the philosophers of the YNPA, such as Ai Siqi, He Peiyuan, Zhang Ruxin, and Yang Song, continued, into the early 1940s, to mention the influence of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy in their laudatory accounts of Mao's philosophical contribution to the Sinification of Marxism-Leninism, one can discern in their essays a tendency to push Mao further into the foreground and to place less stress on the influence of the New Philosophy. It was Mao's contribution to Marxist philosophy, rather than the major influence on his philosophical thought, the New Philosophy, which was becoming the focus of attention, admiration and emulation. This tendency was to become increasingly pronounced in subsequent years, until Mao's debt to the New Philosophy largely disappeared in commentaries on his philosophical thought. The irony is that those who produced commentaries on Mao's

philosophy, and particularly Ai Siqi and (after 1949) Li Da, knew only too well that Mao's philosophical thought was not *sui generis*, but highly derivative of the New Philosophy. These proficient and erudite philosophers, themselves powerfully influenced by the philosophical claims of the New Philosophy, were being drawn into a larger intellectual project, one whose political implications rendered impolitic continued stress on the philosophical precursors to Mao's philosophy. Yet, having once accepted the first premise of the New Philosophy – the Party-character of philosophy – they were in no position to resile from the task of constructing the philosophical dimension of the Party's ideology, and in particular, the ideology of the Party's leader. Indeed, there is no evidence that senior philosophers and theorists of the YNPA looked askance at this shift from philosophy to ideology; it represented a logical extension of the political commitment that underlay their particular philosophical orientation. Moreover, Mao himself had inspired the organisational context – the YNPA – within which they worked. Not only did this organisation allow them the possibility of continued philosophical research and activities in a context otherwise far from conducive to such seemingly esoteric pursuits, they found that Mao prized their skills and was enthusiastic to encourage them. They were thus in thrall to Mao himself, were committed to the Party he led, and believed that their contribution to the formation of Party ideology could make a substantial contribution to the successful prosecution of the Anti-Japanese War and the creation of a post-revolutionary socialist society. Is it any wonder then that the YNPA's eminent philosophers and theorists were prepared to participate so readily in the construction of 'Mao Zedong Thought', and to conveniently put out of mind Mao's debt to the New Philosophy?

6. 'MAO ZEDONG THOUGHT': THE PARTY'S 'GUIDING THEORY'

While the YNPA's primary brief was the elaboration and dissemination of information on Marxist Philosophy, particularly the New Philosophy, its research foci and activities strayed far from a narrowly philosophical interpretation of its charter. Its theorists, as we have seen, were involved in the study of military science and Chinese history and culture, as well as non-Marxist philosophies. Most importantly, they accepted as their role the coalescence of Mao's ideas and thoughts into a coherent ideology recognisable as 'Mao Zedong Thought'. The YNPA's contribution to the process of ideological formation within the CCP was thus a very significant one, and its efforts were to come to fruition with the decision of the Party's Seventh Congress of April 1945 to adopt 'Mao Zedong Thought' as its 'guiding theory'.

The 'Resolution', Party Constitution and other documents adopted by the Seventh Party Congress made quite clear that Marxist philosophy represented the intellectual basis of the Party's ideology. For example, the 'General Program' states that the CCP based 'itself on Marxist dialectical and historical materialism'.[602]

[602] Reprinted in Liu Shao-chi, *On the Party*, p. 157.

However, if judged by the space devoted to Marxist philosophy in these two documents, its importance had by then been substantially eclipsed by the significance of Mao's application of this philosophy to an understanding and resolution of the problems of the Chinese Revolution. Moreover, nowhere in these documents is the New Philosophy mentioned by name, although it hovers like a ghost at their margins, recognisable to those cognisant of the genealogy of Marxist philosophy in China, but already invisible to those not conversant with the history of its introduction to China and the process of its elaboration and dissemination. For the uninitiated, it was Mao Zedong's capacity to Sinify the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism that established his thought as the Party's 'guiding theory'; it was much less his roots in orthodox Soviet Marxist philosophy.

The documents of the Seventh Party Congress invoke the language and formulations developed by the philosophers and theorists of the YNPA in their attempts, of the late 1930s and early 1940s, to conceptualise Mao's contribution to the Sinification of Marxism. For example, in his 'Report on the revision of the Party Constitution', Liu Shaoqi stated that:

> The Thought of Mao Tse-tung is the thought that unites Marxist-Leninist theories with the actual practice of the Chinese revolution. It is Communism and Marxism applied to China. .... It has been formulated through the application of the Marxist world outlook and social outlook – dialectical materialism and historical materialism. In other words, it has been formulated on the solid foundation of Marxist-Leninist theories, by taking into account China's national traits, by relying on the exceedingly rich experiences of modern revolution and of the Chinese Communist Party in directing the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people and by making a careful and scientific analysis of such experiences.[603]

Similarly, the 'Resolution' of the Seventh Party Congress sums up Mao's contribution to the Sinification of Marxism as follows:

> The correctness or incorrectness of a political, military or organisational line fundamentally depends on whether it starts ideologically from the Marxist-Leninist theory of dialectical materialism and historical materialism and from the objective realities of the Chinese revolution and the objectives needs of the Chinese people. Ever since the day he joined the Chinese revolution, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has emphasised the application of the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism in the investigation of and study of the actual conditions of Chinese society ... When Communists who live and fight in China study dialectical materialism and historical materialism, they should do so for the purpose of applying them, as Comrade Mao does, to investigate and solve the ... actual problems of the Chinese revolution.[604]

These documents repeatedly refer to the integration of the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the 'actual practice of the Chinese revolution'.[605] We can thus observe, in the way in which overt mention of the New Philosophy was avoided at the Seventh Party Congress, the displacement of genealogy by application and of origin by contemporary political realities. While the core doctrines of the New Philosophy were to survive within 'Mao Zedong Thought' and to persist with

[603] Ibid., pp. 31–2.
[604] *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956), Vol. 4, pp. 207–8.
[605] Ibid., p. 209.

astounding tenacity in the philosophical discourse of the CCP for many decades, its actual influence was, until the more open intellectual environment of the 1980s, concealed by the overwhelming significance attributed to Mao's application of Marxist philosophy to China. And even in the 1980s and 1990s, the influence of the New Philosophy was still portrayed as of less significance to the history of Marxist philosophy in China than Mao's Sinification of it.[606]

Nevertheless, while his debt to his intellectual influences was downplayed or ignored from 1945 until after his death, a non-partisan analysis of Mao's philosophy reveals only too clearly its intellectual roots in the Soviet Union's New Philosophy of the early 1930s. Rather ironically, it was the very philosophers who laboured so hard in the 1930s to ensure the orthodoxy of their version of Marxist philosophy who were so intimately involved, through the efforts of the YNPA, to transform it into what was to become effectively a new orthodoxy – 'Mao Zedong Thought'. Yet, these philosophers were satisfied, with some justification, that the Party's new found 'guiding theory' retained its roots firmly in the soil of mainstream Marxist philosophy, despite its emphasis on the need to establish a form of Marxism suited to China's particular conditions, and despite its change of name. Once 'Mao Zedong Thought' was established as Party ideology, the Yanan New Philosophy Association had consequently outlived its purpose, or at least its title. The task of its philosophers and theorists henceforth was no longer the dissemination of the New Philosophy (under that name, at least) but the elaboration of Mao's philosophical thought. It was to this task that they turned with enthusiasm in the late 1940s and in the far more propitious environment of post-Liberation China.[607]

[606] For a discussion of analysis of Mao Zedong's philosophical thought in China in the 1980s, see Nick Knight, (ed.), *The Philosophical Thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), Introduction.

[607] For analysis of Li Da's philosophical writings and activities of the 1950s and 1960s, see Knight, *Li Da and Marxist philosophy in China*, Chapters 9 and 10.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

– Marxist Philosophy in China, 1923–1945 –

A major theme in the history of Marxist philosophy in China between 1923 and 1945 was the influence of Marxist philosophy imported from the Soviet Union and Europe, often via Japan. The detailed study of Marxist philosophy by Qu Qiubai, the pioneer of Marxist philosophy in China, was dominated by contemporary accounts of Marxist philosophy emanating in the Soviet Union, but having clear links to European Marxism. Qu's brief, as he understood it, was to understand the history of Western philosophy and the position of Marxist philosophy within it, and through this exercise gain a mastery of Marxism's philosophical concepts and forms of reasoning sufficient to broach the resolution of some of its most intractable philosophical problems. Qu's survey of Western philosophy is no descriptive history. It is fashioned as a critique by one whose conversion to Marxism was complete. Qu recognised that his earlier freewheeling intellectual pursuits could not coexist with his commitment to Marxist theory and revolutionary struggle. He also recognised that Marxist theory possessed an intellectual sweep that encompassed and responded to the intellectual dilemmas that perplexed him. Of these, the dilemma of determinism was the most challenging. Qu's attempted resolution of this dilemma was no facile exercise. It was embedded in a serious engagement with all of the major themes of Marxist philosophy: its materialist ontology, epistemology, laws of dialectical materialism, dialectical logic, and social philosophy. From these complex interlocking themes, Qu fashioned a response to the dilemma of determinism that allowed a limited degree of human agency in a material universe governed by laws of causation, and in a materialist social history moving ineluctably towards predetermined ends. While the position at which he arrived is not particularly convincing, one can hardly be unimpressed by the seriousness of Qu's engagement with Marxist philosophy. He was tenacious in pursuing a resolution to the dilemma of determinism that would satisfy his own activist inclinations while retaining the determinism of Marxist social theory and philosophy. In his principal philosophical texts of 1923 and subsequent writings, there is no indication that he was at all dissatisfied by the position at which he had arrived, or with the capacity of Marxist philosophy to respond to this touchstone issue. Whether there was consistency between his philosophical viewpoint on determinism and his political actions, particularly those of 1927–28, is another matter. However, Qu did not resile, in print, from the philosophical position at which he had arrived in 1923.

The influence of Qu's sojourn in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s and his conversion to Marxism there was thus to have long-term consequences for the

history of Marxist philosophy in China. He accepted that the font of philosophical wisdom was the Soviet Union, and he did his utmost to impart his understanding of Marxist philosophy as practised there to his Chinese audience. In so doing, he introduced to the history of Marxist philosophy in China a trend that persisted into the 1930s, that of importing Marxist philosophy into China and its communist movement without, initially at least, considering how that philosophy might be applied to the social and political context of Chinese society and the Chinese Revolution. Was it relevant to the theoretical and practical needs of those whose task was to lead and prosecute the Chinese Revolution? Answering this highly significant question in a logical manner had to wait until Marxist philosophers in China had first mastered the concepts and language of Marxist philosophical discourse as enunciated by Soviet Marxist philosophers. It would have to wait, too, for the emergence in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of a political leader who was adamant that Marxist philosophy had to be made relevant to the practical needs of the revolution, and relabelled to impart it a Chinese air.

Despite Qu's sterling efforts of 1923 to introduce Marxist philosophy to China, the most significant development in the history of Marxist philosophy in China was the introduction in the early 1930s of the Soviet Union's New Philosophy by Ai Siqi, Li Da and other philosophers. The ramifications of this were to be great indeed for the subsequent ideological development of the CCP. Mao's endorsement of the New Philosophy in 1937 determined that Party work would henceforth be underpinned by this construction of Marxist philosophical orthodoxy. Mao, Ai Siqi and Li Da (and many other Marxist philosophers, in China and internationally) accepted implicitly that the New Philosophy *was* Marxist philosophy; other claimants to the status of philosophical orthodoxy were deemed false and repudiated. As the orthodoxy of the CCP, the New Philosophy was given initially modest but later massive institutional support. It was elaborated for widespread consumption both within and without the Party, and defended vigorously against its detractors. The protective skin of orthodoxy hardened into a shell, and within this protective carapace the New Philosophy, as elaborated and illustrated by Mao and a host of his philosophical acolytes under the rubric of 'Mao Zedong Thought', continued as a stubborn survivor into the mercurial and fickle ideological world of post-Liberation China. While its mass appeal has now virtually disappeared, it still holds a significant position in official Party declarations of adherence to Marxism-Leninism; and amongst Party theorists it has not yet been entirely superannuated, although it no longer holds the unchallenged dominance it once did.

The fact that the philosophical substance of the New Philosophy has survived for some seventy years as an essential ingredient of Marxism in China underlines the very great significance of its introduction to China in the early 1930s and Mao's study and endorsement of it in 1936–37. It also underlines the importance of a comprehension of the sources of Mao's understanding of this philosophy: the Soviet texts on philosophy and the writings of Marxist philosophers in China who had accepted and elaborated the New Philosophy. Through the translations and writings of these philosophers, particularly Li Da and Ai Siqi, the New Philosophy entered Chinese intellectual life and became a major force. These texts, which made possible Mao's access to and understanding of the New Philosophy, became available at a

strategically important moment in the ideological development of the CCP. Mao was then emerging as the Party's foremost leader, but he had yet to fully impose his views – on military strategy, Party organisation and work style, art and literature, Marxism and its Sinification, and philosophy – on a Party recently emerged from the near disaster of the Long March and now gearing itself up for a sustained war of resistance against Japanese imperialism. In 1937, Party ideology only partially reflected Mao's ideological viewpoint. That was to change dramatically over the next few years, precisely when Mao was engaging intellectually with the New Philosophy. The years between the late 1930s and the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 were to witness the rise and rise of Mao's thought as the Party's ideology, and, as we observed in Chapter 11, a significant dimension of that ideology was its philosophical dimension. It mattered little that Soviet philosophy was to take a somewhat different tack after 1936 (particularly in relation to the fundamental laws of Marxist philosophy), nor that in Europe different schools of Marxist philosophy had emerged to challenge the New Philosophy's claim to philosophical dominance. From 1937, the New Philosophy, absorbed into the CCP as Marxist orthodoxy, was to continue largely uninfluenced by these philosophical developments in international communism. Its major influences were henceforth generated within the CCP, and of these the most important were the philosophical pronouncements of a leader whose thought was to be elevated to absolute pre-eminence in 1945. It was only after 1981, some five years after Mao's death, that a critical re-evaluation of the history of Marxist philosophy in China could commence, and even since then the basic tenets of the New Philosophy endorsed by Mao in 1937 have been overwhelmingly reaffirmed by China's Marxist philosophers.[608]

The history of Marxist philosophy in China thus remains incomplete without recognition of the extremely important role played in that history by the Soviet Union's New Philosophy. The central planks of Mao's philosophy – his theory of contradictions and theory of practice – were clearly not his own invention. The immediate inspiration for Mao's understanding of these foundational dimensions of Marxist philosophy was the New Philosophy. This philosophy described the law of the unity of opposites (or contradictions) as 'the fundamental law of dialectics', and provided a detailed explanation of its logical structure and examples of its manifestation. Similarly, in its discussion of epistemology, the New Philosophy asserted that practice is the touchstone against which claims to knowledge are evaluated. It was on the foundation of these precepts – contradiction and practice – that Mao shaped his own writings on philosophy, and consequently a philosophy for the Party. Having done so, he never afterwards resiled from these core propositions. With the collaboration of Ai Siqi, Li Da and other philosophers, Mao ensured that this philosophy was disseminated within the Party and beyond in a manner which transcended the bounds of the strictly philosophical. Indeed, it became, as one scholar has pointed out, an arts of living, a philosophical exercise with a strong

[608] Nick Knight (ed.), *The philosophical thought of Mao Zedong: Studies from China, 1981–1989* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Chinese Studies in Philosophy, 1992).

political purpose.[609] For Party cadres and the Chinese masses, it was not just a matter of believing in this philosophy as an abstract system of ideas, but of being able to apply it in a manner that would enhance the ethical and scientific value of their own lives. To be a better communist, to make headway in the personal struggle to dominate nature for the benefit of the masses, the philosophical postulates incorporated in Mao's philosophy had to be grasped as a compass with which to negotiate political and personal challenges.

Looked at from this perspective, it is not the genealogy of Mao's philosophy that should excite excessive attention, for it was safely orthodox by the standards of Soviet Marxist philosophy of the early to mid 1930s, whose core propositions had a long and established history within the Marxist theoretical tradition. Rather, it is in terms of its consumption by Party cadres and the Chinese people that Mao's philosophy distinguishes itself. Philosophy was presented to them as something that could be grasped, not just by philosophers, but by ordinary Chinese men and women and used in the conduct of their own conduct. To achieve this result, philosophy had to be demystified and made accessible to those without specialist knowledge of philosophy as an intellectual discipline; it had to be spoken in a language stripped of mystifying and impenetrable abstractions and made comprehensible through its identification with and illustration of the objects of everyday existence.

This process involved a particular approach to philosophy, and it involved a particular use of language. It is here that Ai Siqi's influence was so important. While Ai was a Marxist philosopher of considerable erudition, he possessed the ability to elaborate through simplification. He took the arcane formulations of dialectical materialism and explained them in a concrete manner, illustrating them by reference to objects and experiences with which his readers were familiar. He commenced from the assumption that his readers could understand philosophy, and the language he chose was appropriate to their level of philosophical understanding. He repudiated an insular and highbrow approach, and wrote in an accessible language. The extent to which he succeeded in this project is attested by the large readership of his columns and the popularity of his books. It is also attested by the fact that Mao perceived in Ai Siqi's approach to philosophical elaboration (rather than the content of his philosophy) something novel, something that could be deployed by himself and the Party to enhance the ideological uniformity and competence of its dispersed and highly differentiated membership. Moreover, Mao perceived that this effect could be achieved beyond the Party itself, among the masses, to inculcate within them a common way of thinking and acting that would have beneficial ethical and scientific results.

The model for philosophical elaboration represented by Ai's approach was one that appealed to Mao as it gelled with his own inherent suspicion of theoretical speculation entirely removed from concrete investigation of practical problems. While he recognised the importance of theory (and his huge commitment of time and intellectual energy to understand dialectical materialism attests to this), he never

[609] Richard Johnson, 'A compendium of the infinite: Exercises of political purpose in the philosophy of Mao Zedong', in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 207–33.

resiled from the view that theory had to useful. His philosophical and theoretical writings forcefully argue the need for the elaboration and consumption of theory for utilitarian purposes, and not for theory's sake. From the moment he commenced his study and annotation of the Soviet texts of the New Philosophy, Mao began reflecting on the way in which the principles of Marxist philosophy could be illustrated by Chinese examples and explained to a non-specialist audience. We observed, in Chapters 6 and 9, some examples of this process of reflection. These make clear a determination, not only to master dialectical materialism's universal laws, but to identify concrete manifestations of these laws in China's history and society. This approach is evident in both 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice'. These essays are far more than abstract treatises on the core principles of dialectical materialism (as Li Da's *Elements of Sociology* tended to be); they project a concern to communicate the meaning and significance of these principles through examples drawn from a particularly Chinese background and experience.

While this approach to Marxism, and particularly its philosophical dimension, may have contributed to the creation of what Arif Dirlik has coined a 'vernacular' Marxism, it did not create a Marxism in isolation from the mainstream Marxist theoretical tradition.[610] The inspiration that Mao drew from Ai's expository approach may have underlined his powerful commitment to the process of the 'Sinification of Marxism'; but the New Philosophy's powerful influence on him highlights the point, made throughout this book, that Marxism in China after 1937 could not be an hermetic ideological entity, one owing little if anything to theoretical currents within the international communist movement. Rather, Mao's philosophy drew on a philosophical tradition that was not Chinese but originally European, one that nevertheless had assumed the stance of universality. It is essential to recognise this genealogy (although many have not), for without doing so, the trajectory that Marxist philosophy in China took is quite incomprehensible. In particular, without this recognition no understanding is possible of the process whereby the core philosophical postulates of the New Philosophy could continue largely unaltered, while its elaboration, dissemination and consumption sought a form in tune with the needs of the Party and those of the Chinese masses, particularly as Mao perceived these. Under Mao, the 'Sinification' of Marxist philosophy was premised on the possibility of a union of theory and practice that was both Marxist *and* Chinese.

The powerful influence of European and particularly Soviet Marxist philosophy on Marxist philosophers in China in the 1920s and 1930s can be perceived in their elaboration of its key philosophical themes. First, each of the philosophers considered in this book recognised and responded to the dilemma posed by the determinism of Marxism. Qu Qiubai, who wrote most extensively on this theme, argued that Marxism is a deterministic, not a fatalistic, theory. For Qu, knowledge of the way in which causation operates allows a degree of agency to conscious human action to effect changes in the natural and social environments. While human agency is limited, and largely limited to 'aggregate' human action, he did not for that reason talk down the importance of striving to bring about change. What was necessary was

[610] Arif Dirlik, 'Modernism and antimodernism in Mao Zedong's Marxism', in Dirlik, Healy and Knight (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought*, pp. 59–83.

knowledge of the possibilities for change inherent in the objective circumstances that humans confronted; this enhanced human capacity to push change to its limits. Qu's denial that Marxism was a fatalistic theory was no mere sophistry, for he was convinced that human action could make a difference, could bring about change. Nevertheless, his detailed philosophical reasoning placed quite extensive limits on human agency.

Ai Siqi and Li Da, like Qu, accepted the basic constraints that a material universe and material social practice imposed on human action, but one senses in their writings the more activist inclinations of the New Philosophy. While this endorsed a thoroughgoing materialism, and gave prominence to the laws of dialectical materialism in determining the nature and motion of all things in the universe, it nevertheless rejected 'economic materialism', which had attributed economic structures and forces with overwhelming causal significance in the unfolding of history; the politico-ideological superstructure played an active role, and at time could be decisive. In line with this view, Ai argued that, while free will was a myth, humans retained a 'relative freedom' to act, and could do so purposefully if their knowledge of their environment was accurate and used to devise actions appropriate to the constraints on and possibilities for change inherent within objective contexts. Li Da likewise drew not only on the New Philosophy, but also on his own writings on social theory of the early 1920s, to bolster a position that rejected the view that Marxism was a fatalistic doctrine. His social philosophy accepted that the superstructure was not a passive reflection of society's economic base. The superstructure possessed a reactive influence; there was a dialectical causal relationship between the economic realm and the realm of human consciousness and political institutions and practices. Nevertheless, in line with his materialist beliefs, Li insisted that this relationship remained an asymmetrical one, for the economic base retained dominance and was ultimately the deciding factor in determining the course, and to a large extent, the pace of historical change.

Mao, like Ai and Li, accepted unreservedly the materialism of Marxist philosophy, but like these influential philosophers, did not accept that materialism implied a retreat into passivity. For Mao, Marxist philosophy reinforced a view that he felt instinctively to be correct: humans could alter their environments and should struggle to do so, but had to be mindful of the constraints that objective circumstances imposed on their efforts. Mao reconciled the determinism of Marxism's materialism and his own activist inclinations by pointing to the practice-based nature of the epistemology of Marxist philosophy. Mao rejected the notion, implicit in some readings of Marxist philosophy, of thought as merely a reflection of reality. This was far too passive a notion for Mao. Rather, his epistemology, in line with that of the New Philosophy, endorsed an active engagement with reality, a process in which both the subject and object were transformed and in which the subject gained knowledge of reality sufficient to formulate tactics for action appropriate to the constraints of the objective situation. Practice, from this perspective, was an important key to understanding how humans could not only exist in the world, but gain knowledge of and transform the world. Mao extended this activist reading of Marxist epistemology to his social philosophy in which he allowed, like Li Da, that society's superstructure could 'sometimes' play

a decisive role in bringing about historical change. He nevertheless continued to insist that 'under normal conditions', the economic base remained dominant, and to that extent his social philosophy remained a recognisably materialist one.

Second, each of the four philosophers considered in this book accepted the proposition that the universe is a material universe in which all things are in motion. The nature of this motion – the movement of objects and the relationships between them – is governed by natural laws. Of these, the law of the unity of opposites is the most fundamental, for this explains the primal cause of motion: contradictions. It is contradictions and the struggle between them that lead to motion and change; this is an inherent characteristic of matter. While Qu equivocated over the relative significance of internal and external change, he accepted that contradictions were fundamental to motion. Later Marxist philosophers in China, in line with the New Philosophy, accepted unreservedly that it was internal contradictions that drove motion and change in all things. They, like Qu, accepted that change was not random or chaotic, for it was the nature of the struggle between contradictions that ensured change proceeded in a purposive manner. The direction and purpose of change could be discerned through the application of the law of quantitative and qualitative change and the law of the negation of the negation. The laws of dialectical materialism were thus the governing laws of the universe, and mastery of them was a prerequisite to an understanding of how the natural and social worlds operated. Marxist philosophers in China accepted that these abstract laws of Marxist philosophy had to be comprehended before the particularities of the Chinese context could be grasped.

Third, Marxist philosophers in China derived from European and Soviet Marxism a recognition that epistemology constituted a core problem of philosophy, one that had great political significance. Without knowing the world, how could it be changed? Each of them accepted that practice is central to the production of knowledge, and that the process of knowledge production involves continual reference to reality via the medium of practice; none of them accepted that knowledge derives from a passive reflection of reality in the mind of the subject. As we have observed, Mao perceived in Marxist philosophy an epistemology in line with his activist political inclinations, for the pursuit of knowledge required an active engagement with reality. For Mao, practice was no mere mechanical exercise that automatically created knowledge. It was a purposive activity based on the conscious need of the subject to determine the nature of reality in order to formulate strategies to alter it in line with the goals of the subject. While this was an activist epistemology, it was nevertheless one that accepted that reality imposed limitations; knowing these limitations, and the potentiality for change that these allowed, were an inherent part of the epistemological process.[611] Ai Siqi and Li Da agreed, and their confirmation of the orthodoxy of Mao's reading of the practice-based epistemology of the New Philosophy ensured that the concept of practice would assume a central position in Marxist philosophy in China from the late 1930s on.

[611] See Nick Knight, 'The form of Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism"', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 9 (January 1983), pp. 17–33.

Fourth, Marxist philosophers in China from Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong accepted that the study of logic – the way in which objects and the relationship between them are represented discursively – is an integral part of the philosophical project. In line with their materialist ontology, they insisted that logic had to reflect the nature of reality, and could do so by recognition of the actual laws that governed the material universe and the objects within it. Central to this ontology was a belief in the constancy of motion, driven by contradictions that ensured a particular pattern of movement and change in all things. Any logic that failed to grasp these tendencies could only be 'logical' in a merely formal sense, for it would be incapable of describing the real nature of things or the causal relationship between them. In particular, Marxist philosophers in China accepted that the ubiquity of internal contradictions and the inherent struggle between them ensured that a thing is simultaneously itself and something else, and that new things constantly emerge from and replace the old. Logic thus had to be dialectical, for reality was itself dialectical. It was for this reason that formal logic was an object of so much of their criticism, for it represented a universe that was static and in which objects could only be themselves and no other. Marxist philosophers recognised the political implications of this assertion, for it implied that change in the direction of communism was impossible. This they could not accept, and the ferocity of their attacks on formal logic reflects the deep political as well as philosophical divide that separated these two viewpoints on logic.

It is evident that in each of these areas – determinism, ontology, epistemology and logic – Marxist philosophy in China during its formative years was heavily influenced by European and Soviet Marxist philosophy. Early Marxist philosophers in China were committed to understanding Marxist philosophy as philosophy, and to communicating their understanding of this philosophy to the Chinese communist movement. It was only when they had, to their own satisfaction, understood its purely philosophical dimensions that they felt able to turn to the problem of its application to the Chinese context. The history of Marxist philosophy turns on this apparent tension between the necessity of universality and the imperative need for particularity. Through its origination in European and Soviet Marxism, Marxist philosophy in China drew on a school of philosophy that had assumed the mantle of universality; yet it strove to apply the universal principles of Marxist philosophy to explain and provide significance to the particularities of the Chinese context. Marxist philosophers in China believed that the union of the universal and particular was possible, and strove to find a conceptual and linguistic form through which it could be expressed. With the triumph of 'Mao Zedong Thought' in 1945, with its strong commitment to the abstract philosophical principles of the New Philosophy and the application of these to the Chinese context, Marxist philosophers in China felt that the quest to find this form – of a 'Sinified' yet universal Marxist philosophy – had been achieved.

It is at this point that the challenge of analysis asserts itself. It is all too easy to be distracted by the practice required to achieve the 'Sinification' of Marxist philosophy: the modification of language to reach particular target audiences, the use of Chinese illustrations, and the refusal to restrict the consumption of philosophy to professional philosophers. Each of these practices suggests a *Chinese* Marxist

philosophy, one that had so distanced itself from European and Soviet Marxist philosophy as to be unrecognisable as mainstream Marxism. This would be an inappropriate conclusion. At the very heart of the philosophical project pursued by Marxist philosophers in China, from Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, was a determination to gain a deep understanding of Marxist philosophy *as* philosophy. Qu Qiubai's pioneering foray into Marxist philosophy in 1923 introduced to a Chinese audience the history of European philosophy and Marxism's position within it; there is little consideration of how Marxist philosophy might be applied to China. The focus is clearly on the universal themes of Western philosophy, and Marxism's position on these. The same is true of Li Da's *Elements of Sociology*, for this is first and foremost a work of Marxist philosophy (in the guise of the New Philosophy); the focus is not China, nor even the application of Marxist philosophy to China, but Marxist philosophy itself. Likewise, Ai Siqi's acknowledgement of his debt to the New Philosophy and his persistent efforts to explain its core propositions reveal only too clearly that he was first and foremost a Marxist philosopher, one who recognised that the application of a philosophy to a novel context had to be preceded by mastery of that philosophy. Mao's writings on philosophy also reveal his determination to achieve a deep understanding of dialectical materialism. The philosophical writings of each of these Marxist philosophers – Qu Qiubai, Ai Siqi, Li Da and Mao Zedong – make inaccurate any suggestion that Marxist philosophy in China was automatically rendered heterodox through its transplantation to a supposedly alien cultural context. If anything, the opposite holds true, for the core philosophical postulates drawn by these philosophers from European and Soviet Marxist philosophy have sustained a level of orthodoxy of Marxist philosophy in China unparalleled in the mercurial world of communist ideology, where orthodoxies have come and gone.

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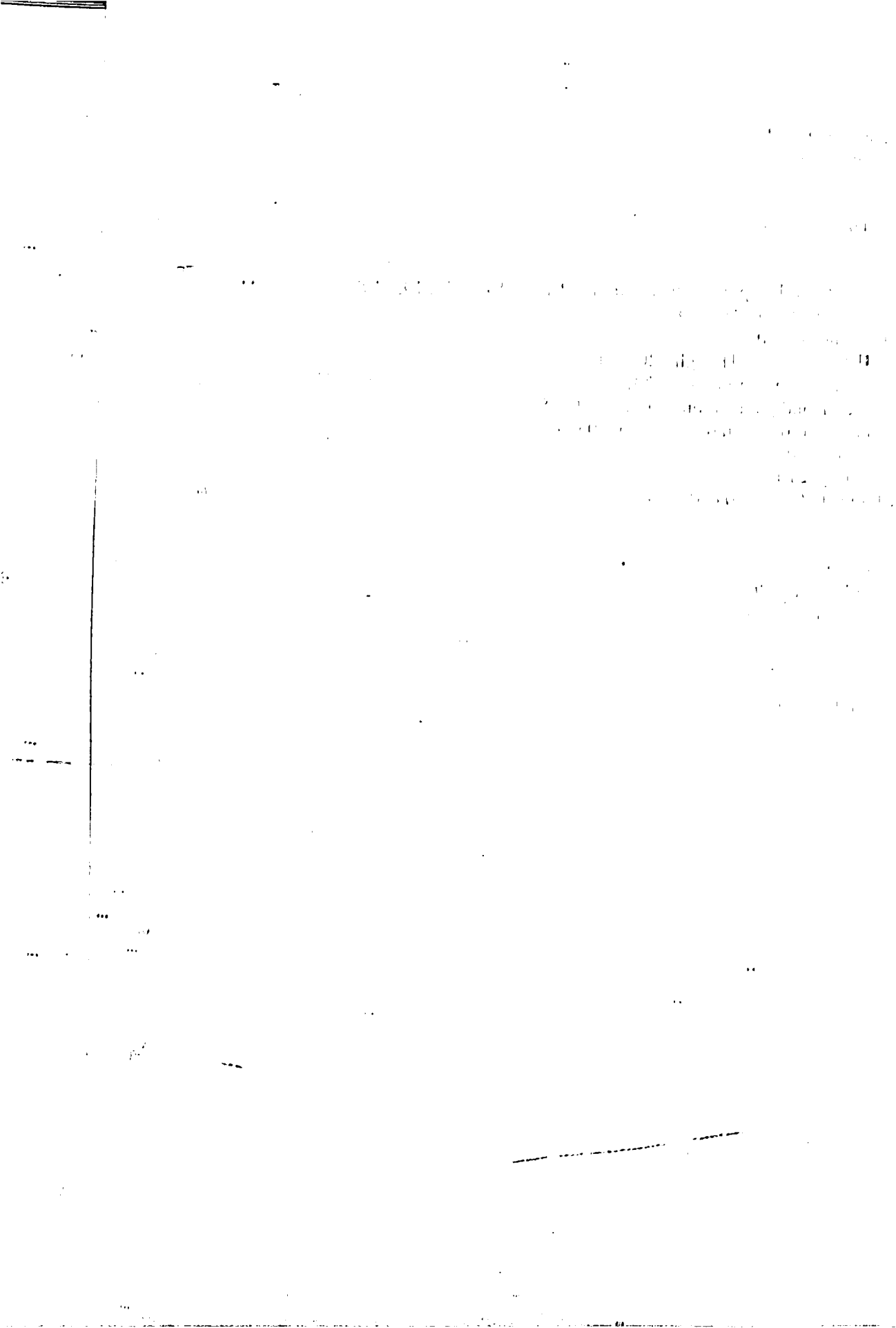

Marxist Philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, 1923-1945

Nick Knight

This book examines the introduction of Marxist philosophy to China from the early 1920s to the mid 1940s. It does this through an examination of the philosophical activities and writings of four Chinese Marxist philosophers central to this process. These are Qu Qiubai, Ai Siqi, Li Da and Mao Zedong. The book sets the philosophical writings of these philosophers in the context of the development of Marxist philosophy internationally, and examines particularly the influence on these philosophers of Soviet Marxist philosophy. It argues that these Chinese Marxist philosophers' interpretations of Marxist philosophy were quite orthodox when judged by the standards of contemporary Soviet Marxism. The book explores core themes in Marxist philosophy in China, including the dilemma of determinism, and investigates the way in which these Chinese Marxist philosophers sought a formula for the 'Sinification' of Marxist philosophy that both retained the universal dimensions of Marxism and allowed its application to the Chinese context. The book concludes with analysis of the role of the Yanan New Philosophy Association in developing from Soviet Marxist philosophy the philosophical dimension of Mao Zedong Thought, the official ideology of the Chinese Communist Party after 1945.

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