

The “Two Integrations” In My Eyes

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Opening Remarks

This study offers a foreigner’s perspective on a major issue in Chinese scholarly circles today: the integration of the basic principles of Marxism with China’s concrete practice and with the best of China’s traditional culture (马克思主义基本原理同中国具体实际相结合、同中华优秀传统文化相结合). The “two integrations” were initially mentioned in General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speech at the centenary celebrations of the CPC, on 1 July 2021. The “two integrations” were mentioned again in the General Secretary’s report to the CPC’s Twentieth National Congress, held in October 2022, and here we find some elaboration on their meaning. However, the most significant exposition of the “two integrations” appeared in a speech at a Symposium on Cultural Inheritance and Development, held on 2 June 2023. In light of these three speeches, this study presents how a foreigner who is somewhat familiar with China sees the “two integrations.”

In this introduction, the following three matters are addressed: why another study is needed; methodological assumptions; a synopsis of the chapters to come; and topics that will not be addressed in any detail.

1.2 Why Another Study of the “Two Integrations”?

In light of the significant amount of scholarship that has already been published concerning the “two integrations,” the reader may wonder what contribution a foreigner may make to the discussion and analysis. Allow me to explain a little, since it is important for the reader to know some information about the author. The following analysis is written by an Australian-born professor of Marxist philosophy. My parents were immigrants from the Netherlands in the 1950s, and I was born in Australia but have a Dutch and not an Anglo-inheritance. I sometimes say that my citizenship may be Australian, but my nationality (民族) is Dutch. Since my specialisation is Marxist philosophy, I have also taught in China since 2013, initially part-time and now full-time. Although my first visit to China was in 2007, I have engaged ever more deeply since 2013, studying in depth Chinese Marxist philosophy, socialism with Chinese characteristics, and

the relations between China’s traditional philosophy and Marxist philosophy.¹ And I have done so with a background in the works of Marx and Engels, Western Marxism, and Soviet Marxism.

Perhaps a well-known short poem can explain the approach taken in this study: 横看成岭侧成峰，远近高低各不同。不识庐山真面目，只缘身在此山中。 Written by the 11th century CE Song Dynasty poet, Su Shi (苏轼), the poem is difficult to translate into English, so let me paraphrase: you may look at Lu Mountain from many angles, near and far, high and low, but you cannot see the true face of the mountain if you are inside. I have actually visited Lushan in Jiangxi Province, and experienced its complex history, but I quote this brief poem to point out that in some cases foreigners can see something, can view a situation from a distinct perspective, that those who are inside assume and so do not see in the same way.

1.3 Methodological Concerns

A number of preliminary and important methodological matters also need to be addressed: the philosophical approach; a focus on texts; terminology; and my use of Chinese scholarship.

The concern of the following study is philosophical,² and I will focus primarily on four topics: philosophy and method, specifically in terms of dialectical thinking and comprehensive analysis; old and new, or the question of modernisation and the innovation of traditional culture; and the way Marxism relates to traditional cultures. In the conclusion, I tackle the manifold problems faced by the few countries of the world that make up the “West.” In light of the fact that they have hit rock bottom and will take a significant time to assess why and how to find resources for renewal, I seek to make some initial suggestions for finding alternative resources in the Western cultural and philosophical tradition for the sake of renewal. In other words, what might the West learn from a Chinese approach that looks to its own long cultural tradition so as to identify what is best about that tradition and what can contribute to innovation, modernisation, and indeed a qualitatively new form of global human civilisation. This is not a small task, I must admit, but a beginning must be made.

¹Roland Boer, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners* (Singapore: Springer, 2021).

² In late 2022, Li Hongwei observed that most of the research on the “two integrations” concerned historical course, content, results, and experience, and that relatively little research had focused on philosophical questions of methodology and epistemology. 李宏伟, 《论 “两个结合” 对推动马克思主义中国化时代化的方法论创新》, 马克思主义研究 2022, 期 12 (2022 年): 112.

While the framework and the questions asked are philosophical, it is also important to note that I am by training a scholar of texts. In the past, I have studied and taught classical Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, I have studied German and French so as to read the texts of Marx and Engels in the original, and I know Danish, read Russian somewhat slowly (yes, to study Lenin, Stalin, and others), and have for the last decade – and not in my youth – engaged in the arduous process of learning Chinese so as to study the works of Chinese Marxism in the original language. Perhaps this perpetual interest in languages and texts comes from the fact that my first language was not English; instead, it was Dutch. Given my long-held assumption that textual research is crucial, it will come as no surprise that I turn from time to time to textual and translation questions.

A word is also needed on terminology. The two terms 文化 *wenhua* and 文明 *wenming* – which can be translated only somewhat loosely as “culture” and “civilisation” – have a specific relationship. We may put it this way: 文化 *wenhua* refers to a constantly transformed and renewed cultural (especially written) tradition, while 文明 *wenming* refers to the brightness, to the clarity or crystallisation of the cultural tradition. As General Secretary Xi Jinping observed in June of 2023, “There are many important elements in the best of China’s traditional culture [文化 *wenhua*], which together shape the outstanding characteristics of Chinese civilisation [文明 *wenming*].”³

Finally, there is the question of engagement with Chinese scholarship on the “two integrations.” As is my research habit, in preparing for the writing of this work I read hundreds and hundreds of academic articles. The reader will note that I regularly quote and cite from these works. At the same time, the task before me is somewhat distinct. To begin with, this work is not an effort to present the best of Chinese scholarship on the “two integrations” to an international readership that most likely knows little about these developments.⁴ Further, this work is not an effort to emulate or mimic Chinese academic discourse. From much experience of researching this material, I know full well that Chinese academic discourse arises from a very long tradition that has at the same time been transformed in light of Marxism’s taking root and flourishing in China. However, I do not seek to emulate this discourse. What, then, do I seek to achieve (and indeed what have been asked to do)? The task is nothing less than a concise study that provides *both* a new

³ On the complexities and many dimensions of the relationship between 文化 *wenhua* and 文明 *wenming*, see 张梧, 《“第二个结合” 是又一次思想解放》, 中国社会科学报 2023 年 6 月 15 日 (2023 年), https://www.cssn.cn/skgz/bwyc/202306/t20230615_5645199.shtml.

⁴ I have taken this approach in a number of recent works, for example: Boer, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners*; Roland Boer, *Socialism in Power: On the History and Theory of Socialist Governance* (Singapore: Springer, 2023).

angle for Chinese scholarship from a foreigner who is rather familiar with Chinese culture, Chinese Marxism, and Chinese academic developments, *and* a distinct contribution to scholarship outside China on a topic that has global significance. To do so requires that I speak with my own voice, deploying the discourse style that I have developed over the last few decades. That said, I ask the forbearance of Chinese readers in relation to some material with which they will be familiar, but these sections are necessary for international readers.

1.4 Synopsis

By way of introduction to the synopsis of the following chapters, I would like to address the question of the compatibility of Marxism, which originated in the Western country of Germany, with China's concrete realities and its traditional culture. We will return to this question in various forms as my argument develops, but I assume throughout the consensus among Chinese scholars that the basic principles of Marxism have a very high degree of compatibility with the deep-held assumptions of Chinese culture, so much so that this organic compatibility enabled an engagement between the two that runs very deep and continues today. Many are the contributions to understanding this process, such as the fact that the only viable Marxism is concrete Marxism which has taken root in light of specific conditions, or the dialectic of what is opposite is also complementary, but from my perspective there is the fact of Marxism's lack of fit in a modernised Western context. I will have much more to say on this matter as the argument proceeds, save to point out here that it should have been obvious from almost the beginning that Marxism would have far greater traction on non-Western contexts, such as China among others, than in a West that was the result of modernising cultural processes deriving from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and the Western Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Now for the synopsis. This introduction is the first chapter, which deals with the context and interests of the author, some methodological issues, this synopsis, and a number of topics that will not be discussed in any detail.

The second chapter concerns philosophy and methodology, for this is the main interest of the book as a whole. It has a number of sections, which deal with the main statements by General Secretary Xi Jinping on the “two integrations”; with the question of dialectical analysis, emphasising how such an approach arises from deep within the Chinese tradition and how this enables Chinese Marxism to inherit the full Marxist tradition (known as dialectical materialism and historical materialism); and with

comprehensive analysis, or analysing a situation from all aspects and in a systemic way. On this topic, I stress that Marxism too is by definition a comprehensive or universal method, and that it cannot be truncated so to focus on one or another aspect (for example, on social and economic forces without a dialectics of nature). The conclusion to Chapter Two points out why it is so important for Westerners to understand dialectical thinking and comprehensive analysis, so as to overcome their “either-or” and “zero-sum” mindset.

Chapter Three deals with the question of old and new, specifically in relation to modernisation and innovation. Thus, the first section deals with modernisation, focusing on how the achievements of Chinese-style modernisation have brought the question of traditional culture to the foreground. The next section turns to the relations between old and new in general and specific terms, with a focus on how communist revolutionaries deal with the old in light of the need to construct a new social form. The third section concerns two historical examples, the Soviet Union and the New China, where we find that it was a long road to discovering a dialectical answer to the problem of how to relate to, appreciate, and renew traditional culture. The fourth section offers a contrast between the Western tendency to see the new against the old and China’s preference to find an approach in which the innovative “gene” of traditional culture meets the inherent innovation of Marxism.

Chapter Four deals with the relationship between the basic principles of Marxism and the best of China’s traditional culture. In light of the already considerable amount of research that has already been published on this “second integration,” my interest is in the following three areas. The first concerns Marxism’s leading role in the dialectical integration with traditional culture. The second area concerns the phrase “discarding the dross and preserving the essence,” which includes a treatment of the question of translation: I suggest that the semantic field of 扬弃 *yangqi* (the philosophical translation of the German *Aufhebung*) actually expands and develops further the terminology used by Marx and Engels (derived from Hegel). The third topic concerns what counts as the “best of [优秀],” as the essence of traditional culture. After a discussion concerning the core traditional values that have been identified, I examine whether a value that was originally intrinsic to the older feudal system can undergo a thorough sublation (*Aufhebung* 扬弃) so as to find a new expression in a socialist context. By way of conclusion, I emphasise the renewal and innovation of Marxism that takes in its integration with the best of traditional culture.

The final and concluding chapter addresses somewhat briefly the themes of cultural confidence, reconstituted concerns with the collective, the community of

common destiny-and-future for humankind, and the distinctly global concerns of what Chinese Marxist civilisation can provide for a new form of human civilisation in all its diversity. However, the main concern of the concluding chapter is to address the “Western question”: given that the few countries of the world that make up the “West” have hit rock bottom, and given that it will take quite some time for them to assess soberly the internal reasons for such a situation and find internal resources for renewal, I suggest that the “China model” of finding resources within may be a useful starting point. Since the world is undergoing qualitative changes unseen in a century, by the time the “West” does find such resources for renewal – inspired by Engels – the world will be a very different place.

1.5 Topics Beyond the Scope of this Study

Finally, I need to mention a number of topics that I will not discuss in any detail, since they have been covered more than adequately by Chinese scholars.

1.5.1 Education

Education has been the concern of a significant amount of research,⁵ especially after a number of guidelines promulgated by the Ministry of Education since 2014: *Guidelines for Improving Education in the Best of China’s Traditional Culture* (《完善中华优秀传统文化教育指导纲要》) from March of 2014; *Opinion of the Ministry of Education on Cultivating and Practising Core Socialist Values and Further Strengthening Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools* 《教育部关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观进一步加强中小学德育工作的意见》 in early April of 2014.⁶ During the following decade, more statements were promulgated by the Ministry of Education, with the most recent appearing in January 2021: *Guide for Introducing the Best of China’s Traditional Culture into Curriculum Materials for Primary and Secondary Schools* 《中华优秀传统文化进中小学课程教材指南》; *Guide for Introducing the Revolutionary Tradition into Curriculum Materials for Primary and Secondary Schools* 《革命传统进中小学课程教材指南》.⁷ The reader will have noted two features concerning these documents: first, their concern tends to be with

⁵ The research includes many scientific articles and a number of monographs concerning educational implications. Given that these works are not directly relevant to this study, I do not cite them specifically here.

⁶ The texts of these documents may be found, respectively, at http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A13/s7061/201403/t20140328_166543.html and http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3325/201404/t20140403_167213.html.

⁷ See further 彭红斌, 《中华优秀传统文化教育政策变迁的百年历程与展望》, 中国人民大学教育 学刊 2022, 期 3 (2022 年): 130–32.

primary and secondary schools curriculum materials, although one also find mention of higher education; second, I have translated 中华优秀传统文化 as “the best of China’s traditional culture.” A comment is needed on both items. To begin with, many of the documents from the Ministry of Education concern primary and secondary schools. However, since the centenary celebrations of the CPC and the explicit statement concerning the “two integrations,” many studies have also been concerned with the implications for higher education, especially courses on “Theoretical and Political Education.” Further, the translation of 中华优秀传统文化 as “the best of China’s traditional culture” is very deliberate. One will encounter various translations, such as “China’s excellent traditional culture” or “China’s fine traditional culture,” but there is a very good philosophical reason for proposing that “the best of China’s traditional culture” is to be preferred as the translation of 中华优秀传统文化. The reasons will become clear as my argument develops.

1.5.2 History

Despite the temptation to fill out the content of this study with historical narratives, I will refer to such matters only where relevant to the primary philosophical concerns. The main reason why there is no need to delve into historical matters in any depth is that Chinese scholars have already dealt with this question in much detail and there is little that I can add to such material. For non-Chinese readers interested in such matters, I outline the four main aspects to studies of the history of the “two integrations” and provide a number of key references. The reader will note that these four aspects both overlap and at times are in a contradictory relationship.

The first aspect may be seen in terms of the well-known saying deriving from the Northern Song Dynasty’s Shao Yong (1011-1077 CE) that “one divides into two.”⁸ In this respect, the “first integration” sums up the history of the sinification of Marxism and the “second integration” arises from and enriches this history.⁹

The second aspect is related and concerns the search for the “second integration” from the earliest days of Marxism in China. In this respect, we find studies of the May

⁸ Some may also be reminded of the 道德经 *Daodejing*, where we find “one begets two [一生二 *yi sheng er*].”

⁹ As a sample of key works on the “historical logic” of “one integration” becoming “two integrations,” see: 张允熠和张弛, 《从 “一个结合” 到 “两个结合” : 马克思主义中国化的新叙事》, 思想理论教育 2021, 期 9 (2021 年): 10–16; 李毅, 《从 “一个结合” 到 “两个结合” 不断开辟马克思主义中国化时代化新境界》, 马克思主义研究 2022, 期 12 (2022 年): 1–11+149; 王天民和郑丽丽, 《从 “一个结合” 到 “两个结合” 的历史与逻辑》, 理论导刊 2023, 期 3 (2023 年): 92–98.

Fourth movement’s attraction to and adoption of Marxism in a Chinese cultural context, Mao Zedong’s engagements with the best of traditional culture, as well as the works of Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao.¹⁰

The third aspect deals with earlier observations by General Secretary Xi Jinping. This is a rich resource and includes not merely analyses since Xi Jinping was elected General Secretary in 2012, but also published works from before 2012. On this matter, it needs to be noted that we already find scholarly works on the best of China’s traditional culture in relation to Marxism that predate the announcement of the “two integrations” in July 2021.¹¹

The fourth aspect concerns an over-arching historical perspective, which argues that the “two integrations” are inherent to Marxism, in the sense that the theoretical expression arises from the concrete practice of applying Marxism in socialist construction and thus has world-historical significance.¹² In a Chinese context, the “two integrations” arise from China’s own historical experience and thereby function as a concentrated expression of the Party’s own historical consciousness.¹³

¹⁰ Again, a sample of works can be cited: 薛庆超,《马克思主义基本原理同中华优秀传统文化相结合的典范——毛泽东对中华优秀传统文化的创造性转化和创新性发展》,统一战线学研究 2021, 期 5 (2021 年): 1–18; 林雅华,《从“一个结合”到“两个结合”:中国共产党文化叙事的历史演进与新时代内涵》,广东社会科学 2022, 期 4 (2022 年): 126–36; 颜晓峰,《坚持把马克思主义基本原理同中华优秀传统文化相结合》,社会主义核心价值观研究 2022, 期 1 (2022 年): 14–25; 陆卫明和草芳,《论马克思主义和中华优秀传统文化的契合性——以五四时期先进知识分子接受马克思主义为例》,理论学刊 2022, 期 1 (2022 年): 54–63; 金民卿,《毛泽东对“两个结合”的贡献及其在新时代的升华》,毛泽东思想研究 2023, 期 1 (2023 年): 1–11.

¹¹ Representative works of such studies include those that dig back into quite early publications by Xi Jinping, respond to his speech at the 2565th anniversary of the birth of Confucius in September of 2014, and analyse in detail his statements on traditional culture since 2012: 习近平,在纪念孔子诞辰 2565 周年国际学术研讨会暨国际儒学联合会第五届会员大会开幕会上的讲话 (2014 年 9 月 24 日) (北京:人民出版社, 2014); 杨瑞森,《弘扬中华优秀传统文化四题——学习习近平同志关于弘扬中华优秀传统文化重要论述的几点体会》,思想理论教育导刊 2014, 期 12 (2014 年): 47–53+136; 郭建宁,《优秀传统文化为治国理政提供丰厚滋养——学习习近平关于中华优秀传统文化的重要论述》,中国特色社会主义研究 2017, 期 2 (2017 年): 11–14; 张安,《让中华文化展现出永久魅力和时代风采——试论习近平关于中华优秀传统文化的思想》,科学社会主义 2018, 期 1 (2018 年): 121–25; 安丽梅,《中华优秀传统文化时代化——学习习近平关于中华优秀传统文化的重要论述》,教学与研究 2020, 期 6 (2020 年): 13–21.

¹² 金民卿,《“两个结合”的思想渊源和原创性理论贡献》,历史研究 2022, 期 6 (2022 年): 28–40.

¹³ 袁艺鸣和张立波,《“两个结合”的内在逻辑及其哲学意蕴》,学习论坛 2023, 期 1 (2023 年): 105–6; 冯莉,《“两个结合”与中国近现代史的阐释》,贵州社会科学 2022, 期 11 (2022 年): 67–73.

1.5.3 From Party Building to Tea

Other topics that appear in the research and with which I cannot deal here include the all-important question of Party building. One also finds material on rule of law, women, youth, ecological civilisation, sport, the development of new media technology, and a most interesting article concerning China’s millennia-old tea culture.¹⁴ If I may be allowed a personal note: as a tea-lover, I was drawn to this article and read it with great interest.

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¹⁴ 张朝阳,《中华优秀传统文化融入国企文化建设的探讨——以中国传统茶文化为视角》,福建茶叶 2022, 期 3 (2022 年): 230–32.

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