

BOOK REVIEW

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE MARXISM: FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH ORIENTATION

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Chengbing Wang (Ed). *Contemporary Chinese Marxism: Foundational Research Orientation*. London: Routledge, 2023. 116 pp. ISBN: 9781032471853

Abstract: This review examines Chengbing Wang's *Contemporary Chinese Marxism: Foundational Research Orientation*, which brings together nine essays originally published in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2022). The collection explores the domains of Marxist theory, Chinese cultural traditions, and contemporary socio-political challenges. Covering themes from aesthetics and axiological research to dialectical logic, British neo-Marxism, and the integration of Chinese and Western traditions, the anthology reveals how Marxist thought is continually reinterpreted in the Chinese context. While the book's breadth sometimes stretches thematic coherence, it offers rich insights into the sinicization of Marxism, its intellectual evolution, and its role in shaping Chinese identity and modernization.

Keywords: *Chinese Marxism, Cultural Identity, Dialectical Materialism, Ideology, Modernity, Political Philosophy, Sinicization.*

Marxism, as a political and economic philosophy, remains central to debates on inequality, class struggle and social transformation. Rooted in the critique of capitalism and the exploitation of the working class, it has inspired revolutionary movements worldwide, from Lenin and Mao Tse-tung to anti-colonial

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struggles. Beyond politics, Marxist educational theory — emphasizing critical consciousness against dominant culture — has influenced research in sociology, political science and cultural studies. In this context, Chengbing Wang's edited volume, *Contemporary Chinese Marxism: Foundational Research Orientation*, offers a timely exploration of how Marxism has been reinterpreted within China. Bringing together nine papers, the anthology traces Marxism's foundational theories while adapting them to contemporary Chinese realities. The collection is organized into five thematic areas, ranging from aesthetics and axiological studies to dialectical logic, Western comparisons, and the challenges of modernization.

The first chapter, by Wang Yichuan, explores Marxism's influence on Chinese art and literature. Rejecting the notion that Marxism reduces art to mere propaganda, Yichuan highlights its people-centered aesthetic ideals and its role in cultivating cultural taste, enlightenment, and community spirit. He argues that the development of an indigenous Marxist theory of art is essential for balancing popular appeal with national identity. In chapter two, Wu Xiangdong examines axiological research within Chinese Marxism, particularly since the Reform era. He shows how the philosophy of value has been employed to assess reform outcomes and to articulate China's "core socialist values." These values not only harmonize China's complex social fabric but also provide guiding principles for modernization and stability.

Chapter three, by Jinfang Nie, focuses on textological research, a growing field in Chinese Marxist studies. Nie emphasizes the importance of close, historically grounded readings of Marx's texts to avoid distortion and to preserve their contemporary relevance. He underscores Marx's concern with human freedom and social relations as a framework for renewal. Chapters four and five trace the trajectory of dialectical logic and British neo-Marxism. Lei Chen and Chengbing Wang revisit the history of dialectical logic in China, noting its Soviet-inspired introduction in the early 20th century, its disappearance mid-century, and its revival during the reform era. Despite its declining prominence today, the authors argue for renewed

attention to its role in sinicizing Marxism and enriching Chinese philosophy.

Ji Xue and Zhongfang Tong turn to British neo-Marxism, highlighting its cultural critique and humanistic focus. Unlike economic determinism, British neo-Marxism engages with history, ideology, and social order, drawing on structuralist insights to rethink culture’s autonomy. This approach resonates with China’s own debates on cultural modernization.

Chapters six and seven examine critical theories of law and materialism. Kefei Xu critiques Louis Althusser’s analysis of capitalist law, which exposes how legal systems reinforce ruling-class dominance through ideological conformity. Xu suggests that law, redefined within a communist framework, could instead serve proletarian independence. Meanwhile, Xiang Liu discusses Jean Baudrillard’s radical inversion of Marxist subject-object relations. By emphasizing the proliferation and autonomy of objects, Baudrillard reframes materialism as a critique of consumer society, simulation, and hyperreality. For Liu, this “fatal strategy” destabilizes subjectivity and offers a provocative rethinking of modernity’s crises.

The final two chapters return to comparative and integrative themes. Liyin Yang contrasts Chinese and Western Marxist approaches to modernity. While Chinese Marxism emphasizes modernization and national rejuvenation, Western Marxism tends to critique modernity’s contradictions without linking theory to practical politics. Yang suggests that mutual exchange could produce a more comprehensive Marxism for the 21st century. Ying Liu examines Marxism’s relationship with traditional Chinese culture across five historical stages—from its 19th-century introduction, through the Cultural Revolution, to today’s attempts at harmonization. Liu emphasizes the leadership roles of Mao, Deng, and Xi in merging Marxism with indigenous traditions. He advocates “comprehensive innovation” as the key to sustaining Marxism’s cultural relevance while reinforcing national identity.

The book succeeds in showcasing the adaptability and resilience of Marxist theory in China. By addressing aesthetics,

value systems, textology, law, and modernization, it demonstrates how Marxism is both a critical framework and a cultural project. Particularly notable is the attention to aesthetics and axiological research, which highlight Marxism's role beyond economics, extending into cultural identity and social stability.

However, the anthology's breadth comes at a cost. Some discussions, such as those on dialectical logic and British neo-Marxism, feel somewhat detached from the overarching themes. Readers unfamiliar with specialized debates may find the shifts in focus disorienting. A stronger editorial thread tying the essays together would have enhanced coherence.

Nonetheless, the collection is a valuable contribution to scholarship on Marxism's global and local dynamics. It illuminates how Chinese Marxism has evolved through historical struggles, ideological adaptations, and cultural integration. As China faces ongoing modernization challenges, the book provides insight into the philosophical foundations guiding its development. Moreover, the book also highlights Marxism's enduring role as both theory and practice in the development of Chinese culture and politics. While not without limitations, the volume enriches understanding of how Marxism continues to shape cultural identity, political legitimacy and modernization. For scholars of political philosophy, cultural studies, and Chinese thought, the book is a compact yet rich resource that situates Chinese Marxism within both national and global contexts.

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