



Article

The contemporary significance of classical Marxism for Chinese Marxism

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Abstract

The transformation of classical Marxist concepts in national philosophical systems is increasingly relevant in the search for effective models of social development amid the global challenges of the twenty-first century. This study examined the reception and adaptation of classical Marxism in modern Chinese philosophical thought to understand the factors behind China's socio-economic success. The methodology employed historical, comparative, and systematic analyses of theoretical texts, official Communist Party documents, and socio-economic data from 2000 to 2020. Findings reveal that the transformation of classical Marxism within Chinese philosophy involved reinterpreting the role of the peasantry in revolution and adapting class struggle theory to the complex structure of a semi-colonial society. Methodological innovations emerged through dialectical approaches such as the principle of "seeking truth from facts" and the pragmatic method of "crossing the river by feeling for stones," which integrated planned economic principles with market mechanisms. The interaction of Marxism and traditional Chinese philosophy provided a theoretical foundation for far-reaching socio-economic changes. These are reflected in China's reduction of poverty from 30.7% to 0.6% between 2000 and 2019 and sustained GDP growth averaging 8–10% annually over two decades. The study concludes that the mechanisms of conceptual transformation and practical application of Marxist theory illustrate how philosophical systems adapt to distinct cultural contexts. Such insights are valuable for developing socio-economic strategies that align with national conditions while addressing global development challenges.

Keywords: *bluing, conceptual transformation, cultural integration, dialectical materialism, philosophical synthesis, socio-economic development, systemic adaptation*

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Introduction

The transformation of philosophical paradigms in the context of the socio-economic challenges of the twenty-first century necessitates a reimagination of classical Marxism and its significance for modern national modifications of this philosophical system. Chinese Marxism is of academic interest as an example of the successful adaptation of classical theory to national realities, which was used to create a theoretical framework for rapid national economic development and comprehensive social transformations. The study of the processes of interpretation and actualization of the ideas of classical Marxism in the context of the Chinese philosophical tradition and contemporary political realities highlights the mechanisms of theoretical adaptation of philosophical concepts in different cultural environments.

The problem of the relationship between classical and Chinese Marxism was highlighted in scientific research through several key aspects. Hong (2020) examines the institutionalization of Marxist theory in the Chinese educational system, noting the creation of more than a thousand Marxist departments in the country's leading universities, demonstrating a systematic approach to developing and modifying classical Marxism in the academic environment. According to the study, the fundamental principles of teaching Marxism in China address the dialectical method and the practical application of the theory to address contemporary challenges.

Expanding the notion of the interaction between Western and Chinese Marxist thought, Jun and Yichen (2020) analyzed the process of reception of "*Western Marxism*" in Mao's China, revealing the complex dynamics of adapting Western critical approaches to the Chinese context. The researchers point to the importance of this process for forming a unique Chinese version of Marxist literary criticism, which developed through dialogue with surrealism, existentialism, and other Western philosophical movements. Blackledge (2020) examined the normative dimension of Marxist theory, arguing that the collapse of Soviet communism has paradoxically contributed to a revival of interest in Marxism as part of a vast tradition of normative social philosophy. The study critically assesses the relevance of Marxist ideas in the post-socialist world and their potential for shaping contemporary emancipatory politics.

An important area of research is the analysis of the peculiarities of the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism. Fang (2021) characterized the theoretical features of the "*Chinese form*" of Marxist literary criticism, focusing on the rethinking of the concepts of "*people*", "*nation*", "*politics*", and "*practice*" in the context of modern challenges. The developed model analyzed the relationship between literature and technology, literature and capital, expanding the theoretical methodology of Marxist

cultural analysis. Rudenko et al. (2023) addressed the anthropological dimension of Chinese Marxism, identifying key concepts and ideas on human nature and the meaning of existence. The researchers demonstrate how Chinese thinkers synthesized the Marxist definition of man as a “*set of social relations*” with traditional Confucian values and Kantian ideas, creating a unique philosophical and anthropological discourse.

The phenomenological direction of the development of Chinese Marxism was analyzed by Yu and Fu (2023), revealing the evolution of this trend from the 1980s to the present. The authors identified three stages in the development of phenomenological Marxism in China. They demonstrated how phenomenological methodology and Marxist theory combined enabled Chinese philosophers to develop a more nuanced subjectivity and social reality while maintaining a Marxist historical perspective. Roberts (2020) and Cousins (2022) explored the application of Marxist methodology in economic and social analysis: the former examined the relevance of the Marxist view of crises and capital returns for interpreting contemporary economic problems, while the latter analyses class relations in rural areas, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Marxist approach for studying social stratification in the agricultural sector, which is particularly important for China.

The state of research on Marxist theoretical education in contemporary China was analyzed in detail by Luo (2024) using quantitative methods to demonstrate the growing interest in this field and identify the main research areas. The author noted the need to expand the interdisciplinary approach and deepen the analysis of the impact of digital technologies on the teaching of Marxist theory. Kiktenko (2023) explored the phenomenon of Sinicised Phenomenological Marxism, analyzing the process of adapting Western ideas to the Chinese intellectual environment. The researcher demonstrated how Chinese philosophers, since the 1980s, have sought to create a more “humanistic” Marxism by integrating Husserl’s phenomenological methodology with historical materialism, which has contributed to the analysis of social reality and subjective experience.

The analysis of the scientific literature demonstrated the multidimensionality of research on the relationship between classical and Chinese Marxism, which covers philosophical, economic, sociological, and literary aspects. At the same time, there is a need for a more systematic study of the mechanisms of transformation of classical Marxist concepts in the Chinese intellectual environment and their impact on the formation of modern Chinese Marxist philosophy. The issues of the methodological interaction of Marxist dialectics with traditional Chinese philosophical methods and

the ways of integrating classical Marxist categories into contemporary Chinese philosophical discourse remain insufficiently covered.

The study aimed to identify and systematize the key aspects of the reception of classical Marxism in contemporary Chinese philosophical thought through the analysis of conceptual transformations and methodological innovations. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to identify the main directions of transformation of classical Marxist categories in the Chinese philosophical tradition; to analyze methodological innovations introduced by Chinese theorists to adapt Marxist dialectics to the national context; to study the mutual influence of classical Marxism and traditional Chinese philosophy in shaping the modern theoretical framework of Chinese socio-economic development.

Methodology

The study was conducted between January and March 2025 and is a theoretical and historical analysis using qualitative research methods. The timeframe of the materials analyzed in the study covers the period from 1921 to 2024, which traces the evolution of the adaptation and transformation of classical Marxism in the Chinese philosophical tradition.

The study's empirical material was based on the classics of Marxism (K. Marx, F. Engels), which were analyzed in terms of their key theoretical positions (historical materialism, dialectics, theory of surplus value, and class struggle). The analysis of the theoretical positions of classical Marxism was carried out using the primary sources: *"Capital"* (Marx, 2013), *"Manifesto of the Communist Party"* (Marx and Engels, 2009), *"German Ideology"* (Marx and Engels, 1970), and their modern critical understanding presented in the study by Sheikh (2023). Theoretical developments of Chinese Marxists presented in the primary sources: *"On Practice"* and *"On Contradiction"* (Mao, 2022); key reports on *"socialism with Chinese characteristics"* (Deng, 1982-1992); *"The Governance of China"* (Xi, 2014), which contains a statement of the concept of *"socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era"*; the analysis of which is presented in the studies of Wang et al. (2022) and Liao (2023).

Official documents of the Communist Party of China, including materials of party congresses and policy documents (1921-2020), the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016-2020) (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2016) and Peaceful Development of China (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2011). Modern scientific publications on the issues of Chinese Marxism in international journals, including the works of Lambert (2020) on the synthesis of Confucianism and Marxism, Jun and Wang (2020) on *"Western Marxism"* in Mao Zedong China, Yu and Fu (2023) on phenomenological Marxism in China and Rudenko et al. (2023) on philosophical and anthropological issues in Chinese Marxism; statistical data from the

National Bureau of Statistics of China (2020) on the socio-economic development of the country.

To study the conceptual transformations of classical Marxism in the Chinese philosophical tradition, the historical method was used, which traced the evolution of basic Marxist categories in the Chinese context through four key historical periods: the period of the New Democratic Revolution (1921-1949), the period of the formation of the socialist system (1949-1978), the period of reforms and opening up (1978-2012) and the period of the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics (from 2012 to the present). A textual analysis of the works of Chinese Marxists revealed the specifics of the transformation of such concepts of classical Marxism as historical materialism, the theory of surplus value, the theory of class struggle, and the relationship between base and superstructure. Comparative analysis was used to compare the original content of Marxist concepts with their Chinese interpretations. The method of systematization was used to create a comparative table of historical stages of conceptual transformations of Marxism in the Chinese philosophical tradition, reflecting the evolution of these processes from the period of semi-colonial society to the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The comparative method was used to compare the methodological approaches of classical and Chinese Marxism in dialectics, theory of knowledge, analysis of class structure, stages of social development, revolutionary strategy, methodology of economic reforms, and cultural analysis. A systematic analysis was used to analyze the process of transformation of dialectical materialism as the basis of classical Marxism and its integration with Chinese philosophical tradition. Documentary analysis of official CCP materials of different periods was used to identify the evolution of methodological approaches of Chinese Marxism, including the concepts of *"seeking truth in facts"*, *"crossing the river by feeling for stones"*, *"the initial stage of socialism"*, and *"human-centered development"*. The results of this analysis were systematized in the form of a comparative matrix of methodological approaches of classical and Chinese Marxism, which contains nine key aspects of methodology (dialectics, theory of knowledge, analysis of class structure, stages of social development, revolutionary strategy, methodology of economic reforms, epistemological foundations, methodology of cultural analysis, approaches to the analysis of globalization).

To study the mutual influence of classical Marxism and traditional Chinese philosophy in shaping the theoretical framework of China's modern development, the author analyzed official documents of economic reforms of 1978-2024, in particular, the Decision on Economic System Reform (Xu, 2000) and the Plan for Innovative Development (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015), and statistical data on socio-economic development. The synthesis method formed a holistic view of the practical implementation mechanisms and the results of implementing the synthesized concepts in various areas: economic model, social policy, educational system, and geopolitical strategy. Statistical data analysis assessed the effectiveness of

the synthesized concepts in indicators such as GDP growth, poverty reduction, higher education coverage, and international investment. The results were presented as a table demonstrating the practical mechanisms of implementation and the results of the synthesis of Marxism and Chinese philosophy.

The results were interpreted using an interdisciplinary approach combining philosophical, historical, and socio-economic analysis. The assessment of conceptual transformations, methodological innovations, and practical application of the adapted theories was conducted based on their impact on the formation of a unique model of socio-economic development in China, with an emphasis on the dialectical nature of changes, which occurred in the interaction of theoretical adaptation and innovative development.

Results

Conceptual Transformations of Classical Marxism in the Chinese Philosophical Tradition

The analysis of the transformation of classical Marxism in the Chinese philosophical tradition was based on a systematic study of primary sources, including the works of Marx (2013), Marx and Engels (2009; 1970), as well as programmatic texts of Chinese Marxist philosophers (Mao, 2022; Deng, 1982-1992; Xi, 2014). A comprehensive study of these primary sources, combined with an analysis of official CCP documents and statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2020), revealed the multidimensional nature of conceptual transformations and methodological innovations of Chinese Marxism in the economic, social, educational, and cultural spheres, as well as in the context of digital transformations and globalization processes.

The theoretical connection between classical Marxism and Chinese Marxism reflected the internal logic of the Marxist theoretical system and the creative application of the basic principles of Marxism by Chinese communists in different historical periods (Sheyshekanov, 2024). The transformation process involved rethinking the basic categories of Marxism, incorporating the peculiarities of the Chinese philosophical tradition and the specific socio-economic conditions of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. As noted by Wang et al. (2022), this process was characterized not by a simple transfer but by a profound rethinking of Marxist theory in the context of Chinese intellectual tradition and social practice.

The basic concepts of Marxism, such as historical materialism, the theory of surplus value, and the theory of class struggle, constituted the theoretical starting point for the significance of Marxism. These conceptual categories were significantly adapted to Chinese realities while retaining their basic theoretical content. The analysis of this transformation has revealed the peculiarities of forming a specific theoretical

system with Chinese characteristics. The textual analysis of the primary sources of classical Marxism and Chinese theoretical interpretations has revealed conceptual transformations in the perception of historical materialism. The study of the philosophical treatise by Marx and Engels (1970) identified the fundamental postulate of the materialist view of history about the determining role of being concerning consciousness, emphasizing the importance of material factors in forming social consciousness. Comparative analysis of the epistemological works of Mao (2022) revealed the reconfiguration of this concept in the Chinese philosophical context through the implementation of the principle of dialectical interdependence of theoretical understanding and practical activity. This conceptual evolution reflected the systematic integration of orthodox Marxism with elements of the autochthonous Chinese philosophical methodology, forming the theoretical and methodological basis for further experimental socio-economic practice.

In Mao Zedong's writings, historical materialism underwent its first significant transformation as a Marxist concept. Jun et al. (2020) emphasized that Mao's revolutionary strategy demonstrated a new way of classical Marxism by integrating the theory with the specific practice of Chinese reality, which transformed the universalist claims of Marxism into a localized theory of revolutionary movement. In contrast to the classical interpretation, where the proletariat was defined as the main revolutionary force, Mao proposed the revolutionary path of *"surrounding cities with the countryside"*, redefining the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary process. The textual analysis of the treatise *"Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War"* (Mao, 2004) revealed a significant modification of the Marxist theory of revolution. In the semi-colonial context of China, military conflict was postulated as the dominant form of confrontation, and armed forces acquired the status of a key organizational structure. Other social mechanisms, including mass mobilization and social associations, retained a particular significance but were subordinated to military strategy. This conceptual transformation was due to the demographic composition of China at that time, which had a predominantly agrarian population.

In *"On Contradictions"* (Mao, 2022), the ideological leader developed a dialectical methodology to study China's unique socio-political circumstances. According to the theoretical construction, the antagonism between the industrial proletariat and the capitalist bourgeoisie was to be resolved through global socialist transformation. At the same time, the confrontation between colonized communities and imperialist powers required national liberation strategies. A critical analysis of the text revealed a fundamental divergence from orthodox Marxism: the author highlighted national liberation movements as autonomous theoretical elements,

without reducing them to a derivative element of the class struggle of the industrial proletariat.

In an epistemological study, *“On Practice”*, the author articulated the epistemological paradigm of the cyclical interaction of practical activity and theoretical understanding. According to this concept, the practical-theoretical cycle is implemented in a permanent iteration, with each new spiral turn accompanied by qualitative progress in both empirical experience and conceptual comprehension. The hermeneutical analysis presented here documents the organic convergence of Marxist dialectical methodology with autochthonous Chinese pragmatism, which became the theoretical basis for a revolutionary doctrine adapted to the specific socio-historical conditions of China.

A conceptual shift in class struggle theory developed from this initial transformation. Whereas classical Marxism addressed the confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in developed capitalist countries, Chinese theorists expanded this understanding to include the national liberation aspect and the forms of capitalism that emerged in the colonial context. Chinese communists formulated the general line of “revolution led by the proletariat, the masses, against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism”, which reflected the adaptation of Marxist class theory to the multi-layered social structure of China at that time (Sliusarevskiy, 2018; Radzhapov, 2024).

The transformation of the theory of surplus value occurred in parallel with its application to economic analysis in the Chinese context. During the New Democratic Revolution, Chinese theorists used this theory to reveal the mechanisms of exploitation in a semi-colonial society that combined foreign capital, bureaucratic capital, and feudal relations. It presented a more comprehensive analysis than the classical Marxist model, which focused on European-style industrial capitalism.

The synthesis of Marxist ideas with elements of traditional Chinese philosophy was critical in these conceptual transformations (Sheikh, 2018; 2022). Mao Zedong’s idea of *“seeking truth from facts”*, which combined Marxist epistemology with Chinese philosophical pragmatism, was fundamentally important. Lambert (2020) argued that Li Jiehou’s philosophical conception represents the most systematic attempt to synthesize Marxism with Confucian ideas and Kantian philosophy, proposing a “humanization of nature” concept combining historical materialism with traditional Chinese humanism. This methodological guideline influenced the formation of the entire theoretical structure of Chinese Marxism, emphasizing the correlation between theory and practice and the need to incorporate specific national conditions.

The classical Marxist concept of base and superstructure has undergone a significant conceptual transformation. In contrast to traditional economic determinism, where the economic base determined the political and ideological superstructure, Chinese Marxism developed a model emphasizing the active role of political will and ideology. The concept of “*politics as a commanding force*” reflected this transformation, partly due to the influence of traditional Chinese political philosophy, where moral and ideological leadership were seen as a factor in social order.

Terminological transformations of Marxist concepts substantially formed Chinese Marxism (Kultenko & Tokhtarits, 2020). The translation and adaptation of Marxist terminology to the Chinese language were accompanied by semantic shifts that reflected China’s cultural characteristics and intellectual traditions. These linguistic transformations influenced the definition and interpretation of key Marxist concepts in the Chinese context, creating a specific theoretical discourse.

The historical process of conceptual transformations of Marxism in China was characterized by the gradual development and adaptation of theoretical positions to changing socio-economic conditions (Lazurenko & Ocheretianyi, 2022; Pata, 2025). The study results of the historical stages of this transformation are systematized in Table 1.

Table 1. Historical Stages of Conceptual Transformations of Marxism in the Chinese Philosophical Tradition

Period	Historical context	Conceptual transformations	Key theoretical categories
1921-1949	Semi-colonial and semi-feudal society	Adapting revolutionary theory to an agrarian society	Historical materialism and class struggle
1949-1978	Formation of the socialist system	Transformation of the theory of socialist construction	Relationships between base and superstructure, the concept of contradictions
1978-2012	Reforms and openness	Synthesis of Marxism with market mechanisms	The theory of productive forces, practice as a criterion of truth
2012-present	A new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics	A conceptual combination of Marxism and Chinese tradition	Synthesis of Confucian values with Marxist development theory

Source: compiled by the authors based on Zhang et al. (2020), Jun and Yichen (2020), Wang et al. (2022).

The study of the conceptual transformations of Marxism in the Chinese context has revealed their dialectical nature, present in the interaction of theoretical adaptation and innovative development. On the one hand, there was an adaptation of Marxist categories to the Chinese reality, and on the other, an enrichment of the theoretical corpus of Marxism with new elements that emerged from the Chinese experience. This conceptual evolution created the basis for further methodological innovations, which

will be discussed in the next section, and for the practical application of transformed theories in the development of modern China.

Methodological Innovations of Chinese Marxism: Dialectic and Practice

The transformation of the methodological foundations of classical Marxism in the Chinese context took place through the systematic adaptation of theoretical concepts to the socio-historical conditions of China. The process of applying the Marxist methodology began in 1921 with the formation of the Communist Party of China and has undergone a long evolution through various historical stages of the country's development. Dialectical materialism, as the basis of classical Marxism, underwent structural modifications when integrated into the Chinese philosophical tradition, which led to the formation of original methodological approaches.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the transformation of the dialectical approach to the analysis of contradictions was central to the methodological innovations of Chinese Marxism. In *"On Contradictions"* and *"On Practice"*, Mao Zedong expanded the classical Marxist dialectics by developing a theory of the specificity and universality of contradictions. In contrast to the classical Marxist dialectic, which emphasized the general patterns of social development, the Chinese interpretation addressed the specific contradictions characteristic of semi-colonial and semi-feudal Chinese society. This methodological approach applied Marxist dialectics to the analysis of the unique conditions of Chinese society without mechanically copying Western models, as demonstrated during the Yan'an period (1935-1947). This methodological innovation was further developed by studying phenomenological Marxism in China. As noted by Yu and Fu (2023), the development of phenomenological Marxism in China can be divided into three stages, starting in the 1980s, when Luo Keting consciously embarked on a project to combine phenomenology with Marxism to create a more humanistic approach to the analysis of social reality.

Lambert (2020) noted that Li Jiehou made the most systematic attempt to synthesize Marxism with Confucian ideas and Kantian philosophy, proposing the concept of *"humanizing nature"*, which combines historical materialism with traditional Chinese humanism. With the development of its theoretical framework, Chinese Marxism modified the concept of practice as a criterion of truth. In *"On Practice"*, Mao Zedong reinterpreted the Marxist theory of cognition, emphasizing the cyclical nature of the interaction between theory and practice. The methodological principle of *"seeking the truth in facts"* formed the core of the Chinese approach to the definition of social reality. This principle synthesized Marxist epistemology with elements of traditional Chinese philosophical thought, particularly Confucian pragmatism.

Instead of dogmatically adhering to theoretical postulates, Chinese Marxism developed a methodology of constantly verifying theory through practice, which helped adapt Marxist ideas to dynamic social conditions (Khakhula & Ilnytskyi, 2021; Samus et al., 2023). This epistemological approach was officially enshrined at the Seventh Congress of the CCP in 1945.

A fundamentally new vector for the development of methodological innovations was observed during the period of reform and opening under Deng Xiaoping's leadership after 1978. The concept of "*socialism with Chinese characteristics*" was based on a methodological approach that involved a dialectical combination of Marxist principles with specific Chinese realities. Deng Xiaoping enriched the methodological toolkit of Chinese Marxism by introducing the principle of "*crossing the river by feeling the stones*". This approach introduced an experimental methodology that verified theoretical postulates through limited practical experiments, significantly different from classical Marxism with its propensity for comprehensive transformational models. The practical implementation of this methodology was the creation of special economic zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen in 1980 as experimental sites for economic reforms. According to a study by Zhang (2021), Chinese economists, especially Liu Guoguang, developed a specific social reproduction model that considered the Chinese economy's peculiarities – the weak initial industrial base, the agrarian nature of society, and foreign policy isolation. This methodology envisaged balancing the development of heavy, agricultural, and light industries to ensure production growth and maintain consumption levels.

The transformation of Marxist methodology in China's educational sphere was manifested through the systematic integration of dialectical materialism into the national education system (Järvis et al., 2022; Matviienko, 2024). The analysis of the Decision on the Reform of the Education System (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2016) revealed the development of a specific pedagogical doctrine of a "fully developed socialist personality" that synthesized the Marxist concept of polytechnic education with the Confucian traditions of respect for knowledge and social harmony. The methodological innovation was to combine class analysis with an emphasis on moral education, which was reflected in the structure of Chinese university curricula, where courses in Marxist theory were integrated with the study of national cultural heritage. Statistical data showed an increase in the number of Marxist faculties from 87 in 2000 to more than 3,000 in 2024, demonstrating the institutionalization of this methodological approach.

Research in the 1980s demonstrated that Chinese Marxism formulated a specific methodology for analyzing the stages of social development. The theory of the "*initial*

stage of socialism", officially approved at the 13th CPC Congress in 1987, modified the classical Marxist notion of the historical stages of social development. This methodological innovation was based on the recognition that China is at a special, long-term stage of development that requires specific approaches to building socialism. The classical Marxist notion of a rapid transition from capitalism to socialism was transformed into a long historical process involving the coexistence of different economic systems, which combined socialist orientation with market mechanisms.

The synthesis of traditional Chinese philosophical thought with Marxist methodology has become a characteristic feature of Chinese Marxism. The concepts of traditional Chinese dialectics, such as the interaction of yin and yang, the cyclical nature of development, and the harmony of opposites, were integrated with Marxist dialectics. This synthesis created a methodological approach that combined Western rationality with elements of the Eastern holistic tradition, distinguishing Chinese Marxism from classical Marxism, which developed in the context of the Western philosophical tradition. A concrete example of this synthesis was the concept of a "harmonious society" proposed by Hu Jintao in 2005, which combined Marxist principles of social justice with traditional Confucian ideas of social harmony.

The methodological transformations of Chinese Marxism are systematized in the comparative matrix of methodological approaches of classical and Chinese Marxism (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Methodological Approaches of Classical and Chinese Marxism

Methodology aspect	Classical Marxism	Chinese Marxism
Dialectic	Emphasis on the general laws of dialectics, the universality of contradictions	Emphasis on the specificity of contradictions, their specific historical nature
Theory of cognition	Practice as a criterion of truth, but with an emphasis on theoretical justification	The principle of "seeking truth in facts", the priority of practical verification over theoretical constructs
Analysis of the class structure	The binary opposition of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is the central contradiction.	Comprehensive analysis of the multi-level class structure, the concept of a "block of four classes"
Stages of social development	A precise sequence of socio-economic formations, socialism as a separate formation	The theory of the "initial stage of socialism", the possibility of the coexistence of different economic systems
Revolutionary strategy	The proletarian revolution in industrialized countries	The strategy of "surrounding cities with villages" emphasizes the peasantry as a revolutionary force

Methodology of economic reforms	Central planning is the basis of the socialist economy	Combining planning with market mechanisms, an experimental approach to economic transformation
Epistemological foundations	Focus on objective economic laws.	Synthesis of objective analysis with elements of traditional Chinese epistemology
Methodology of cultural analysis	The economic base determines culture as an element of the superstructure	Culture is a relatively autonomous sphere with an active influence on socio-economic development.
Approaches to analyzing globalization	Emphasis on class contradictions on a global scale	The concept of a “community of the common destiny of mankind” (人类命运共同体), a pragmatic approach to international cooperation

Source: compiled by the authors based on Ahmed (2023), Wang et al. (2022), Zhang (2021).

The dimension of Chinese Marxism was manifested in methodological approaches to analyzing public consciousness during the 1940s and 1970s. Chinese theorists used elements of phenomenological analysis to study the transformation of the population’s worldview in the process of revolutionary change. This approach included the study of symbolic forms of consciousness and their impact on social behavior. The Chinese methodology of “*ideological re-education*” was based on a specific understanding of the processes of transformation of consciousness, which adapted Marxist theory to a cultural context that traditionally focused on the moral and ideological aspects of social life. Campaigns of ideological re-education, such as the 1942-1944 Movement for the Correction of Work Style, demonstrated the practical application of this methodology.

Adapting Marxist methodology to analyzing market transformations was another methodological innovation in Chinese Marxism in the 1980s and 1990s. The developed methodology was based on a dialectical description of the relationship between the plan and the market as two forms of economic coordination that are not necessarily associated with a specific socio-economic system. Deng Xiaoping proposed a methodological approach that viewed the market as an instrument rather than an essential characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, which differed from the classical Marxist methodology. The 14th CPC Congress in 1992 enshrined the concept of a “*socialist market economy*” as the official methodological basis for economic reforms in China.

Since 2013, Xi Jinping’s theory of socialism and the Chinese characteristics of the new era have continued to develop methodological innovations. The methodological emphasis on “*human-centered development*” reflects the transformation of the classical Marxist understanding of social progress, integrating elements of the

humanist tradition with a socialist orientation. This methodological approach adapted the Marxist methodology to the conditions of globalization and the information society while maintaining the socialist social development perspective. The “two-century goals” methodology, proclaimed at the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, represents an innovative approach to strategic socio-economic development planning that combines Marxist principles with traditional Chinese state thinking in the long term.

Wang and Niu (2024) analyzed the application of Marxist methodology to contemporary international relations in the context of the scientific and technological confrontation between the United States and China. Noting that the structure of modern capitalism is reflected in scientific and technological competition, where the root of the conflict lies in the contradiction between productive forces and production relations on a global scale. The methodology of analyzing international relations in Chinese Marxism has undergone a significant transformation, especially since the 1970s. Mao Zedong’s “*three worlds*” theory, proposed in 1974, presented an alternative methodology for analyzing global relations. This approach views international relations through the prism of class struggle and by incorporating different countries’ geopolitical interests and national characteristics. During the 2010s, this methodology evolved into the “*community of the common destiny of mankind*”, which offers an innovative approach to globalization processes, different from the classical Marxist vision of globalization as a form of imperialist capital expansion.

The Interaction of Classical Marxism and Traditional Chinese Philosophy in the Formation of the Theoretical Framework of China’s Modern Development

The interaction between Marxism and China’s autochthonous philosophical tradition has formed a unique theoretical basis for the country’s socio-economic development. Lambert (2020) argued that Li Jiehou’s philosophical system was the most methodologically complete attempt to integrate Marxist dialectics with the Confucian ethical paradigm and Kantian epistemology. A comprehensive analysis of the policy documents of economic transformations of the period 1978-2024, in particular, the doctrinal “*Decision on the Reform of the Economic System*” (Xu, 2000) and the strategic “*Plan for the Implementation of Innovative Development*” (State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2015), identifying specific mechanisms for adapting Marxist political economy concepts into the applied economic strategy of the People’s Republic of China. The strategic concept of the “*four modernizations*” (agriculture, industrial production, science and technology, and defense), officially implemented in 1978, reflected a substantive reinterpretation of the Marxist theory of productive

forces. Chinese economic theorists exegeted Marx's classical thesis on the determining role of the development of productive forces in the context of the imperative of technological progress, synthesizing this theoretical construct with elements of the Confucian pragmatic tradition.

The large-scale geo-economic initiative "*One Belt, One Road*" (a modern reincarnation of the historical "*Silk Road*") manifested a fundamental transformation of the Marxist geopolitical paradigm through its convergence with the traditional Chinese concept of "*tianxia*". This theoretical evolution signaled a departure from the orthodox Marxist theory of imperialism towards the doctrine of the "community of the common destiny of mankind", which provided a theoretical justification for the transcontinental expansion of Chinese capital regarding the global development of productive forces.

Structural economic reforms and the introduction of market mechanisms, institutionalized in the theoretical construct of the "*socialist market economy*" (1992), were based on a dialectical rethinking of the Marxist concept of the relationship between planned and market economic models. The Chinese political economy school conducted a hermeneutical reconstruction of the Marxist theory of commodity-money relations, interpreting market mechanisms as a historically determined phase of economic development, organically combining structural analysis of production relations with the applied pragmatism of the Confucian tradition (An et al., 2024; Lailieva et al., 2025).

Economic theory with "*Chinese specifics*" emerged from integrating Marxist analysis of production relations with Confucian pragmatism. The study of economic reform documents from 1978 to 2024 demonstrated the transformation of the classical theory of surplus value when applied to the Chinese context. The principle of "*seeking the truth in facts*" proposed by Mao Zedong became a methodological bridge between Marxist epistemology and Chinese philosophical pragmatism, introducing an experimental approach to economic transformation.

A new type of social policy was formed through the prism of adapted Marxism. Targeted poverty alleviation programmes have combined class analysis with a traditional ethic of responsibility. Statistics depict the impact of this synthesis on social structure: basic health insurance coverage increased from 23% of the population in 2000 to 95% in 2018, and the poverty rate decreased from 30.7% to 0.6% over the same period. These dynamics demonstrate the practical implementation of the concept of "*moderate prosperity*", which has accumulated elements of Marxist social justice and the Confucian ideal of a harmonious society.

The analysis of the main elements of classical Marxism and their transformation in the Chinese context systematized the practical mechanisms of implementation and the results of implementing the synthesized concepts (Table 3).

Table 3. Practical Mechanisms of Implementation and Results of the Synthesis of Marxism and Chinese Philosophy

Element of Classical Marxism	Transformation in the Chinese context	Practical implementation mechanisms	Implementation results (2000-2020)
State economic planning	Integration of planned and market mechanisms	Five-year development plans with market adjustments	Average annual GDP growth of 8-10% for two decades
Socialist property	Diversity of ownership forms with public sector dominance	A system of large state-owned corporations with private investment	96 Chinese companies in the Fortune Global 500 (2020)
Class solidarity	Social harmony with Confucian elements	Targeted assistance programs (精准扶贫, jīngzhǔn fúpín)	Reduction of poverty from 30.7% (2000) to 0.6% (2019)
Ideological hegemony	A combination of Marxist education with traditional values	Reforming university curricula with the integration of traditional ethics	Training of 77.7 million specialists with higher education (2010-2020)
Foreign economic expansion	The concept of mutually beneficial cooperation (共赢, gòng yíng)	The Belt and Road Initiative	Investments of over 770 billion USD in 140 countries (2013-2020)
Improving employee welfare	The policy of “moderate welfare” (小康, xiǎokāng)	Social security system with Chinese characteristics	Growth of city revenues from 760 USD (2000) to 5400 USD (2019)
Cultural revolution	Revival of traditional culture with a Marxist perspective	Programs for the protection of intangible cultural heritage	40 sites on the UNESCO list, 1372 national projects
Anti-imperialist struggle	Multipolar diplomacy with Chinese characteristics	Creation of alternative international institutions (AIIB, SCO)	Formation of influential regional associations (RCEP, 2020)

Source: compiled by the authors based on National Bureau of Statistics of China (2020), Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (2016), Information Office of the State Council of the PRC (2011), State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2019).

These tables demonstrate the multidimensional transformation of Marxist concepts in the Chinese context. Evidently, the synthesis was not limited to theoretical constructions but embodied in economic, social, cultural, and foreign policy practice. The most illustrative example is the transformation of class solidarity into targeted aid programmes that combined Marxist principles with the Confucian ethic of mutual assistance.

Yu and Fu (2023) noted that the development of the theoretical strands of Chinese Marxism, including its philosophical and sociological aspects, has gone through several stages since the 1980s, when Chinese scholars consciously embarked on a project to rethink Marxist theory to create a more humanistic approach to analyzing social reality. In university curricula, dialectical materialism was applied to interpreting classical Chinese texts, creating a new methodology for analyzing philosophical heritage. The growth in students from 3.4 million in 1998 to 38.3 million in 2019 reflects how the synthesized educational concept was implemented in practice. This synthesis was also reflected in the curriculum structure, where courses on Marxism-Leninism were integrated into the study of national cultural traditions.

The geopolitical strategy of modern China demonstrates a rethinking of the Marxist analysis of international relations through integration with traditional concepts (Alnaimat et al., 2023; Auanasova et al., 2025). Wang and Niu (2024) highlighted that the structure of modern capitalism is reflected in the scientific and technological confrontation, where the root of the conflict lies in the contradiction between productive forces and production relations on a global scale. The Belt and Road Initiative is a practical embodiment of the transformed Marxist theory of imperialism, which has acquired new meaning through the combination with the ancient Chinese concept of “tianxia”. This approach is reflected in the structure of foreign economic relations, where the emphasis shifts from resource exploitation to creating infrastructure for multilateral cooperation. By 2020, this initiative covered more than 140 countries with a total investment of about 770 billion USD.

The concept of a “community of a common destiny for mankind” is central to China’s modern foreign policy doctrine. In it, classical Marxist internationalism was transformed through synthesis with the traditional idea of “harmony without unification”, creating a new vision of the world order. The practical expression of this synthesis was the creation of alternative international institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which operate on principles different from those of their Western counterparts.

The model of “socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” proposed by Xi Jinping demonstrated the further development of the interaction between Marxism and national tradition. This concept integrated the classical Marxist analysis of social contradictions with traditional Chinese state thinking in the long term. The methodology of “two-century goals” (2021-2049), introduced at the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, combined the Marxist interpretation of the historical process with the traditional Chinese approach to strategic planning.

In the economic sphere, the adaptation of Marxist theory was manifested in creating a new type of state-owned enterprise system. Zhang (2021) noted that Chinese economists, especially Liu Guoguang, developed a specific social reproduction model that incorporated the Chinese economy's peculiarities – the weak initial industrial base, the agrarian nature of society, and foreign policy isolation. These structures synthesized the Marxist concept of social property with market mechanisms, reflecting a rethinking of the classical plan-market dichotomy. Statistical data analysis showed that by 2020, 96 of the world's 500 largest corporations were Chinese, most of which belonged to the public sector but operated on market principles.

The transformation of the approach to cultural heritage reflected the synthesis of the Marxist understanding of culture with national traditions. In contrast to the classical Marxist view of traditional culture as an element of the feudal superstructure, Chinese Marxism developed the concept of “cultural heritage as a consolidating factor”. The programmes for preserving intangible cultural heritage, which covered 1372 national projects by 2020, demonstrate the practical implementation of this synthesis. As part of these programmes, traditional practices were reinterpreted as components of modern socialist culture.

The digital age has created new challenges for synthesizing Marxism and Chinese philosophy (Chaplinska & Kabanova, 2021; Efremov, 2025). Zhang et al. (2020) distinguish three stages in the development of Chinese society: “the period of the planned economy (1949-1978), the period of reform and opening up (1978-2012), and the current stage of the revival strategy (since 2012)”, which demonstrates the evolution of approaches to socio-economic development. The notion of “digital socialism” developing in modern China combines Marxist analysis of productive forces with traditional governance concepts. The introduction of advanced technologies into state planning and management reflects the adaptation of Marxist methodology to the conditions of the information society. This synthesis is manifested in the concept of “smart cities” and the “Made in China 2025” programme, where technological innovations are viewed through the prism of socialist modernisation.

The gradual evolution of the interaction between Marxism and Chinese philosophy can be traced from the period of Mao Zedong to the current stage under the leadership of Xi Jinping. While in the early stages (the 1950s-1970s) there was an adaptive borrowing of Marxist categories, a methodological synthesis was formed in the period of reforms (1980s-2000s), forming a unique development model. The current stage is characterized by a holistic theoretical approach, where Marxist and traditional Chinese elements form an organic unity that determines the state's policy in all spheres of public life.

Thus, the mutual influence of classical Marxism and traditional Chinese philosophy has created a theoretical framework that determines China's special development path. The transformed concepts have practical application in the economic model, social policy, educational system, and geopolitical strategy. The effectiveness of this synthesis is confirmed by the steady socio-economic development of the nation and the growth of its international influence.

Discussions

The study's results demonstrated that the interaction of classical Marxism with the Chinese philosophical tradition was transformative, leading to a theoretical system that became the basis for socio-economic transformations in China. Conceptual transformations took place through integrating Marxist categories with elements of Confucianism and a pragmatic approach to solving social problems. The methodological innovations of Chinese Marxism were manifested in developing approaches to analyzing social reality that considered the peculiarities of the national context. The practical application of the adapted theory has demonstrated the effectiveness of the synthesis of Marxism with the Chinese philosophical tradition in achieving socio-economic development and overcoming historical challenges.

The results obtained on the conceptual transformations of Marxism in the Chinese context complement the analysis by Sheikh (2023) of the theoretical foundations of Marxism through the prism of the Communist Manifesto and State and Revolution. The study demonstrated that Chinese Marxism significantly transformed the classical understanding of class struggle and revolutionary change, moving from rigid determinism towards pragmatic adaptation. The researcher addressed the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the central concept of Marxism. At the same time, the study determined that Chinese Marxism expanded this notion to include the peasantry as a major revolutionary force and redefined class relations in a semi-colonial society.

Dialectical materialism as a methodological basis for Marxist development was the subject of a study by Ahmed (2023), who proposed to return to Marx's original methodology instead of its later interpretations. The study's results expanded on this thesis by demonstrating how Chinese theorists transformed dialectical materialism to incorporate national characteristics, creating a methodological approach that combined elements of Western rationality with traditional Chinese holistic thinking. The researcher emphasized emancipation and self-realization in the context of climate change. At the same time, the study revealed a wider range of adaptations of the dialectical method in the Chinese context to address specific historical development challenges.

Teaching Marxist religious concepts from the perspective of cultural security was addressed by Sun (2021), emphasizing the need to strengthen ideological education in the face of global challenges. The study's results expanded on this by

demonstrating how the Chinese philosophical tradition transformed Marxist methodology in the educational sphere, creating a synthesis that became the basis of the national education system. In contrast to the researcher, who focused on religious aspects, the study revealed a more comprehensive transformation of the educational system, which included the integration of Marxist dialectic with traditional teaching methods and forming a specific model of moral education.

Debele (2021), in a critical review of classical sociological theories, examined the Marxist interpretation of history as the result of material relations and class struggle, while Li (2022) analyzed the transformations of Marxist cultural theory in British New Libya. The results of the study showed consistency with these works. However, with important differences: Chinese Marxism transformed the concept of economic determinism, giving greater importance to the active role of political will and ideology in shaping society, which confirms the concept of *"politics as a commanding force"* identified in the study. Like the researcher's findings, the relative autonomy of culture was established. However, as the study showed, the Chinese version retained a connection with classical theory, creating the concept of *"cultural heritage as a consolidating factor"* radically different from the approach of the British New Left.

A critical view of Marxism as a tribal ideology that insists on the inevitability of social conflict and revolution is presented in Forgas (2024). The author analyzed the psychological mechanisms behind the attractiveness of Marxist ideology, including the desire for epistemic certainty and moral absolutism. The study results demonstrated that Chinese Marxism has avoided many of the limitations criticized by the researcher by adapting the theory to the national context and combining revolutionary rhetoric with a pragmatic approach to economic development.

Yarar Aksoy (2023) analyzed the revival of Marxism in film studios after the 2008 crisis, and A. Ullah (2022) studied its application in industrial relations. The study results demonstrated that Chinese Marxism has developed original approaches in both areas: phenomenological Marxism provided a nuanced analysis of culture, and in labor relations, class analysis was integrated with traditional ethical concepts. It confirms the tendency identified in the study to synthesize Marxist theory with elements of national tradition, which has created practical tools for social management that differ from Western models.

Goonewardena (2023) analyzed David Harvey's contribution to the development of critical geography through the concepts of dialectics and totality, while Holdren and Tucker (2020) examined Marxist theories of law, suggesting a combination of theoretical and empirical research. The study results demonstrated that Chinese Marxism has undergone similar sectoral transformations: spatial relations have been redefined by integrating Marxist analysis with traditional concepts of spatial organization, and legal relations have developed with a greater emphasis on social order than on legal individualism. It manifested the ability of Chinese Marxism to adapt the theory to national needs, as identified in the study. Instead of simply

criticizing it, as in Harvey, the Chinese model created a practical methodology for development planning and social management.

Liao (2023) analyzed the impact of the ideas of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China on the development of Marxist theory, emphasizing the need for a systematic model that integrates academic research, education, and ideological training. The study's results complemented this analysis by showing the historical roots of this integration and its theoretical foundations in synthesizing Marxism with the Chinese philosophical tradition. At the same time, in contrast to the researcher, who analyzed the current stage of development of Marxist theory, the study revealed the continuity of transformational processes from the early stages of Chinese Marxism to modern interpretations.

The identified methodological innovations of Chinese Marxism, particularly the experimental approach of "crossing the river by feeling for stones". Gagnon (2019), analyzing the ethnography of global political economy through the works of Nash and Tsing, showed how local communities influence global processes. Royle (2020) explored the tension between socialist and naturalist interpretations of environmental Marxism. The study results demonstrated that Chinese Marxism combined both directions: it adapted global theoretical concepts to local conditions, emphasizing centralized planning. It integrated traditional philosophical concepts in environmental issues more deeply than is represented in Western interpretations of Marxism.

Perry (2021) explored the panorama of Marxist history, emphasizing the flexibility of Marxism as a tool for historical research. At the same time, Martins (2022) analyzed the dependency theory through the concepts of super-exploitation and sub-imperialism. The study results demonstrated that Chinese Marxism transformed both areas: historical analysis was adapted to the national context with a combination of the role of the masses and prominent individuals, and the theory of international relations was rethought with an emphasis on mutually beneficial cooperation instead of the classical center-periphery model. It confirms Chinese Marxism's ability to borrow Western concepts and create unique theoretical and practical models based on them.

The study revealed the mechanisms of transformation of classical Marxism in the Chinese philosophical context, demonstrating how conceptual adaptation and methodological innovation contributed to creating a unique theoretical system with Chinese characteristics. The findings expand understanding of the interaction between different philosophical traditions and show how theoretical transformations influence practical socio-economic development models. Further research could analyze the latest forms of adaptation of Marxist theory to the challenges of the digital age and global environmental issues, and compare different national models of Marxist transformation.

Conclusions

The study demonstrated that the significance of classical Marxism for Chinese Marxism is determined by forming a theoretical foundation that has undergone a

significant transformation in adapting to China's national characteristics. The analysis of conceptual transformations has shown that classical Marxist categories, such as historical materialism, the theory of surplus value, and class struggle, have been reinterpreted to consider the specifics of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The key feature of this transformation was the reinterpretation of the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary process and the development of the theory of "revolution led by the proletariat, the masses, against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism". An important outcome of this process was the gradual evolution from direct borrowing of Marxist ideas to their creative adaptation and synthesis with elements of traditional Chinese philosophy, as reflected in the systematic table of historical stages of Marxism's conceptual transformations.

A study of the methodological innovations of Chinese Marxism revealed the formation of original approaches to the dialectical analysis of social reality. In contrast to classical Marxist dialectics, the Chinese interpretation focused on specific contradictions characteristic of the unique conditions of Chinese society. The most significant methodological innovations were the principle of "seeking truth in facts", which synthesized Marxist epistemology with Confucian pragmatism; the experimental approach of "crossing the river by feeling for stones", which verified theoretical postulates through limited practical experiments; and the concept of "the initial stage of socialism", which modified the classical Marxist understanding of the historical stages of social development. The developed comparative matrix of methodological approaches of classical and Chinese Marxism demonstrated significant differences in nine key aspects, demonstrating the formation of an original methodological system.

An analysis of the interaction between classical Marxism and traditional Chinese philosophy revealed the formation of a synthetic theoretical framework that has determined China's special development path. The most illustrative was the transformation of the concept of class solidarity into targeted assistance programmes that combined Marxist principles with the Confucian ethic of mutual assistance, as evidenced by the statistical data on the reduction of poverty from 30.7% in 2000 to 0.6% in 2019. Significant results also included the formation of an economic model that combines planned and market mechanisms; the development of an educational system that integrates Marxist methodology with traditional approaches to education; and the development of a geopolitical strategy that transformed classical Marxist internationalism through synthesis with the concept of "harmony without unification". The systematization of practical mechanisms of implementation and the results of the synthesis of Marxism with Chinese philosophy in eight key areas have confirmed the practical effectiveness of this theoretical synthesis.

Based on the results obtained, it is possible to recommend further analysis of Chinese Marxism as a national modification of the classical theory and as an independent theoretical system with significant potential for addressing modern development challenges. The study's practical significance lies in identifying

mechanisms for conceptual adaptation of philosophical systems to national peculiarities, which can be used to develop the theoretical foundations of socio-economic transformations in other countries, considering their cultural specifics. The identified models of integrating traditional values with modern theoretical concepts can also be applied in intercultural communication and international cooperation.

A limitation of the study is the lack of internal theoretical debates in the Chinese academic environment on the interpretation of Marxist theory and its interaction with the national philosophical tradition. Further research should focus on analyzing the latest forms of adaptation of Marxist theory to the challenges of the digital age and global environmental issues, as well as on a comparative analysis of different national models of Marxist transformation.

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