

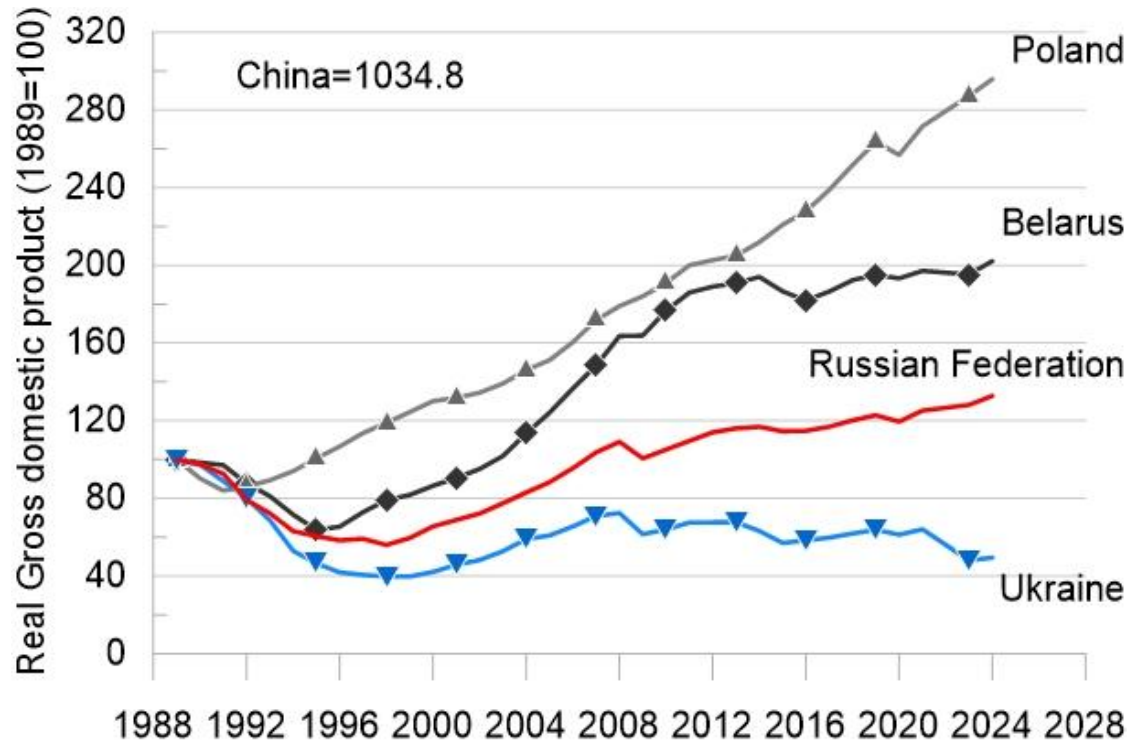
On the need to see the world through non-Western lenses: some reflections on the Chinese path to socialism

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1 Not all societal development paths are Western paths and not all are capitalist paths (due to resistance)

- Capitalism is a mode of production that came to dominate European civilisation and European societies at a time when much of the world's population lived in tributary empires.
- Commercial, financial and political at first capitalism was from the outset associated with colonial and imperial expansion (it started with it) and quests for hegemony (Greece and Rome, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Dutch Republic, GB, Germany, US, Japan ...)
- Once established a dominant aim is to open up the world for colonial, imperial and private capitalist exploitation (value extraction, predation and value creation)
- It was secured by enduring Western domination of the realms of information and ideology and control over narratives (western supremacist lenses reflected in Western ontology such as Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, enlightenment liberalism, 1990s (neo)liberalism on stilts, ... (decolonisation of social science called for by Xi Jinping)
- All socialist revolutions (and Iranian revolution) were and are obstacles standing in the way of Western capitalism and imperialism which is one reason for
- **The current struggle against China** aims to exact and pocket concessions), prevent China from challenging western hegemony, contribute to the establishment in China of a completely westernised system (the real end game) by imposing their way of thinking especially on elites, destabilising China (Hong Kong, Xinjiang ...), creating divisions between China and other countries (including by spreading disinformation) ...

Capitalist and socialist societies



Consequences of adoption of liberal recommendations of IMF and World Bank (who actually ran economic policy in accordance with contemporary Western advice to China)

- In 1989-91 the transition to capitalism in Russia started with political change ('historical nihilism') and splitting up of Soviet Union, World Bank and IMF reform
- In China an attempt 'to establish a completely westernised system' (Deng Xiaoping) was defeated.
- China avoided a transition to capitalism and is policy-driven and designed to fulfil human needs and where social recognition derives from 'what you contribute to the shared work of cultural and material life' (Fabio Bigli)
- 'rather than endless transformation of human labour into abstract value, represented by money'

The hegemony of a liberal/neoliberal constitution of capital

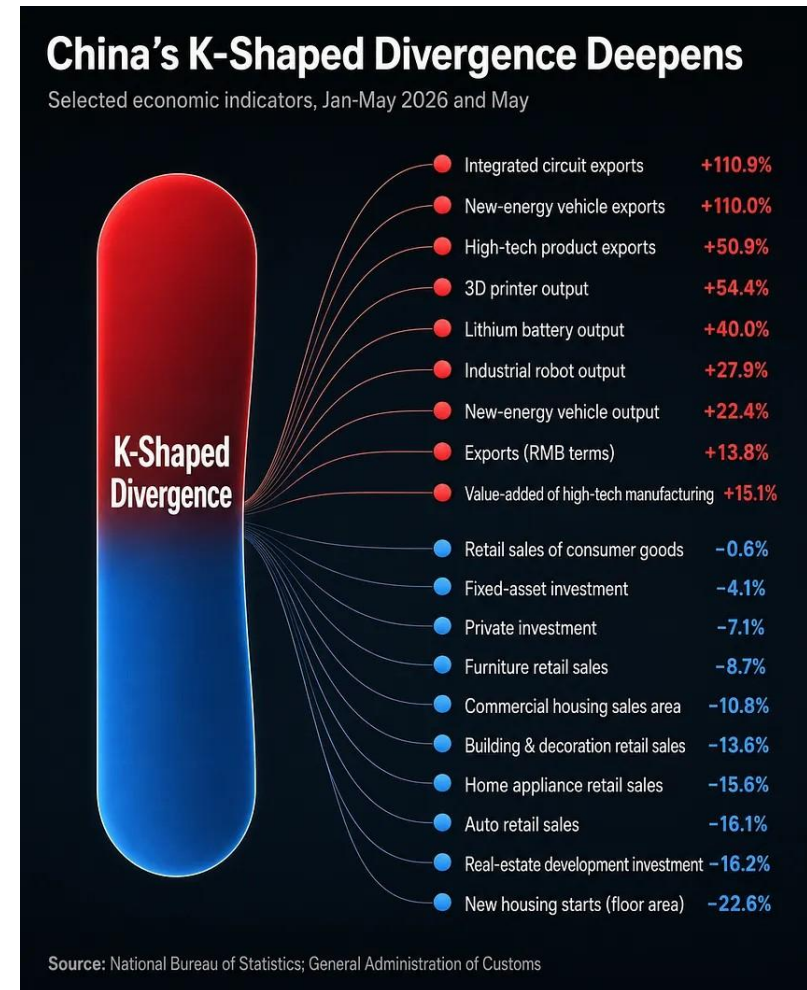
- Capitalist and imperialist societies rest on a (global) constitution of private capital and economic liberty: the protection of freedom and private property rights from the state and the *démos* (δῆμος) through a visible hand of law (in neoliberalism beyond the reach of sovereign states) alongside the hidden hand of the market and the exorbitant privilege of imperial financial centres. Crises and fascism. Commodification/decommodification/recommodification (debt)
- ‘A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell, it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it.’ Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 1917

Chinese system of political governance

- On coming to power 公函当 established the people's democratic dictatorship and the system of people's congresses (after initial plans for a joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes including national bourgeoisie under the leadership of the proletariat)
- In March 1979 Deng Xiaoping ('Upholding the Four Cardinal Principles') subsequently written into the constitution: keeping to the path of socialism; upholding the dictatorship of the proletariat (people's democratic dictatorship); upholding the leadership of the CPC; upholding Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.
- All process democracy, substantive versus procedural democracy
- 'Socialist public property is sacred and inviolable.' Constitution protects citizen's personal private property.
- Capitalist class is not the ruling class.

Governance and planning: A democratic policy-driven 'plan-rational state'

- In the current primary stage of socialism the principal task remains the development of the forces of production and the required transformation of the relations of production in an economic system in which public ownership and distribution according to labour along with CPC governance play dominant roles. The fundamental purpose of development is the achievement of common prosperity. (共同富裕 - gòngtóng fùyù) for all the people.
- In 1955 Mao Zedong said: 'our goal is to catch up with and surpass the United States. How many decades will it take? Through everyone's hard work, at least fifty years, perhaps seventy-five years—that's fifteen five-year plans.' China is embarking on the 15th Five-year plan (2026-2030)



Markets do not discriminate between spurious and non-spurious uses of resources. Ends of economic activity depend on preferences, supported by purchasing power. All that matters is that someone wants something, can pay for it and it can be supplied at a profit.

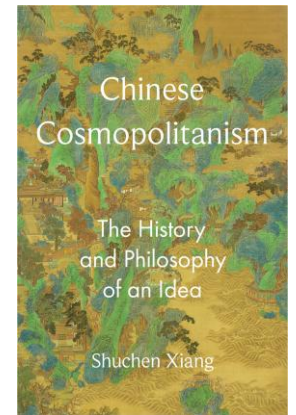
China's latest **policy-driven** transformation

- China's latest transition is from finance, platforms, and a land-real estate nexus (which dominated credit and wealth expansion for two decades) to industrial capability, technological upgrading, export networks, and higher-quality nominal growth that increase national security, people's livelihoods, and international competitiveness
- **China's 'real economy' policy aims to increase state capacity** to organise capital, labour, technology, infrastructure, energy, enterprises, and supply chains into durable productive power (Leon Liao).
- **In infrastructure industries public returns are high when private or fiscal returns deter investment** so state-owned banks, local governments, state and collective enterprises, and policy institutions support projects whose returns emerge partly outside the project itself (social return exceeds their standalone financial return)

3A From Western metaphysics (and second integration)

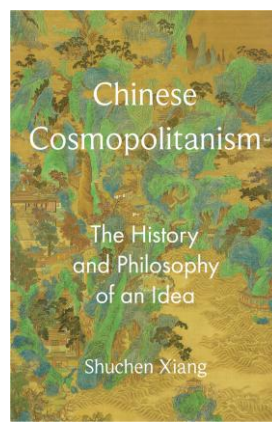
- Aristotle's theory of natural slavery argued that on their own non-Greeks are incapable of reason and that their purpose (telos) is to be subjugated by a rational Greek to act reasonably. That thinking depends on a substance ontology in which the substance determines being or becoming of things and posits ontological superiority (as in manifest destiny) (Xiang Shuchen)
- These ideas are reflected in the racist idea that China was an instance of oriental despotism (in which a tyrant lords over servile peoples in its sphere of influence) which assumes that 'Asiatics' are more servile in character and so did not revolt.
- Aristotle also contends that every physical object is a compound of matter and form. This concept lends itself to the western practice of the coercive imposition of an ideal form on matter. Examples include colonial and imperial practices, hegemony, and colour revolutions whose goal is to impose western values (= interests) and institutions on others. All reflect a concept of western superiority.

versus Chinese metaphysics (and second integration)



- Chinese metaphysics rests on a processual perspective: the performance of actions in accordance with social norms is constitutive of the achievement of a moral category of humanness, and no group is ontologically superior.
- In Chinese empirically focused ontology, all diverse particulars/ things (万物) are considered to be in a state of change as a result of their own inner potentialities and spontaneous source of initiative) and their interaction with all other particulars (other than themselves) (Xiang, 2023, pp. 101, 114, 128)
- materialist concept of history (development of the forces and relations of production and of metabolic relationships to nature (万物)): material civilisation, social relations of production, ecological civilisation, spiritual civilisation
- Chinese thought is informed by a metaphysics of harmony and an account of causal efficacy that rests on non-coercive actions that accommodate, and enable everything to realise their potentialities.
- As such it is incompatible with colonising missions (though China possessed opportunities and a capable military, technology and knowledge system).

4 A difference in core concepts: individualism versus collectivism



- Mainstream western theories reside are founded on ontological individualism' and the centrality of rational actors pursuing personal/private advantage. A difficulty of the latter is that individualism simply cannot generate sufficient social solidarity, a sufficient sense of shared common values or a sufficient awareness of community which are the absolute pre-requisites for the integration and cohesion of societies and nation states, collective solutions to global issues and common prosperity.
- Indeed relatively unfettered individualism releases centrifugal social forces (Wang Huning America against America) and cause uneven development and social disintegration. As Durkheim argued (1983) 'Man is only a moral being because he lives in society, since morality consists in solidarity with the group and varies according to that solidarity. Cause all social life to vanish, and moral life would vanish at the same time having no object to cling to.'
- Chinese concepts of harmony such as symbiosis (共生) emphasise the existence of the self in relation to others rather than existence in isolation (as does Marx). Guangxi emphasises relations of reciprocity, relational self-interest and Confucius' adage, 'If you want to establish yourself, help others to establish themselves; if you want to be successful, help others to be successful.'

The case of Japan

- In 1885 Meiji-era (dating from 1868) Japanese reformer Yukichi Fukuzawa wrote that Japan must 'leave the ranks of Asian nations and cast our lot with *civilised* nations of the West' (Author's italics).
- After adoption of the western ethos ('civilised') Japan lurched into capitalist industrialisation and imperialist adventures, seizing Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria in 1931 ...

5 On liberalism

- Human beings are not social animals but self-interested individuals: ‘Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe’, said Hobbes (1983 [1642], p. 24). Second, human beings are incapable of agreement on any definition of the common good. Individuals enter into a social contract agreeing to give up certain freedoms and submit to a sovereign authority who can provide security and order. Beyond that it is a matter of live and let live.
- John Locke had a less pessimistic view of the possibility of rational individual conduct, but argued that individuals have rights to life, liberty, and private property and enter a social contract in which they conditionally transfer some rights to a political government in order to secure their lives, liberty, and private property rights.
- A consequent liberal order is in each case one whose central aims are the guarantee of individual freedom and private property rights, and their protection from the state and the *démos* (δῆμος).
- Modern states combine legal and political equality of isolated individuals in political life abstracted from real differences in economic life that are through it institutionalised, associated with procedural (rather than substantive) multi-party representative democracy; and the separation of powers (legislative, executive and judicial).

From liberalism to colonialism and imperialism, a sense of superiority and the conflation of shared values and western institutions

- The advance of liberalism went hand in hand with colonialism and imperialism which were advocated by leading liberal theorists such as de Tocqueville and Mill. In relation to China, Mill asserted that, 'if they are ever to be farther improved it must be by foreigners'.
- A consequence of this liberal stance was the eventual nineteenth- and twentieth-century replacement of an Enlightenment cosmopolitanism by an aggressive colonialism and a sense of superiority.
- Western elites deliberately conflate the common values of humanity such as peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom (gōng yì) with specific Western liberal/authoritarian capitalist institutions (gè yì)
- Common is used in this instance to challenge the way western liberalism/capitalism conflates a generic concept (a 'universal value') with specific western liberal capitalist political and economic institutions.
- These claims about moral superiority that invoke democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law take the place of the widespread claims of religious and racial supremacy that provided steady support in the past for colonial conquests.
- These claims are in fact all designed to serve western colonial and imperial interests.

Though there are common values of humankind, China differs radically from capitalist societies

- In terms of its governance system (all-process democracy and people's democratic dictatorship),
- its policy driven development model,
- its goals (development of the material forces and social relations of production to establish common prosperity, ecological civilisation, spiritual civilisation through a succession of transitions in non-western (socialist) path to modernity
- And its integration with Chinese thought and good aspects of Chinese culture (and development of Chinese philosophy and social science rather than globalisation of western individualism and liberal ideologies)
- To which one should add its international engagement

Thank you
谢谢



Afterword

- ‘Capitalism is not a system designed to fulfil basic human needs; it is an automated engine driven by a singular, pathological compulsion: the endless transformation of human labour into abstract value, represented by money’ (Fabio Bigli).
- This statement does not describe what China is. Instead China is something different whose goal is the development of the material forces and social relations of production to establish common prosperity, ecological civilisation, spiritual civilisation through a non-western (socialist) path to modernity, where social recognition derives from ‘what you contribute to the shared work of cultural and material life’.

5A Western international relations: liberalism, realism (and nationalism)

- The premises of the most influential Western (realist) theories of international relations are liberal assumptions of individual and national egoism, and in the absence of a supranational state international anarchy. And yet realists arrive at the conclusion that international politics is a realm of power politics and interests ('raison d'état'). For realists, conflict among great powers with different capabilities, and balance of power politics, are of enduring salience (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979).
- In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries several attempts were made to impose liberal hegemony. A philosophical justification was provided by Kant (1939 [1795]) who argued that liberal freedoms and democracy, and a voluntary federation of liberal republics, would usher in peace and prosperity.
- 'Alongside liberal constitutionalism: It is the spirit of commerce that sooner or later takes hold of every nation, and is incompatible with war: the power of money being that which of all others gives the greatest spring to states, they find themselves obliged to labour at the noble work of peace, though without any moral view; and instantly seek to stifle, by mediations, war, in whatever part it may break out.'

5B versus Chinese concepts of international relations

- The central in Chinese international relations is harmony (和谐). Chinese (and traditional East Asian) visions are of a harmonious international order (the avoidance of conflict through the pursuit of shared interests, mutual respect, and noninterference) and are rooted in Chinese concepts of 'All under heaven' (**tiān xià** – 天下), 'relationality' (关系 - guānxi), and 'symbiosis' (共生 - gòngshēng) (emphasises the existence of the self in relation to others rather than existence in isolation as in liberal thought).

Why divide the sciences?

- The division of social science into economics, politics, sociology, geography, history is a source of a non-holistic account of socio-natural totalities
- Unity of science and social science (technology): subjects seeking an evolving understanding of a changing world (humans as a part of nature). Each is a part of a collective understanding of the world.
- Implications of scientific work: Embedded in a totality of relations, impacting subjective experience (through social relations, medical systems)
- The practice of existing socialism as a foundation of theory and interpretation.

In liberal capitalism

- In realm of law sovereign legal personalities (individuals and corporations) are bearers of freedom and abstract 'equality' rights: class domination (a relation of power of capital over labour) appears as an objective and impartial legal relationship between two autonomous and equal owners of commodities and money, so that
- 'the machinery of state coercion' does not appear as 'the private machinery of the ruling class'. Instead, it detaches 'itself from the ruling class and take[s] on the form of an impersonal apparatus of public power [a public authority], separate from society'.
- A market does not discriminate between spurious and non-spurious uses of resources. The ends of economic activity are determined by preferences, supported by purchasing power, and the aim is so-called efficiency in the use of resources (so that no reallocation of resources can increase the output of one commodity, or the utility of one individual, without reducing that of another). All that matters is that someone wants something, can pay for it and it can be supplied at a profit.