What should we learn from China?

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This talk’s genesis...

1. Developing countries seeking alternatives to Western development strategies/philosophies, i.e., the emergence of a receptive trend with respect to new ideas and ways of thinking.

2. “China’s Rise” relative to a perceived “Western Decline.”

3. The possibility of a “China Model” (as a discourse if not policy) along with additional emergent “Chinese” trends among Chinese intellectuals, officials, etc.

4. A talk Bruce Dickson gave last summer at 中央编译局...


6. A keynote lecture presented at a national pedagogy conference in Shanghai.
Starting with this titular question and given a Western epistemological tradition that has arguably given rise to and is presently mired in political and economic crises, we discuss the “China model” and other contemporary Sinocentric or Chinese-inspired developments, including official political thought and ideology, as possibly indicating the emergence of a new, alternative discourse if not epistemology and *episteme*, with implications for theories and practices of political economy.

We suggest that one area that deserves more attention is the Chinese practice of synthesizing dialectical and linear ways of thinking throughout the modern period and especially since the May 4th Movement, 1919.
But since we’re in Copenhagen, let’s start with Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* (1843)

Aristotelian Logic: 1) Law of identity \((A = A; \text{a thing is identical to itself})\); 2) Law of excluded middle (either \(A\) or not-\(A\); a thing is either something or not that thing, no third option); 3) Law of non-contradiction. (not both \(A\) and not-\(A\); a thing cannot be both true and not true in the same instant)

Hegelian Logic: 1) Law of identity is inaccurate because a thing is always more than itself; 2) Law of excluded middle is inaccurate because a thing can be both itself and many others; 3) Law of non-contradiction is inaccurate because everything in existence is both itself and not itself.
What I propose here is that we think of thought itself as being capable of two different ways of knowing, **linear** and **dialectical**.

I agree with Alasdair MacIntyre who views Kierkegaard’s thought as being largely Kantian in its rejection of Hegel’s dialectic, with it’s chief innovation being a deepening of the questions of individual Being and existence.

I see this as being symptomatic of the times, i.e., the West in thrall largely to a capitalist hermeneutic and it mutually reinforcing ideological values in religion (Protestantism), politics (bourgeois liberalism), and philosophy (individualism and utilitarianism).
Heraclitus

Pre-Socratic Skepticism and Dialectics
Plato’s Allegory of the Cave
Into the sun...
Jesus’ “cave...”
Saul on the road to Damascus
Paul (5-67) famously described himself as a “Jew by birth, a Christian by faith, a citizen by Rome, a Greek by education.” In the last sense, he meant that he had been educated in Greek philosophy.
Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the first major theologian of the Catholic Church. Recalling that Paul had described himself as a “Greek by education,” Augustine noted...
... that most of the *New Testament* was written by Paul, and that what he wrote followed a way of thinking that was consistent with Platonic thought. Consequently, Augustine famously made Platonic thinking the basis of Catholic theology.
In turn, with the decline of Aristotelian empiricism and the rise of faith-based religious idealism, within a short period of time, Europeans forgot how to do complicated math. They forgot how to build arches and domes, even though the remains of both were still visible from Greek and Roman ruins. Science was lost, forgotten, and suppressed. Europe fell into the Dark Ages.
This led substantially to a rupture between Platonic and Aristotelian thought, and suppressed the dialectic between them insomuch as much of Aristotle’s works were lost if not burned...
السلطات العثمانية في أوج انتشارها

خليج فارس در نشأة حكومات عربية (حكومات إسلامي) در أوج وعهد
القبائل العربية، الصبرة إلى مسيرات تأليف صبي عبد الكريم نزه
محمد شفيق غريب، شارف، 1956،
The Effects of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* (1265–1274)

Drawing from Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Aquinas’ work provided the ideological basis for the start of the Enlightenment and the eventual fall of many absolute monarchs.

Nevertheless, while Aquinas’ efforts assured empiricism’s return, and in such a way that it would ultimately and unintentionally displace the Church’s Platonic, idealist metaphysics, the culture of resentment remained, and the concept of dialectics was thoroughly suppressed.
Hegel and Marx’s Attempted Corrective

Hegel’s idealist dialectics...

Marx’s materialist dialectics...
Contrarily, China has what some call…

Correlative thinking, a “yin-yang way of thinking,” holism, dialectics (ancient and modern)
Dialectical and Correlative Thinking


“What has come to be called correlative thinking is effectively a nonlogical procedure in the sense that it is not based upon natural kinds, part whole relations, an implicit or explicit theory of types, or upon casual implications or entailments of anything like the sort one finds in Aristotelian or modern Western logics. Correlative thinking employs analogical associations.”
"The relative difference of correlative thinking to logical analysis means that ambiguity, vagueness, and incoherence associable with images and metaphors are carried over into the more formal elements of thought. In contradistinction to the rational mode of thinking which privileges univocity, correlative thinking involves the association of elements into image clusters which guarantee to its constituents richly vague significance." (Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, p. 195)
The Chinese Dialectical Tradition

Shang Oracle Bones
‘Harmony’ / ‘and’ (vs. Either/Or)

龢/和  -  harmony / harmonious / peace, peaceful / to be affable / conjunction: ‘and’

禾  -  grains still on the stalk / millet

口  -  the mouth / a person / a certain article (as a cistern, a big jar, etc.) / an opening / a gate (especially in the Great Wall or city walls) / a crack
Left: The left part, *yue*, is the name of an ancient reed flute that produced harmonious music; hence, *he*, indicated the sound. The sound of the music is peaceful. Within a few generations, the character’s use in seal script evolved, like this:
Yijing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>乾</th>
<th>兑</th>
<th>離</th>
<th>震</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>qian</td>
<td>dui</td>
<td>li</td>
<td>zhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yang metal</td>
<td>yang metal</td>
<td>yang</td>
<td>yang wood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>离</th>
<th>坎</th>
<th>艮</th>
<th>坤</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>xun</td>
<td>kan</td>
<td>gen</td>
<td>kun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yin wood</td>
<td>yang water</td>
<td>yang earth</td>
<td>yin earth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confucius, Book of Rites, etc.

Xiaokang shehui

Datong shehui
Laozi, Daodejing, Daoism
Chan Buddhism
Marxist-Leninist Thinking

ВЫШЕ ЗНАМЯ МАРКСА, ЭНГЕЛЬСА, ЛЕНИНА И СТАЛИНА!
Why did the Chinese “choose” Marxism?

1. Russian Revolution, 1917
2. Treaty of Versailles, 1919, May 4th Movement
3. ‘Semi-colonial’ status worsening under Japan
4. A cultural predisposition to dialectical thinking
5. An emergent conviction contra traditionalism
6. However, cultivation of humanistic-based social justice consistent with fundamental Confucian values at the heart of Chinese culture
7. A recognition that the masses would have to be involved
8. Early discussions led effectively by Li Dazhao, Qu Qiubai, and Li Da
9. It was adaptable, it was adapted, it “worked”
Chinese Marxists, 1921-onward
A Few Examples of Dialectical Thinking and Problem Solving

1. Mao: “Two World Outlooks”
2. Mass Line, *maodun*/primary and secondary contradictions, etc.
3. Mixed Economic Models, namely, a socialist market economy
4. For a while, the double track price systems
5. SOE reforms, new ownership models
6. Special Economic Zones
7. Mao to Deng: from *Datong* to *Xiaokang/Datong*
8. One Country, Two Systems
9. Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents”
10. Hu Jintao’s Scientific Outlook on development and harmonious Society
11. The “China Model”
Two world outlooks: Throughout the history of human knowledge, there have been two conceptions concerning the law of development of the universe, the metaphysical conception and the dialectical conception, which form two opposing world outlooks. Lenin said:

The two basic (or two possible? or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, and development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation). Here Lenin was referring to these two different world outlooks.
Broadly, Mao pursued policies that, in his words at least, were designed to achieve “da tong,” the term used by Confucius to describe the “Grand Course,” the “Grand Unity.”

After Mao died (1976), a period of transition ensued, culminating in Deng Xiaoping’s rise. For the most part (70%!), Deng affirmed Mao’s goals, but in 1979, in lieu of making a direct run to da tong, Deng proposed a xiao kang strategy... This signals the start of the “reform era.”
Jiang: Three Represents

Reviewing the course of struggle and the basic experience over the past 80 years and looking ahead to the arduous tasks and bright future in the new century, our Party should continue to stand in the forefront of the times and lead the people in marching toward victory. In a word, the Party must always represent the requirements of the development of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of the development of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.
Hu: Theory and Policy

- Harmonious Society, domestic and foreign policy
- Scientific Development Concept (2003)
- A Multipolar World while extending China’s soft power
- Strategic positioning by deepening Alliances initiated under Jiang, i.e., the SCO, ASEAN, WTO, etc.
- Addressing energy concerns through relationships with “rogues” and by massive investments in green technology
- The North Korea-Taiwan dialectic
Scientific Development Concept (2003)

The current official guiding socio-economic ideology of the Communist Party of China incorporating sustainable development, social welfare, a humanistic society, increased democracy, and, ultimately, the creation of a Harmonious Society. The ideology stems from the basic premise that it is possible for the state to "engineer" sustainable development through tested and proven methodologies of governance. Such a scientific approach is said to minimize conflict amongst different interest groups in society in order to maintain stability on the national level, in turn fostering economic and cultural advancement.

科学发展观 kēxué fāzhǎn guān
The China Model

1. Some argue that it is a concept that stands in opposition to the “Washington Consensus.”

2. Some suggest that it is an approach to development that is essentially Chinese.

3. Both President Hu and Premier Wen say there is no China Model, however some officials contend that there is...

4. Has risen substantially as a discourse, one where there is little agreement or certainty that “a” particular model exists. This point deserves special attention, epistemologically speaking...
Zhonghua Culture
and Emergent Intellectual Trends

There is an active, substantial ongoing effort at many levels of Chinese society to recapture, rearticulate, reposition, and so on, Zhonghua culture. On the one hand, this sometimes appears to be little more than a form of vulgar nationalism, and sometimes perhaps it’s just propaganda. However, in fact, there is considerable evidence that this effort is being treated seriously by China’s leading intellectuals and government officials, and that their efforts are progressing and resonating with many, and further, having direct consequences on policymaking. I think it would be a mistake to suggest cynically that this is just a soft power exercise, or that it is a hapless searching for “self”, post-Marxism. Contrarily, Marxism is still substantially part of the fabric of Chinese thinking, due to the fact that Marxism by itself and certainly in its Sinified form is still significantly congruent with many aspects of traditional Chinese thinking.
Dialectical vs. Linear Thinking?

Elsewhere we have discussed the substantial “dialectical” aspect to Chinese culture, language, and thinking (although Hall and Ames would call this correlative thinking...), and have indicated how this type of thinking is in some ways different from the linear, logical forms that predominate in the Western epistemological tradition. Although these different types of thinking sometimes reach contradictory results, if one accepts the dialectical tradition, one does not have to suppress the linear one; however, as Hegel, Marx and many others have observed, the West substantially suppressed the dialectical way of thinking in favor of the sort of rote, reductionist, totalitarian but highly productive approach afforded by scientific, positivistic forms of linearity. I think the take home point here is that China has survived modernity and Western epistemology without losing the dialectic.
The Weakest Link: An Epistemic Rupture?

Lenin analyzed Russia as the weakest link in the imperial bourgeois system, and therefore explained why revolution was possible in Russia despite the Marxist idea that it would first be achieved in a more developed capitalist country. Lenin points to the various contradictions in Russia, it being the most advanced and the most backward among its peers in terms of economic, social and political development. Then, faced with the broader challenges associated with WWI, found itself unexpectedly but reasonably vulnerable by virtue of these contradictions to revolution. Lenin’s point here then is to disavow economism or economic determinism and to instead focus dialectically on the the contradictions and overdetermined capacity for revolution, which of course, is something Mao Zedong did as well...
The Weakest Link

But my central question here is whether China presents today as the weakest link within the hegemony of a Western epistemology. In other words, are the contradictions in China simply too irrational for the otherwise reductive and universalizing Western perspective (e.g., one country two systems, socialist market economy, etc.)? And does this indicate not only a break or the potential for a break, but also a positive Chinese solution to contemporary epistemological shortcomings, i.e., crises, associated with “Western” knowledge and the Western way of knowing?
What should we learn from China?

+ A new epistemological shift...

+ Synthesis of the linear and dialectical...

+ That an understanding of these points is critical for an understanding of China today....?
Basic Theoretical Perspectives

Foucault: Epistemic Thresholds
(the French version of a paradigm shift, sort of)
Althusser on “Ruptural Unity”
in the essay, “Contradiction and Overdetermination”

Increasing Contradictions

The Old Way of Thinking