

The years 2017 and 2018 mark several anniversaries regarding Marxism-Leninism: 100 years since the October Revolution, 150 years since the publication of *Das Kapital*, 170 years since the publication of the *Das kommunistische Manifest*, and Karl Marx's 200th birthday. Despite the crisis of the Marxist paradigm after the fall of the Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism remains an important legacy in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and in the People's Republic of China (PRC), with Japan and Japanese intellectuals having played a major role as transmitters in the initial stage in the past.

After the Opium Wars and the invasion of Western forces in the nineteenth century, the former world order in East Asia became unravelled. Social values and government modes were questioned and East Asian intellectuals started seeking out models to reform their respective nations. The October Revolution of 1917 had a particular impact on East Asia. Just a few years on, the communist parties were established, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, the Japanese Communist Party, though underground, in 1922, and, in spite of the restrictive colonial government, the Korean Communist Party in 1925.

This special issue on "Marxism in East Asia and Beyond" explores the ways in which Marxism-Leninism was transmitted within East Asia and from the Soviet Union to East Asia. It traces the different perceptions of Marxism-Leninism through the selection, translation, adaptation of Marxist works, looking particularly at how the Marxist canon was accommodated to meet the needs of its interpreters in East Asia. It sheds light on how relationships between the socialist countries in the initial phase of socialist construction played a major role in going astray from the internationalist path of socialist brotherhood and in eventually becoming a national project of national distinction. It shows that now and then Marxist-Leninist thought has inspired, and continues to inspire, intellectual life in terms of philosophy and literature.

Three periods are treated in the papers in this issue: (1) the initial period of the influx of Marxist ideas at the beginning of the twentieth century (Morita, Tikhonov), (2) the period after the establishment of the DPRK in 1948 and the Mao era up until the mid-1970s (Kim, Komarovskaya), and (3) new interpretations of Marxism under the new framework of post-socialism, or so-called "post-Mao era" (Stecher, Kunze, Brusadelli, Krawczyk). The papers focus on three key aspects. The first set of papers address the early methods of transmission and the pioneers of Marxist thought in the 1930s and 1940s in Japan and Korea. Seiya Morita investigates the wealth of Japanese translations of Trotsky's works in different phases until after 1931 when the Japanese militarist government

reinforced its suppression of Marxist groups. Puzzled by the lack of Trotskyists in Japan at the time, she shows that the intellectual interest in Trotsky was not merely restricted to his ideological works but that there was keen interest in his views on literature and culture, which even reached Lu Xun in China. Moreover, she points that it was not exclusively Marxist groups that translated and read Trotsky. Rather, a variety of groups from different backgrounds shared an interest in him. Even during the Stalinist show trials of 1936–1938 – in Japan, a time of further suppression of Marxism – the Japanese public followed Trotsky’s criticisms of the trials, translated and published in Japanese journals, and, as Morita points, many Japanese intellectuals came to regard him, and not Lenin, as the first Bolshevik leader.

In his paper Vladimir Tikhonov introduces the perception of Marxist thought in the similarly oppressive environment of Japanese rule in Korea. He demonstrates that one key center where Korean intellectuals acquired knowledge of Marxism was the Keijō Imperial University in Seoul, established by the Japanese in the 1920s. A minority of Japanese left-wing professors taught Marxian economics to their students, who were mostly ethnically Japanese but also Korean. Tikhonov focuses on the work of the philosopher and writer Pak Chi’u and shows that, in an intellectual milieu characterized by critical reflection and the search for alternative models in response to the rise of German fascism, Pak aimed to create a broader context for Korean humanist Marxism that would incorporate a critique of Korean right-wing nationalism and combine historical materialism with Marxian dialectics.

The second set of papers are concerned with literature and art in the phase of socialist construction in the PRC and the DPRK as well as the newer adaptations of Marxist thought in the 1990s and 2000s. Tae-Kyung Kim looks into the different narratives on peace in the 1950s in DPRK after the Korean War. She finds that discussions and literary production in this period were diverse in their representation of post-war socialism building depending upon the changing perception of the DPRK’s international relationships. She argues that the literary works she analyzes indicate a distancing from socialist solidarity with the Soviet Union and other European people’s democracies and instead a focus toward the countries of the Third World and postcolonial states of Africa and Asia seeking a more active nationalist struggle for independence. At the end of the 1950s, Kim concludes, socialist realism becomes “Koreanized” with an emphasis on Korean revolutionary struggle and national identity.

Examining the iconography of Marxism-Leninism, Polina Komarovskaya’s paper traces the transmission and integration of Soviet propaganda poster art in China during the phase of socialist construction and its use in developing the Mao personality cult. In her comparative analysis, Komarovskaya indicates that the posters of Mao Zedong were staged in the same way as the Soviet “red corners” to elicit visual legitimization. However, much like the Korean literary production Kim identifies in her paper, Komarovskaya

concludes that elements of national character became incorporated. She argues that in the case of the PRC, propaganda posters were related to Chinese folk art and were less exclusive to the art of painting than their Soviet counterparts.

In the third set of papers, Anna Stecher and Rui Kunze move the conversation on to contemporary literature and art. Stecher analyzes three recent biographical dramas from 1991 and the 2000s about the canonical “first” Chinese Marxist, Li Dazhao. She addresses the puzzling fact that these plays stress Li Dazhao’s non- or pre-Marxist work and his poetry rather than his role in the dissemination of Marxism in China. Based on the official narrative of Li Dazhao’s life and work, Stecher concludes that the official heroic narrative has been accommodated in theatre drama to the present social needs of audiences as well as to the differing positions of the biographers and scriptwriters.

Kunze attends to the topic of migrant worker literature of the new class of workers from the hinterland that stream into the cities or are hired at major factory sites. She draws attention to the production of some of their literary works that in the tradition of socialist realism reflect their class consciousness and everyday working lives. Thereby these works have come into the focus of New Left literary criticism. While these intellectuals employ these works to support the arguments of leftist contemporary criticism against global capitalism, neoliberalism, and liberal democracy, Kunze recognizes that the essential Marxist humanist argument of alienation that these works reflect is not mentioned.

Recent attempts of philosophical Sinicization and political integration of Marxism are considered in the papers by Federico Brusadelli and Adrian Krawczyk. Brusadelli analyzes the late work of the Chinese philosopher Tang Yijie who tried to tackle the repeatedly discussed problem of polarization between Western Marxism and Chinese tradition. He maps out Tang’s strategy to choose Confucianism as a surrogate for Chinese tradition and select only its progressive parts in order to liken them to Western modernization. Brusadelli indicates that Tang thus aimed to illustrate the affinities between the two. Again, as in the case of Tikhonov’s study on Pak Ch’iu, Brusadelli indicates that Tang opted for dialectics as a method and in this case a way out of the dilemma to whether to harmonize both. He concludes that Tang aimed to create a globalized Chinese tradition and a Sinicized Marxism at the same time.

Finally, Krawczyk asks whether Xi Jinping’s speech on the bicentenary of Marx’s birth in 2018 is proof of his Marxist stance. In order to understand and carve out the CCP narrative on Marx, Krawczyk critically analyzes Xi’s speech, as well as the official materials of the commemoration, in relation to Marx’s works, in particular the *Communist Manifesto*. He shows that the official narrative follows a hagiographic representation of Marx and his teachings as a success story – in a traditional master narrative, one might add.