

Seeking a *Xiaokang* Society: Deng Xiaoping and the Reinterpretation of the Confucian Tradition in Chinese Marxism

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Abstract: China is on the verge of achieving a long-anticipated *xiaokang* society, which means a moderately well-off, healthy, and peaceful society. But what is the origin of this term and how did it come to be reinterpreted in the Chinese Marxist tradition? To answer this question, this article delves back into the Confucian classics and follows the path of two terms. The first is *datong*, the Great Harmony. It begins in the *Book of Rites*, is reinterpreted in the commentaries and then in the influential work of Kang Youwei, coming to mean not an undreamed-of utopia but an anticipated and verifiable topos, for which one plans in great detail. It would be the last of three ages, preceded by one of chaos and one of rising peace, or *xiaokang*. While Mao Zedong was fond of using *datong* to refer to communism, he does not refer to *xiaokang* – the second term to be analysed. Instead, it was Deng Xiaoping who picked up the term in 1979. But to understand its background, we return to the Confucian classics to find that it is a more modest achievement, between chaos and the Great Harmony. *Xiaokang* means a society that has finally – after much toil and misfortune – risen from chaos and disorder, to achieve relative prosperity, rest, peace and well-being. Deng’s frequent use of *xiaokang* eventually led to a ‘*xiaokang* society in an all-round way’ becoming core government policy, from Jiang Zemin to Xi Jinping. Its achievement is subject to eradicating absolute poverty, providing medical care for all, ensuring ecological civilisation, and overcoming obstacles. The date: the anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. The method: recordable and verifiable plans and their completion.

In 1979, Deng Xiaoping observed: ‘We are striving to achieve ... a “moderately well-off family” [*xiaokang zhi jia*]’, by which he meant a ‘moderately well-off country [*xiaokang de guojia*]’.² The moment was

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2 Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zhongguo ben shiji de mubiao shi shixian xiaokang (1979.12.06)’, in Deng Xiaoping wenxuan (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2,

auspicious for two reasons: first, it came soon after the audacious and potentially risky launch the year before of the reform and opening up (*gaige kaifeng*); second, it drew on a term – *xiaokang* – with an ancient pedigree.³ The word comes from the Confucian classics and designates a moderate or acceptable time of health, well-being, prosperity and peace. Deng sought to reinterpret the term, also used in everyday parlance, within a Marxist framework. In other words, it was yet another example of the sinification of Marxism (*makesizhuyi zhongguohua*), or Marxism made concrete and transformed in a Chinese context.

The following analysis seeks to explain the background to Deng Xiaoping's reinterpretation of *xiaokang*, which will be left in transliterated form since it is almost impossible to translate. This task entails what may initially seem like a detour: an examination of the Confucian tradition's notion of *datong*, or 'great harmony'. As the highest stage of social development, it would come to be reinterpreted – through Mao Zedong – in light of communism. Before the stage of *datong* comes *xiaokang*, a more moderate and achievable middle ground, somewhat above chaos and disorder, but not at the same level as the great harmony. Deng Xiaoping claimed *xiaokang* and reinterpreted it in light of socialism, the stage – according to orthodox Marxism since Lenin – before communism. What follows has a number of twists and turns, all of them necessary to unearth what Deng Xiaoping meant in 1979. The following points will emerge as the analysis proceeds: both *datong* and *xiaokang* became associated with what is verifiable and recordable, a topos rather than an imagined and transcendent 'no place' (utopia); contradictions and differences are not to be overcome in a perfect world, but managed so as to be non-antagonistic; the Chinese

1979 [2008]), 237-38. Since the emphasis is so often on specific Chinese terms, the modern Chinese texts, from Mao Zedong onwards, are cited only in their Chinese versions. The English translations may be found in the standard selected and collected works. Citations follow the convention of Chinese names, with the family name first, followed by the personal name, without a comma between them.

3 The immediate context was a reply to a question from the Japanese prime minister concerning the 'Four Modernisations', first elaborated by Zhou Enlai.

Marxist intersection with and reinterpretation of a very long tradition is an inescapable dimension of recent developments.

Datong: From the Confucian Tradition to Mao Zedong

The first step to discerning Deng Xiaoping's reclaiming of the Confucian tradition concerns *datong*, which at its core means the great unity, togetherness or harmony. The tradition itself is notable not for its lengthy discourses, but for the briefness and sparseness of its key moments. It is as though the weight of the moments has increased precisely because of this brevity.

The Book of Rites (Liji)

The first articulation of *datong* – and thereby its *locus classicus* – appears in the 'Cycle of Rites [*Liyun*]' chapter of the *The Book of Rites (Liji)*,⁴ compiled in the third to second centuries BCE:

When the Great Way [*dadao*] was practiced, all-under-heaven was as common [*tianxia wei gong*]. They chose men of worth and ability [for public office]; they practiced good faith and cultivated good will [*xiumu*]. Therefore, people did not single out only their parents to love, nor did they single out only their children for care. They saw to it that the aged were provided for until the end, that the able-bodied had employment, and that the young were brought up well. Compassion was shown to widows, orphans, the childless, and those disabled by disease, so that all had sufficient support. Men had their portion [of land], and women, their homes after marriage. Wealth they hated to leave unused, yet they did not necessarily store it away for their own use. Strength they hated not to exert, yet they did not necessarily exert it only for their own benefit. Thus selfish scheming was thwarted before it could

4 For a useful introduction to *Liji*, one of the three books of rites (the other two being *Yili* and *Zhouli*), see Michael Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 185-88.

develop. Bandits and thieves, rebels and traitors did not show themselves. So the outer gates [*waihu*] were left open. This was known as the period of the Great Unity [*datong*].⁵

A few observations are in order. To begin with, the Chinese text is very concise, with one character often functioning as a whole word. Translators are tempted to fill in the meaning for readers. For example, *dadao* is literally the big road, but metaphorically the Great Way. One may seek to expand the meaning by calling it the Great Way of virtue, but this already adds even more layers of interpretation. The text explains *dadao* as one in which ‘all under heaven was’ – literally – ‘as common [*weigong*]’. How one interprets the phrase, which comes down to us through millennia of interpretations, says as much about the translator as the text. It may be expanded to mean that something serves or acts as common, or the common good. Some translations go further, offering ‘public good’, ‘a public and common spirit’, ‘public-spirited’ or ‘one community’. All may offer angles on the initial phrase, but it is important to keep in mind that the focus of the text is primarily on the common, so I have translated the two characters as ‘was as common’.

Further, this social reality is simultaneously envisaged as an expanded family and one that undermines the family by focusing on the common good.⁶ Thus, the primary concern is not one’s immediate parents and children, but all in society – including the widowed, childless, orphans

5 Translation by Nylan, *The Five ‘Confucian’ Classics*, 196. I have chosen the translation by Nylan for the sake of consistency, with one modification in the first sentence. Each translation has of course its benefits and drawbacks. One may also compare James Legge’s classic translation (also at <https://ctext.org/liji/li-yun>): James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism. Part III: The Li Ki, I-IX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1885), 364-66; and also that of Watson in William Theodore De Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 176.

6 A point missed by P.C. Lo, ‘Between the Family and the State: The Common Good and the Confucian Habits of the Heart’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 176-77.

and sick. All should have opportunities in life and appropriate care, although distinct roles were still appropriate for men and women. The text reinforces this common good with a powerful image: the 'outer gates' of the family compound were left open. The character for gate or door – *hu* – also bears the meaning of family or household. If the outer gate is open, it means not merely that households are connected with another, but that the very sense of household expands well beyond the gates so that the family itself is not primary.⁷ While the vision may be an ideal, the overall framework is from a ruling perspective. This appears initially with the phrase *tianxia*, a traditional imperial term for all under the ruler's sway. In this context, it meant China, however large or small it may have been, although it also came to be seen as encompassing the known earth. Further, the setting for this brief description of *datong* has Confucius saying the words to a certain Yen Yen as they stood on a balcony after a ritual. Confucius sighs over the current State of Lu, offering his vision of what might be. The discourse is primarily for rulers' ears, who should be worthy (*xian*) and have ability (*neng*), exerting power not for their own advantage but for others, able to bring about the common good, or – as the final word has it – *datong*.

He Xiu's Revision: Datong as Topos

Crucially, in *Liji* the *datong* is viewed as a past era, as the opening phrase of the following stanza indicates: the way has 'fallen into disuse and obscurity [*jiyin*]'. *Datong* lay in the past, so one had to do the best in the current circumstances. The next moment in the tradition reworks this assumption, appearing in a commentary on a commentary. More precisely, it is the commentary of a certain He Xiu (129-82 CE) on one of three commentaries (*Gongyang*) on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*). While the annals themselves are sparse indeed,⁸ the commentaries explore every possible implication, based on the assumption articulated by Men-

7 Further, the phrase for cultivate harmony or good will (*xiumu*) means to cultivate friendship with neighbours, which entails peace and harmony.

8 The annals record events of the Zhou Dynasty of the state of Lu (concerning which Confucius uttered his reflections on *datong*), from 722 BCE to 481 BCE.

cius that Confucius was the author or editor and had compiled the annals according to specific criteria, embedded through ‘subtle phrasing’ [*weiyān*], which had to be unearthed through careful exegesis.⁹ Of the three commentaries – by Guliang, Gongyang and Zuo – the one by Gongyang is the most intriguing.¹⁰ It is this tradition, which came to be called ‘New Text’ (see more below), to which He Xiu added his layer of commentary.

Briefly put, He Xiu distinguished three ages, with one superseding the other: the ‘decayed and disordered [*shuailuan*]’ world; one of ‘rising peace [*shengping*]’; and one of the ‘greatest peace [*taiping*]’.¹¹ While these ages are not an immediate engagement with the *datong* text from *Liji* (see above),¹² the connection should be obvious: *taiping*, the great peace, and *datong* speak of the same desired reality – especially in hindsight. At the same time, there is a risk that the three-age sequence takes on an evolutionary sense, rising from chaos and disorder to the great peace. Scholars have been keen to stress other criteria, such as legitimacy, virtue rather than inheritance as the criterion for office, or the possibility of moving in either direction, especially if one juxtaposes Confucius’s sense of loss in *Liji* to the progressive schema in He Xiu’s interpretation.¹³

The most important contribution of He Xiu’s commentary lies elsewhere: the world of great peace is not of the imagination, of rumour and innuendo, but one that can be seen and is thus verifiable. To explain: He

9 Needless to say, efforts continue to discern the criteria of compilation and deviations from them: Joachim Gentz, ‘Language Of Heaven, Exegetical Skepticism And The Re-Insertion Of Religious Concepts In The Gongyang Tradition’, in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

10 For a useful introduction to the three commentaries and thus of the central role of *Chunqiu* in Chinese tradition, see Nylan, *The Five ‘Confucian’ Classics*, 257-306.

11 He Xiu, *Chunqiu gongyangzhuan zhuxu*, 28 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 2200.

12 The reason is that the commentary focuses on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

13 Li Jing, ‘“Chunqiu gongyangzhuan” zhi sanshi’, *Chang’an daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 15.4 (2013):58-63; Chen Hui, ‘Gongyang “sanshi shuo” de yanjin guocheng ji qi sixiang yiyi’, *Zhongguo shehui kexue wang fabiao yu wenhua* 2016.12 (2016):1-10.

Xiu follows an earlier interpreter, Dong Zhongshu, who distinguished between two types of meaning: inner and outer. In He Xiu's hands, this becomes a threefold schema of words and worlds that are 'rumoured [*suochuanwen*]', heard of or 'recorded [*suowen*]' and 'seen [*suojian*]'.¹⁴ Now for the breakthrough: For He Xiu, these become three eras.¹⁵ Thus, what is 'rumoured' becomes the 'decayed and disordered [*shuailuan*]' world, one of chaos in which the heart is 'course and unrefined [*cucu*]', the country is broken up into small states and the records virtually non-existent. Rumours abound of skulduggery, assassination, intrigue and inappropriate behaviour in light of established rituals. By contrast, the 'recorded' or reported world has records and it unites all of the Chinese people so that outside are the foreign tribes (*Yidi*). This is known as the time of 'rising peace [*shengping*]': although not ideal, for it still has leaders and people engaging in less than appropriate behaviour, it is a distinct improvement. The 'seen' world, directly experienced, becomes the greatest peace and tranquillity (*taiping*). Here the world is one, whether distant or nearby, large or small, while the heart (*xin*) or inner being is now deep and thoroughly known (*xiang*).

This insight provides a significant contrast between Chinese and 'Western' philosophical assumptions concerning 'utopia'. Let me put it this way: He Xiu's interpretation valorises the 'seen' as the most ideal world (*taiping*), in contrast to what is 'rumoured' and for which no records exist. The ideal world is precisely the one that is fully recorded and can be empirically verified; in short, it is a world in which one lives.

14 Li, "'Chunqiu gongyangzhuan" zhi sanshi', 58-59; Gao Jiye and Chen Xubo, 'Lundong, He de "sanshi yici" shuo', *Anhui daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2014. 1 (2014):36-45.

15 Many editions of this work exist, in 28 volumes. It may also be found at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=642006&remap=gb>. I am unable here to go into a detailed analysis of the development of this position in He Xiu's texts, but other scholars have done so: Jiang Qing, *Gongyangxue yinlun* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995); Wang Gaoxin, 'He Xiu de gongyang "sanshi" shuo de lilun goujian', *Shaanxi shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 36.1 (2007):21-26; Gao and Chen, 'Lundong, He de "sanshi yici" shuo'; Chen, 'Gongyang "sanshi shuo" de yanjin guocheng ji qi sixiang yiyi'.

The unrecorded and unseen world, of which only rumours and hearsay exist, is the world of chaos and disorder. This approach provides a stark contrast with Western European philosophical assumptions concerning ontological transcendence, for here it is precisely what is unseen and unknown that is the ideal world, of which the known world is only a poor copy. This (external) ontological transcendence runs through Western European assumptions at many levels (from religion, through politics, to culture), but how does it influence perceptions of utopia? To put it sharply, for a 'Western' tradition the ideal world is a transcendent one, a *utopia* beyond human experience and knowability; by contrast, for the Chinese tradition examined thus far, *datong* and *taiping* constitute a *topos*, a known and verifiable place.¹⁶ In contrast to the Western 'no' place and 'best' place (*outopia*), which is ultimately unreachable, the Chinese tradition should really be called a 'topian' one, focused on a verifiable *topos*.

Kang Youwei and the Flourishing of Topian Literature

This profound identification of *taiping* (and thus *datong*) with what is empirically verifiable and recorded would be raised to yet another level many centuries later with Kang Youwei (1858-1927). But in order to understand the path to his core text, *The Book of Datong* (*Datongshu*), let us return for a moment to the two main traditions that arose out of the commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. As mentioned earlier, the *Gongyang* commentary became the spring of the 'New Text' tradition, which came into favour during the early Han Dynasty, only to fall into disfavour due to a perceived esoterism. From the late Han (25-220 CE) the more rationalist 'Old Text' school, based on the commentary by Guliang, was at the forefront, forcing the 'New Text' tradition into the background for a while. The rival traditions were nearly always at loggerheads, with one or the other dominating for a time, with rulers keen

16 Noteworthy here is that while the Chinese tradition obviously has perceptions of a better world (as I have been examining), the Western concept of 'utopia/outopia' required a loan-word adaptation, as *wutuobang*, which bears both the meaning and sound structure of the original. Intriguingly, 'dytopia' becomes *fanwutuobang*, 'anti-utopia' – a distinctly different opposition.

to see that neither was completely dominant for long.¹⁷ However, with the imminent collapse of the whole dynastic system and profound turmoil, the 'New Text' tradition gained a whole new lease of life in the work of Kang Youwei.¹⁸

This was precisely the tradition to which He Xiu had made his daring contribution many centuries earlier. The following quotation from Kang Youwei will indicate how much he is indebted to this tradition:

The divine sage-king, Confucius, early on gave thought to and worried over this. Therefore, he established the law of three governments [*santong*]¹⁹ and three ages [*sanshi*]: after a world according to disorder [*luan*] it will change into ascending peace [*shengping*], into the greatest peace [*taiping*]; after *xiaokang* it will advance to *datong*.²⁰

Once again, the text is brief indeed, although Kang Youwei offers later a comprehensive table of the main features of each age.²¹ Yet, this sentence effectively connects *Liji* and the commentary by He Xiu. The latter's terms appear first, with the three ages of disorder, ascending peace and greatest peace; immediately following are the two terms that appear in

17 Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics*, 262.

18 Wong Young-tsu, 'Philosophical Hermeneutics and Political Reform: A Study of Kang Youwei's Use of Gongyang Confucianism', in *Classics and Interpretations: The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*, ed. Tu Ching-i (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000), 383-407. Some are rather drawn to Kang Youwei's proposals, claiming that *The Book of Datong* is 'the most imaginative utopian construct in Chinese intellectual history': Hsiao, Kung-chuan, *A Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 500.

19 *Tong* (统) has the sense of uniting, interconnecting and governing.

20 My translation of Kang Youwei, *Datongshu* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1935 [2010]), 6. Thompson's 1958 translation is patchy at best, expanding some parts significantly while skipping large sections elsewhere, with only summaries in their place. Kang Youwei, *Ta T'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei*, trans. Lawrence G. Thompson (London: Routledge, 1935 [1958]), 72.

21 Kang, *Datongshu*, 43-52, 60-62; Kang, *Ta T'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei*, 105-27.

the *Liyun* chapter of the *Liji: xiaokang* and *datong*.²² Kang uses these to elaborate on He Xiu: ascending peace (*shengping*) is thus connected with *xiaokang*, while the greatest peace (*taiping*) refers to and indeed expands upon *datong*.²³

Three issues are relevant for this analysis,²⁴ the first of which concerns the threefold rumoured-recorded-seen that He Xiu connected with the three worlds. While Kang does not use the terminology explicitly in relation to the three worlds, he does deploy the phrases *yiwusuojian* and *yiwusuowen* to indicate ‘I have seen’ and ‘I have heard’ and, more importantly, he has a liking for the phrase *jianwen* to designate what is – literally – seen and heard and thus what may be regarded as well-informed knowledge.²⁵ Indeed, this term may well describe the nature of *The Book of Datong*, for Kang goes into immense detail to describe *datong* from every conceivable angle. In other words, he seeks to present a world that is not rumoured and found in a distant ‘no-place’, but rather a world that

22 Kang adheres closely to the texts in question, for only two terms appear in *Liji* and there is no equivalent for the age of disorder.

23 As the argument of *The Book of Datong* proceeds, the threefold schema is reiterated on a number of occasions: disorder (*luan*), rising peace (*shengping*) and great harmony (*datong*) or greatest peace (*taiping*). Kang, *Datongshu*, 17, 54, 65, 78-79, 92, 97-99, 124, 33-34, 36-37, 39.

24 I leave aside the question of *ren* (仁), best translated as ‘two-person mindedness’, which Kang Youwei deploys extensively. For example, while *ren* begins to appear in the age of ascending peace and love is characteristic of *taiping*, *ren* comes to full expression in the third age of *datong*: Kang, *Datongshu*, 136. See further, Albert Chen, ‘The Concept of “Datong” in Chinese Philosophy as an Expression of the Idea of the Common Good’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 89-90; Tay Wei Leong, ‘Kang Youwei, The Martin Luther of Confucianism and his Vision of Confucian Modernity and Nation’, in *Secularization, Religion and the State*, ed. Haneda Masahi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2010), 101-3; Jonathan Chan, ‘Common Good and the Ethics of Global Poverty: A Confucian Perspective’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 159-61; Wang Jue, ‘The Common Good and Filial Piety: A Confucian Perspective’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 136-39.

25 Kang, *Datongshu*, 27, 66, 68, 93, 118.

is potentially verifiable and recorded. Rather than an uncrossable gulf or barrier that prevents access to this world, he offers specific suggestions as to how it might be achieved.

Second, the major problem to be overcome concerns the current world's many boundaries. The bulk of the work is devoted to the method of overcoming the boundaries of nation, class, race, sex, family, occupation and private ownership, unequal laws, and suffering itself. The question is whether the resulting age of *datong* is one of homogenous commonality, without any differences. His answer is no, but he comes at the problem through competition (*jingzheng*), which is both necessary for improvement and potentially destructive. Without competition laziness ensues, but competition also leads to strife and a return to disorder. Further, if everyone receives equal pay and is equal on all counts, little incentive would be found for further innovation. Kang concludes:

Now, the way of heaven [*tiandao*] is not peaceful; not being peaceful it is disorderly [*luan*]. The human way [*rendao*] is afflicted by the misfortunes of disorder [*luan huo*]; therefore, they decide to assist one another and make every effort to achieve peace. But having arrived at the time of peace, then misfortunes also arise!²⁶

The problem is less the threats to *datong* and *taiping*, but the need for differences. Kang seeks a way to continue the fostering of competition and innovation, offering as a solution three criteria: striving for excellence; encouraging knowledge; and encouraging *ren*.²⁷ But the very need to foster competition indicates the continued need for differences even in the era of *datong*. How such differences might relate to one another is a problem he did not solve. For that we need to await Mao Zedong and the category of non-antagonistic contradictions.

26 My translation of Kang, *Datongshu*, 127.

27 Such competition would in the Soviet Union of the 1930s become socialist competition, a continual striving for improvement in labour, innovation in technology, and the well-being of all. That it did not always succeed does not negate the theoretical point.

Third, Kang Youwei repeatedly deploys the four-character phrase *ti-anxia wei gong*, all under heaven is as common. As the short-hand definition of *datong*, the phrase is from the initial articulation of *datong* in *Liji*. Kang was by no means the only one to use the phrase at the time, for his political opponent, Sun Zhongshan (Yat-sen), also invoked it frequently to designate the vision of China that would overcome the ‘three mountains’ of semi-colonialism, feudal relics and bureaucratic capitalism.²⁸ So common became the phrase that it is known by nearly every Chinese person today. Indeed, it was precisely at this time, as the last imperial dynasty stumbled into oblivion and China felt the sting of colonial humiliation, that ‘utopian’ – or, rather, *topian* – ideas and literature flourished. Kang was only the most significant writer among many others. For example, another influential piece of literature was Cai Yuanpei’s revolutionary short story, ‘New Year’s Dream’.²⁹ The story, with its revolutionary tone and invocation of the Confucian three eras – as mediated by He Xiu – became widely popular, even if it was the only fictional text published by its author.

Mao Zedong: Datong and Communism

It would fall to Mao Zedong to reinterpret *datong* in light of communism. Before tracing this development, let us consider another widely popular short story. In 1926, Guo Moruo published ‘Marx Enters a Confucian Temple’, which tells of a conversation between Marx and Confucius. Asked to elaborate his idea of a communist society, Marx does so, after which Confucius is unable to contain himself, clapping his hands and crying out: ‘Your ideal society and my world of *datong* coincide with each other’. Thereupon, he quotes the text from *Liji* (see above). In reply, Marx

28 Chen, ‘The Concept of “Datong” in Chinese Philosophy as an Expression of the Idea of the Common Good’, 88.

29 Cai Yuanpei, *Cai Yuanpei quanji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), vol. 1, 422-26; Li Guangyi, ‘“New Year’s Dream”: A Chinese Anarcho-cosmopolitan Utopia’, *Utopian Studies* 24.1 (2013): 89-104. It was first published in 1904 as ‘Xinnian meng’ in the magazine, *Eshi jingwen* [Alarming news about Russia], in the February issue, pages 1-20 and 24-25.

calls Confucius an old comrade (*lao tongzhi*) and observes, 'Your opinion is completely consistent with mine'.³⁰

Given this wider context, it should be no surprise that Mao Zedong also favoured the use of *datong* in his writings, although he took somewhat longer to connect it explicitly with communism. In his pre-communist phase, he writes 'the great harmony [*datong*] is our goal'. Confucius, Mao acknowledges, explored this idea, setting up 'the great peace [*taiping*] as his goal', although he 'did not do away with the two realms of chaos [*luan*] and ascending peace [*shengping*]'.³¹ Clearly, the language is not that of Confucius but of He Xiu and Kang Youwei, although the latter similarly attributed the three ages to Confucius.³² After Mao's turn to communism, *datong* continues to appear, although now he begins to elaborate further: acknowledging that it was a central aspect of the revolutionary program of Sun Zhongshan,³³ he observes that it must be built on the national self-determination of all Asian countries afflicted by colonialism.³⁴ Further, the relation between a 'movement for world *datong*

30 Guo Moruo, 'Makesi jin wenmiao', in *Guo Moruo quanji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue chubanshe, vol. 10, 1926 [1985]), 164, 66.

31 Mao Zedong, 'Zhi Li Jinxi xin (1917.08.23)', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1917 [1990]), 89.

32 In 1917, Mao could not have read Kang Youwei's *The Book of Datong*, since it was published posthumously in 1935. However, Kang had already elaborated such ideas in *Zhongyong zhu*, *Mengzi wei* and *Liyun zhu*: Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei xueshu zhuzuo xuan: Mengziwei; Liyunzhu; Zhongyongzhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987). Further, the ideas were relatively widespread at the time and Mao may have encountered them elsewhere, such as the work of Cai Yuanpei, author of 'A New Year's Dream'. Cai became president of Beijing University, revised its educational philosophy and structure, appointed Chen Duxiu and set up the work-study program in France. Mao's notes the influence of Cai on the 'Strengthen Learning Society': Mao Zedong, 'Jianxuehui zhi chengli ji jinxing (1919.07.21)', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1919 [1990]), 362-72.

33 Mao Zedong, 'Guomindang youpai fenli de yuanyin ji qi duiyu geming qiantu de yingxiang (1926.01.10)', in *Mao Zedong ji, Bujuan*, ed. Takeuchi Minoru (Tokyo: Sōsōsha, vol. 2, 1926 [1983-1986]), 144.

34 Mao Zedong, 'Zhi Zhang Guoji xin (1920.11.25)', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1920 [1990]), 560.

[*shijie datong yundong*]' and the national anti-colonial struggle in China is not a contradiction, but a dialectic in which the only way for China to participate in the international movement is through being independent and liberated.³⁵

Finally, on the eve of liberation, Mao makes the clearest connection with communism. Explicitly acknowledging Kang Youwei's *Book of Datong*, Mao points out that Kang was unable to find a way to *datong*. By contrast, the communists have found a way. But how does he define *datong*? It entails working towards the 'conditions in which classes, state power and political parties will die out very naturally [*ziran de guiyu xiaomie*]', so that humanity can enter *datong*.³⁶ The allusion is less to Kang Youwei than to Engels's coining of the phrase in the third edition (1894) of the deeply influential *Anti-Dühring*: 'The state is not "abolished". It dies out [er stirbt ab]'.³⁷ But Mao also follows what was by now Marxist orthodoxy, which distinguished between the stages of socialism and communism. The latter may eventually entail such a natural dying out, but socialism is a time of struggle and development, needing to deal with internal and external foes. This entailed a dialectic of strengthening the

35 Mao Zedong, 'Zhongri wenti yu Xi'an shibian - he Shimotelai tanhua', in *Mao Zedong wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1, 1937 [2009]), 484. Occasionally, Mao would use the term in a low-key way to designate cooperation, whether in terms of the anti-colonial struggle or labour unions: Mao Zedong, 'Xin minzhuzhuyi lun', in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1940 [2009]), 676; Mao Zedong, 'Suo xiwang yu laogonghui de (1921.11.21)', in *Mao Zedong wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1, 1921 [2009]), 6.

36 Mao Zedong, 'Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng (1949.06.30)', in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 4, 1949 [2009]), 1469. Later, he would make similar observations: Mao Zedong, *Guanyu shehuizhuyi geming de bufen lunshu* (Wuhan: Zhonggong Hubei sheng wei xuanchuan buyin, 1976), 9, 15.

37 Friedrich Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft. 3. Auflage', in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, vol. I:27, 1894 [1988]), 535. A comparison between the first and third editions of *Anti-Dühring* reveals the introduction of the influential phrase only in the third edition: Friedrich Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring)', in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, vol. I:27, 1878 [1988]), 445; Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft. 3. Auflage', in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, vol. I:27, 1878 [1988]), 535.

state, for only when all opposition had been overcome on a global scale could one begin to move to communism, or *datong*.³⁸

The reflections in this 1949 text open up the role of contradiction analysis, and thus dialectics, in Mao's thought.³⁹ As we already found with Kang Youwei, differences are not abolished even in *datong*, for to do so would lead to lack of incentive and laziness. Already in his 1937 lectures on dialectical materialism in Yan'an, Mao had developed a sophisticated 'contradiction analysis', which would become the theoretical basis for the success of the revolution in 1949. The revised text, 'On Contradiction', was the mature formulation,⁴⁰ but he also began to elaborate on an insight first developed in the Soviet Union but now taken to a whole new level through engagement with Chinese philosophy. This was the theory of non-antagonistic contradictions (*feidui kangxing maodun*), which dealt with the reality that contradictions and tensions continue under socialism, if not under communism.⁴¹ As he observes in 1967, any society is driven by 'opposing struggles and contradictions'.⁴² Not to acknowledge this is to abandon dialectical materialism. Crucially, they must be managed to as to be non-antagonistic. How is this relevant for *datong*? This

38 Mao, 'Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng (1949.06.30)', 1475-76.

39 An intriguing foreshadowing of this development may be found in Mao's pre-communist marginal notes on Friedrich Paulsen, which had been translated by none other than Cai Yanpei. Here Mao invokes *datong* and *pingan*, peace. But he observes that under *datong* competition (*jingzheng*) and resistance (*dikang*) would arise, so much so that an era of greatest peace would be unbearable. Cycles of order and disorder (*luan*), war and peace, are more creative and the norm: Mao Zedong, "'Lunlixue yuanli" pizhu', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1917-1918 [1990]), 184-86. The notes on Paulsen constitute a crucial transformative period for Mao, for he would soon join the fledgling communist movement in China.

40 Mao Zedong, 'Maodunlun', in *Maozedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1, 1937 [1952]), 299-340.

41 Mao Zedong, 'Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti', in *Maozedong wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 7, 1957 [1999]).

42 Mao Zedong, 'Dui "(Xiuyang) de yao hai shi beipan wuchan jieji zhuanzhang" yiwen jia xie de er duan hua', in *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* (Beijing: Hongweibing, 1967), 308.

era entails not the abolition of all difference, tension and contradiction, but a situation in which they are non-antagonistic, or – as the term itself suggests – harmonious.

Xiaokang: From the Book of Songs to Xi Jinping

Thus far, we have examined the tradition of *datong*, which emerges not as a ‘utopia’ but as a verifiable *topos*. While the *Liji* presented *datong* as an earlier and lost age, with the reinterpretations of He Xiu and Kang Youwei it became a future to be enacted. The connection of *datong* with communism may have already been suggested by writers such as Guo Moruo, but Mao Zedong made the connection explicit on the eve of Liberation. Crucially, it was not to be an age of the removal of contradictions but for their non-antagonistic interaction.

The Book of Rites and the Book of Songs (Shijing)

However, in Mao’s many works there is one crucial absence: he never refers to the other Confucian age of *xiaokang*.⁴³ Instead, it would fall to Deng Xiaoping to pick up and reinterpret the term in light of Marxism. So let us retrace our steps to the *Liji*, specifically to the paragraph following the one concerning *datong*. Confucius is reported to have said:

Now the Great Way [*dadao*] has fallen into obscurity, and all under heaven is as family [*tianxia wei jia*]. Each loves only his own parents and cares only for his own children. Wealth and strength they consider to exist only for their own advantage. Hereditary succession among the great men [the lords of the land], they take to be a sufficient rite. Inner and outer walls, ditches, and moats, they take to be adequate defenses. As for the rites and duties, they think them the main structures by

43 As noted above, on one occasion in 1917, Mao referred to ‘ascending peace [*shengping*]’, found in He Xiu and Kang Youwei, but he does not mention *xiaokang*. The term also does not appear in He Xiu’s commentary, and while Kang Youwei may have mentioned it briefly as an equivalent for ‘ascending peace’, his resolute focus was on *datong*.

which to rectify relations between ruler and subject, to consolidate relations between father and son, to induce concord between elder and younger sibling, to induce loving harmony between husband and wife. By them, they set up institutions and measures; by them, they lay out fields and hamlets; by them, they judge men of courage and understanding to be worthy; by them, they consider merit to accrue to men's personal advantage. Thus selfish schemes are invented. Warfare derives also from this ... This was known as the period of *xiaokang*.⁴⁴

According to this text, the difference between *datong* and *xiaokang* may be captured by the contrast between two four-character sayings: in contrast to 'all under heaven is as common [*tianxia wei gong*]', we now find 'all under heaven is as family [*tianxia wei jia*]'. For those who would charge Confucian thought with an overwhelming emphasis on (wider) family,⁴⁵ the contrast is instructive. Under *datong*, the family is subordinate to the common good of society, even if the latter is conceived in extending family terms to the social whole. By contrast, under *xiaokang*, one focuses primarily on one's family – a lesser good, for it leads to personal gain, inheritance, moats and ditches. Ordering society according to appropriate relations between ruler and subject, elder and younger, husband and wife, leads not to peace, but to personal advantage (*wei ji*), scheming and war.

Not a particularly positive image, even if this seems to be the time of Confucian ethics. Is this what Deng Xiaoping had in mind when he invoked *xiaokang* in 1979? Perhaps not, for an even earlier text from the tenth century BCE – the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*) – presents a somewhat dif-

44 Translation by Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics*, 196. As with the previous quotation from *Liji*, I have followed Nylan's translation (apart from the last sentence, which I have added). One may usefully compare those of Watson and Legge: De Bary, Chan, and Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume 1*, 176; Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism. Part III: The Li Ki, I-IX*, 366-67.

45 Lo, 'Between the Family and the State'.

ferent picture. In the section called ‘The People are Hard Pressed [*Min-lao*],’ from Part III, Book 9, it presents five stanzas stressing the alleviation of intolerable burdens on the people. I quote the first eight characters of each stanza:

The people indeed are heavily burdened,
 But perhaps a little ease [*xiaokang*] may be got for them.
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,
 But perhaps a little rest [*xiaoxiu*] may be got for them.
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,
 But perhaps a little relief [*xiaoxi*] may be got for them.
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,
 But perhaps a little repose [*xiaokai*] may be got for them.
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,
 But perhaps a little tranquillity [*xiao’an*] may be got for them.⁴⁶

The purpose of quoting these lines is to indicate the meanings attached to *xiaokang*. The repetition of the lines enhances the variation, which is only with the final character. That is, each of the following stanzas begins with the exactly the same characters, with only the last character changing: *kang*, *xiu*, *xi*, *kai*, *an*, or ease, rest, relief, repose and tranquillity. Even so, to give single translations of the terms loses their richness. For example, *kang* can mean health, well-being, prosperity and peace, while *an* has the senses of peace, calm, stillness, contentment, safety and security. The remainder of the stanzas speak of robbers and oppressors, the wily and obsequious, the unconscientious, noisy braggarts, the multitudes of evil and the parasites – from whom the people seek at least some relief. In short, for the *Book of Songs*, *xiaokang* is clearly a distinct improvement on tough lives.

Clearly, the *Book of Songs* provides a more positive image, of people relieved from the burdens of struggle and from those seeking to deceive

46 Translation by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: Vol. 4, Part 2: The She King, or The Book of Poetry* (Hong Kong: London Missionary Society, 1871), 495-98. Legge’s translation may also be found at <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/min-lu>.

and rob them (rulers included). Yet, the differences between the two explications of *xiaokang* may in part be explained by their foci: *Liji* sees this time as a decline from *datong*, while the earlier *Book of Songs* sees *xiaokang* as a noticeable improvement. Clearly, Deng Xiaoping's invocation draws more from the sense of the most ancient picture of *xiaokang*.

Deng Xiaoping and Xiaokang Shehui

As noted earlier, the moment when Deng Xiaoping called up the term was in late 1979, soon after the launch of the Reform and Opening Up:

The objective of achieving the four modernizations was set by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai. By achieving the four modernizations, we mean shaking off China's poverty and backwardness [*pinqiong luohou*], gradually improving the people's living standards, restoring a position for China in international affairs commensurate with its current status, and enabling China to contribute more to mankind. Backwardness will leave us vulnerable to bullying.

The four modernizations we are striving to achieve are modernizations with Chinese characteristics [*Zhongguoshi de si ge xiandaihua*]. Our concept of the four modernizations is different from yours. By achieving the four modernizations, we mean achieving a 'moderately well-off family [*xiaokang zhi jia*]' . Even if we realize the four modernizations by the end of this century, our per capita GNP will still be very low. If we want to reach the level of a relatively wealthy country of the Third World with a per capita GNP US \$1,000 for example, we have to make an immense effort. Even if we reach that level, we will still be a backward nation compared to Western countries. However, at that point China will be a country with a moderately well-off condition [*xiaokang de zhuangtai*] and our people will enjoy a much higher standard of living than they do now...

Some people are worried that if China becomes richer, it will be too competitive in world markets. Since China will be a

moderately well-off country [*xiaokang de guojia*] by that time, this will not be the case.⁴⁷

Three features of this important text should be noted. To begin with, Deng sees the idea of *xiaokang* as a distinct improvement from woeful conditions. He speaks of poverty, backwardness and bullying, with a clear allusion to China's long humiliation at the hands of foreign powers. Such humiliation had continued after 1949, with international sanctions, destruction of new industrial facilities and refusal to acknowledge the People's Republic. Only a few years earlier had the situation begun to change, and *xiaokang* indicates the relative improvement underway.

Further, Deng uses *xiaokang* in three formulations: a moderately well-off family (*xiaokang zhi jia*), condition (*xiaokang de zhuangtai*) and country (*xiaokang de guojia*).⁴⁸ The initial use of 'family [*jia*]' alludes to the Confucian focus in *Liji* on the primacy of family relations during the era of *xiaokang*, when 'all under heaven was as family [*tianxia wei jia*]'. But then Deng modulates this emphasis with the following iterations. He means not merely the 'family', but also China's condition or situation, and above all the country as a whole (*guojia*). The reinterpretation is significant, for the focus on the social whole is actually a feature drawn from the Confucian notion of *datong*.

Finally, Deng's concern is at this point resolutely economic. He speaks of the four modernisations (agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology), quadrupling output and raising per capita GNP to US \$1000 (later modified to \$800) by the end of the century, of making life relatively comfortable even if China would remain a relatively backward country.⁴⁹ While we may initially think that this focus is a relatively

47 Deng, 'Zhongguo ben shiji de mubiao shi shixian xiaokang (1979.12.06)', 237-38.

48 See also a speech from 1987, where Deng speaks of a *xiaokang de zhongguo*: Deng Xiaoping, 'Xiqu lishi jingyan, fangzhi cuowu qingxiang (1987.04.30)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1987 [2008]), 226.

49 Deng Xiaoping, 'Shehuizhuyi shouxian yao fazhan shengchanli (1980.04-05)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1980

narrow one compared with the tradition from which Deng draws, it is important to keep in mind the following: a) Deng was very clear that socialism entailed not only equality in the relations of production, but more importantly unleashing the forces of production so that the socio-economic situation of all would be improved;⁵⁰ b) the Chinese Marxist approach to human rights sees the right to economic wellbeing as the core,⁵¹ a right that remains a key driver of the Reform and Opening Up.

Xi Jinping and the Centenary Goals

Deng Xiaoping's preferred usage was 'moderately well-off level [*xiaokang shuiping*]',⁵² but it was not this phrase that would enter into the lexicon of

[2008]), 311-14. For a brief outline, see Elizabeth Perry, 'Chinese Conceptions of "Rights": From Mencius to Mao - and Now', *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 1 (2008): 41-43.

- 50 He would repeat the point on many occasions, observing that socialism entails not equality in poverty but unleashing the forces of production to improve people's lives: Deng Xiaoping, 'Shehuizhuyi ye keyi gao shichangjingji (1979.11.26)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1979 [2008]), 231-36; Deng Xiaoping, 'Yixin yiyi gao jianshe (1982.09.18)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1982 [2008]), 10-11; Deng Xiaoping, 'Gaige keji tizhi shi weile jiefang shengchanli (1985.03.07)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1985 [2008]), 107-9; Deng Xiaoping, 'Gaige shi zhongguo fazhan shengchanli de biyouzhilu (1985.08.28)', in *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1985 [2008]), 136-40.
- 51 Sun Pinghua, *Human Rights Protection System in China* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014).
- 52 So frequent is the usage that I can give only a sample of references: Deng Xiaoping, 'Muqian de xingshi he renwu (1980.01.16)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1982 [2008]), 259; Deng Xiaoping, 'Guanche tiaozheng fangzhen, baozheng anding tuanjie (1980.12.25)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1982 [2008]), 356; Deng Xiaoping, 'Zhongguo de duiwai zhengce (1982.08.21)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1982 [2008]), 417; Deng Xiaoping, 'Jianshe you zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi (1984.06.30)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 64; Deng Xiaoping, 'Women de hongwei mubiao he genben zhengce (1984.10.06)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 77; Deng Xiaoping, 'Zai zhongyang guwen weiyuanhui disanci quanti huiyi shang de jianghua (1984.10.22)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin

the CPC. Instead, it was a relatively minor usage by Deng, ‘moderately well-off society [*xiaokang shehui*]’ that would become the norm.⁵³ Even so, it was not until Jiang Zemin’s speech at the sixteenth congress of the CPC in 2002 that it became part official policy positions.⁵⁴ Jiang Zemin broke ground by using the phrase *xiaokang shehui* in the title of his speech, now adding ‘in an all-round way [*quanmian*]’. So central did the full term – well-off society in an all-round way – become that we also find it in Hu Jintao’s final speech as president in 2012 and in Xi Jinping’s major speech at the nineteenth congress of the CPC in 2017.⁵⁵

chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 89-90; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Jundui yao fucong zhengge guojia jianshe daju (1984.11.01)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 98; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Gaige keji tizhi shi weile jiefang shengchanli (1985.03.07)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 109; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zai zhongguo gongchandang quanguo daibiao huiyi shang de jianghua (1985.09.23)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 143; Deng Xiaoping, ‘You lingdao you zhixu de jinxing shehuizhuyi jianshe (1987.03.08)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 210; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Huijian xianggang tebie xingzhengqu jibenfa qicao weiyuanhui weiyuan shi de jianghua (1987.04.16)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 218; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Woguo fangzhen zhengce de liang ge jiben dian (1987.07.04)’, 250; Deng, ‘Women gan de shiye shi quanxin de shiye (1987.10.13)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 256.

53 Deng Xiaoping, ‘Fazhan zhongri guanxi yao kan de yuan xie (1984.03.25)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 54; Deng, ‘Jianshe you zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi (1984.06.30)’, 64; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zhengqu zhengge zhonghua minzu de da tuanjie (1986.09.23)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1986 [2008]), 161; Deng, ‘Huijian xianggang tebie xingzhengqu jibenfa qicao weiyuanhui weiyuan shi de jianghua (1987.04.16)’, 216; Deng, ‘Xiqu lishi jingyan, fangzhi cuowu qingxiang (1987.04.30)’, 226; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zhongyang yao you quanwei (1988.09.12)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1988 [2008]), 278. On one occasion, Deng uses the full combination, ‘the level of a moderately well-off society [*xiaokang shehui de shuiping*]’: Deng Xiaoping, ‘Gaige kaifang shi zhongguo zhenzheng huoyue qilai (1987.05.12)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1988 [2008]), 233.

54 For material on the sixteenth congress, see <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/44506.htm>.

55 Hu Jintao, *Jianding bu yi yanzhe zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi daolu, qianjin wei quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui er fendou* (2012.11.08) (Beijing: Renmin

A detailed comparison of the speeches⁵⁶ is beyond the remit of this study, but one item is relevant: the gradual fixing of dates. From Deng Xiaoping's hints⁵⁷ to Xi Jinping's detailed clarity,⁵⁸ we find the following:

2000: The achievement of basic *xiaokang*, fixed on economic conditions.

2020: Attainment of a *xiaokang shehui* in an all-round way by the centenary of the founding of the CPC.

2049: A strong 'socialistically modernised country [*shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia*]' on the centenary of the People's Republic.

The Confucian three ages have clearly been reinterpreted in light of Marxism. Thus, rising from chaos and disorder to *xiaokang* (and ascending peace, *shengping*) becomes the long period of constructing socialism. But most interesting is the clear fixing of dates. Is this not unwise for politicians, who routinely have the habit of failing to achieve stated goals? This clarity may be quite difficult to understand for those steeped in the Euro-American liberal and bourgeois tradition. In this tradition, politicians are wary of any targets, not merely because they know opponents will undo them at the first opportunity, but also because political spin entails that one promises nothing while pretending to promise everything. More to the point, this tradition is wary indeed of any project that

chubanshe, 2012); Xi Jinping, *Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi weida shengli* (2017.10.18) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2017).

- 56 It would include the genre of communist leaders' speeches, a comparative analysis of continuities and variations, and the elaboration of new dimensions, as we find particularly with Xi Jinping.
- 57 While most of Deng's focus was on achievements by the turn of the century, he occasionally spoke of 30 and 50 years into the 21st century, when China would have reached the level of a moderately developed country and the superiority of socialism would become apparent.
- 58 Apart from the speech at the nineteenth congress, see also the two volumes, *The Governance of China: Xi Jinping, Tan zhiguolizheng*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2014); Xi Jinping, *Tan zhiguolizheng*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2017); see also Roland Boer, 'Xi Jinping's China: Keeping the Imagination Alive Under Socialism in Power', in *Socialist Imaginations: Utopias, Myths, and the Masses*, ed. Stefan Arvidsson, Jakub Beneš, and Anja Kirsch (London: Routledge, 2019), 244-64.

seems too 'utopian', too transcendent and thereby unknown and vague.

In order to understand the very different approach of the Chinese government, we need to remember not so much the great emphasis on continuity and stability of long-term plans, but the point first made by He Xiu: both the Greatest Peace (*taiping*) and Ascending Peace (*shengping*) are eras that can be seen and recorded. They are empirically verifiable, rather than falling into the realm of vague promises and rumour. The 'two centenary goals [*liangge yibainian*]' may be seen in this light: as the date of 2020 draws nearer, we find ever greater detail concerning what a *xiaokang shehui* in an all-round way means and what needs to be done to ensure it is achieved. Thus, Jiang Zemin interprets 'all-round way' to mean socialist democracy, the legal system, ideological and ethical standards, and sustainable development. By the time of Xi Jinping's speech, we find advanced science and education, thriving culture, greater social harmony,⁵⁹ a better quality of life, poverty alleviation, medical cover for all, improved education, and environmental health. In speech after speech, Xi Jinping continues to elaborate on what these items entail, with the ensuing resources, detailed planning, implementation and assessment.

In all this verifiable planning, what has happened to *datong*, which since Mao Zedong has been reinterpreted in light of communism? Has it been replaced by a strong socialistically modernised society, thereby relegating *datong* to an imaginary 'utopian' future? The answer lies elsewhere: the stage of socialism – according the Marxist framework first developed by Lenin – precedes communism, which may take a long time indeed to achieve. Thus, the Chinese Marxist logic is that socialism is the period for achieving *xiaokang*, indeed that until *xiaokang* is attained, China remains at the preliminary stage of socialism. Let me put it this way: Xi Jinping has identified three core issues as markers of attaining *xiaokang*: managing profound risks, poverty alleviation and environmental

59 It is beyond my remit to analyse here the complex terms of security (*anquan*), harmony (*hexie*) and stability (*wending*), which run through all material since Deng Xiaoping.

health. Without these, one cannot speak of a moderately well-off, healthy and peaceful society. With them, one may speak of a 'new era [*xin shidai*]' of socialism, a socialistically modernised society.⁶⁰ But not yet a verifiable and carefully recorded *datong*.

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60 Indeed, the speech at the nineteenth congress would become the basis for Xi Jinping Thought for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era, or, in brief, Xi Jinping Thought.

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