

Title: The Transformation of Contemporary China- From Mao to Xi: An Immanent Causality Morphogenetic Regulation Analysis of Socio-Economic Transformation

Thesis By: Brandon Sommer

Supervision Team:

Karim Knio

Stefan Schmalz (Erfurt)

Arjun Bedi (Umbrella)

Abstract

This PhD thesis makes a theoretically informed argument about the systemic persistence of the Chinese socio-economic system through China's Reform period (1970s – present) by utilizing an innovative approach to political economy, the Immanent Causality Morphogenetic Approach – French Regulation (ICMA-FR). The ICMA-FR follows a particular tradition of Critical Realism, starting with the stratified and emergent dialectics of Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar 1993) before drawing on Margaret Archer's Morphogenetic Approach to structure/agency (Archer 1995). However, instead of the analytical dualism contained within the Morphogenetic Approach, this thesis draws on the Spinozian branch of Critical Realism and the Doctrine of Parallelism introduced with the ICMA because of its ability to better account for the separation and interweaving of the material and ideational (Knio 2018, 2020). The political economy component in this research is rooted in the French Regulation School, a leading heterodox approach in economics. The innovation of the ICMA-FR approach is its embedding of the FR, via its explicit engagement with structure-agency, within the ICMA, by facilitating a thorough interrogation of causal questions and a more specific engagement with systemic persistence following (Knio 2020). In addition, this thesis offers a detailed specification of the methodology of the ICMA-FR approach and a discussion of the various methods that can be used to apply it for practical research purposes.

The second part of the thesis starts by examining the systemic aspects of the Maoist period from the early 1960s until 1976 and makes substantive claims about the period's key material and ideational properties, as well as the overarching Regime of Accumulation of the time. The thesis then describes how the first Tiananmen Square protests of 1976 interrupted the systemic persistence of the Maoist period captured by a drive to egalitarianism with uneven production that had been in motion since the beginning of the 1960s. In the aftermath of this interruption, the 1980s and early 1990s represented a period where Reformers and

Conservatives began to define and redefine their positions in relation to one another as the Reform and Conservative factions of the CCP defined and redefined their political positions in relation to one another to try and successfully maneuver themselves into a dominant position within the Party in the years after Mao's death to achieve a new regularity. Finally, Deng Xiaoping's famous Southern Tour marked an outcome of the Social Interaction period that would pave the way to finally move beyond the political stasis incumbered by the decade-plus of tensions between the Party's Reform and Conservative factions. The thesis demonstrates how this period saw Deng assert his position as the 'Core' and ultimate arbitrator of decisions within the Party by virtue of his successful move to assert total control over the Central Military Commission.

Ultimately, the benefit of the thesis is that it is able to make a material and immanently causal argument about the key properties that comprise the systemic persistence of China's socio-economic system today, which it is argued is captured within the material cause(s) that emerged from the CCP's Fifteenth Party Congress in 1997. Such that the key issues of National Rejuvenation and improving Chinese society's productive capacity to boost the capabilities of the PLA were at the heart of the formation of the new Regime of Accumulation. This change would result in those at the top of the CCP and the Central Military Commission's hierarchies beginning to cement their positions of power via the construction of institutions throughout the late 1990s and most of the 2000s. Finally, the thesis arrives at the near present day to examine the degree to which the building of institutions has been successful insofar as these institutions remain coherent with the immanent causes of National Rejuvenation and boosting the PLA's capabilities to ensure the Chinese Communist Party's survival.