

Bolsonaro candidacy, in contrast, gave an important role to defeating ‘cultural Marxism’ and its variants, which were proposed as a threat to the stability of the family and the values of the nation.²² As a result, social conservatives found themselves closer to the positions proposed by Bolsonaro’s plan than they did to the more progressive positions of the PT.²³

The socially conservative positions preached by evangelical groups have been largely consistent over time, even as evangelicals have historically supported different parties. The leaders of evangelical groups, unlike their Catholic counterparts, have prioritized addressing issues related to the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, abortion, and gender, among others. In a survey carried out by Smith, the ‘wrath of God’ was amongst the punishments most feared by members of evangelical churches in Brazil, a punishment that they understood as being likely to ‘fall’ on members of the LGBTQ+ community and supporters of any of the identitarian rights listed above.²⁴ Support for LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights, and gender equality, amongst other positions, considered contrary to the doctrine of their churches, have played a fundamental role in the construction of evangelical discourse in Brazil, leading members of evangelical churches to incorporate these opposing discourses and positions actively in their lives.²⁵ These discourses tends to have more influence because of the existence of a ‘threat of exclusion,’ under which evangelicals feel pressured to actively participate in their churches and defend their churches’ doctrines, under the threat of being excluded from them.²⁶ This threat makes it easier for preachers to disseminate political messages, creating a collective negative moral judgment toward a more liberal social agenda and sometimes even “promising hell,” as evangelical preacher Silas Malafaia once did, to liberals.²⁷

Bolsonaro’s popularity rose among these evangelical groups because of his own conservative stance on the same social issues.

²² Partido Social Liberal, “Prosperidade,” 5-8.

²³ Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 150.

²⁴ Smith, *Religion*, 64.

²⁵ *Id.*, 68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Silas Malafaia Afirma em Vídeo que Aborto é Pior do que Estupro.”

Despite not being evangelical, Bolsonaro developed campaign rhetoric like that of the evangelicals. The clearest example of this was Bolsonaro's campaign slogan, which was even present in all official documents, including his government plan: "Brazil above all and God above all." This phrase has been accompanied by statements where Bolsonaro even declared himself opposed to the secular state in Brazil, proposing to replace it with a 'Christian' one.²⁸ Moreover, the Bolsonaro campaign's government plan included an introductory section that presented "values and compromises." Amongst these, an assertion that respect for the family is 'sacred' and an argument that the state has no right to interfere in individuals' familial lives suggest Bolsonaro's social conservatism. Furthermore, Bolsonaro's campaign plan accused former PT governments of indoctrination and introducing 'precocious sexualization' to school-age children. The inclusion of these matters in the government plan, and the urgent tone with which the plan presents them (written with red highlighting or capital letters), denotes the hardline position of the Bolsonaro campaign, marking clearly its position on social issues in Brazil and allowing it to stand out from the PT.²⁹

Shared positions on social issues allowed an understanding and then an alliance to be formed between Bolsonaro and certain evangelical leaders. A notable example is the case of pastor Malafaia. In 2018, Malafaia led the Rio de Janeiro branch of the neo-Pentecostal church Assembleia de Deus, which then had more than 12 million followers throughout Brazil. Malafaia, along with Michelle Bolsonaro, wife of the future president, was among the biggest critics of the National Human Rights Plan (PNDH3) presented in 2009. Malafaia's opposition stemmed from the fact that this plan contained a legal route to the decriminalization of abortion in Brazil. Malafaia referred to the PNDH3 as a "shame to humanity" and, in preparation for the 2010 elections, he personally financed propaganda in Rio de Janeiro calling to "defend the family and the human being."³⁰ Malafaia's church has a leading doctrinal document known as the *Declaration of Faith*, where the expected beliefs and behaviors of its members are clearly stated. In this

²⁸ AJ+ Español, "¿Por qué Muchos Evangélicos."

²⁹ Partido Social Liberal, "Prosperidade," 4, 41.

³⁰ Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 164–5.

document, for instance, homosexuality is firmly categorized as a sinful path and the family is defined as a sacred institution created by God. The previous links between Malafaia and the Bolsonaro family, exemplified by their shared rejection of the PNDH3, helped Malafaia to acquire proximity with the then-candidate Bolsonaro in 2018 and hence to appear as an initial potential supporter.

This alliance was sealed in the run-up to the 2018 presidential elections, when Fernando Haddad replaced Lula da Silva as the PT candidate, representing a major upheaval and a clear point of cleavage in the 2018 presidential race. During his term as mayor of São Paulo, Haddad blocked the construction of a university owned by a local evangelical church and opposed the construction of another evangelical church in the city.³¹ Evangelical groups subsequently carried out a successful media campaign against Haddad, whom they described as an ‘abortionist’ and accused of distributing a ‘gay kit’ while mayor of São Paulo.³² These groups also targeted Haddad’s vice-presidential candidate, Manuela d’Avila, who was accused of wanting to abolish Christian festivities in Brazil.

Evangelical groups’ history of clashes with the PT and ability to wage a media war on PT candidacies bolstered support for Bolsonaro’s candidacy.³³ Bolsonaro benefited from this media war against his opponent and from evangelical voters’ resulting fears of showing explicit support for the PT candidacy, given that such support would mean breaking the discursive line proposed by some of the most powerful evangelical leaders in the country.³⁴

Shared Sympathy for the Armed Forces

Another factor that facilitated an alliance between Bolsonaro and evangelical groups is that both have special relationships with the armed forces in Brazil. This relationship is quite clear in the case of Bolsonaro. It is a product not only of the fact that Bolsonaro himself was a soldier but also of the nostalgic discourse used by Bolsonaro and his supporters to characterize the military dictatorship of 1964

³¹ *Id.*, 166.

³² Pagliarini, “Tongues of Fire,” 11; Machado and Franco, “Eleições 2018.”

³³ Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 168.

³⁴ Pagliarini, “Tongues of Fire,” 12.

to 1985. Bolsonaro's campaign plan, for instance, praised the armed forces as heroes for "stopping leftist forces" from carrying out a *coup d'état* in Brazil in 1964.³⁵ This, combined with Bolsonaro's choice of vice-presidential candidate, Hamilton Mourão, also an ex-military man, suggests Bolsonaro's sympathy towards the armed forces. Moreover, Bolsonaro made clear in his government plan that military men and police officers should be seen as 'national heroes,' mentioning especially those who have died due to gang violence, and that they "should get their names engraved in the fatherland pantheon."³⁶ The Bolsonaro government plan even argued that violence in Brazil had a "sharp increase" in those states where the PT had ruled in the recent past, creating a discursive inclination towards blaming the PT and left-wing politics for surges of violence in Brazil.³⁷

Evangelical churches in Brazil also have a close relationship with the military. As mentioned above, evangelical churches did not see their activities greatly affected during the military dictatorship. This was partly because the regime had a clientelist strategy rather than one based on ideology. As a result, evangelical churches in Brazil accessed financing and subsidies from the Brazilian state. Although the lack of central governing body to unify all evangelical faiths diminished the dictatorship's ability to establish a strong relationship with these churches, the fact that some pastors were able to receive support from the dictatorship was sufficient to build a nexus of closeness based on convenience—or, at least, tolerance—between both actors.³⁸ It is after the dictatorship, however, that a convergence in the positions of the armed forces and the evangelical churches is most clearly seen—a result of debates over how the Brazilian state should carry out its human rights agenda.

The armed forces opposed the implementation of a truth commission to investigate human rights violations that occurred during the military dictatorship. During his time as a parliamentarian, Bolsonaro himself described this commission as "slandorous" and argued that it would lead to revenge against the

³⁵ Partido Social Liberal, "Prosperidade," 33. [My translation]

³⁶ *Id.*, 29.

³⁷ *Id.*, 26.

³⁸ Boas, *Evangelicals*, 102-10.

armed forces, accusing the PT and its then-presidential candidate, Dilma Rousseff, of having links with terrorist organizations.³⁹ Bolsonaro's opposition to the Truth Commission was similar to that sustained by the most conservative groups within evangelicalism against the PNDH3, which was the plan presented by the PT government in 2009 to promote a human rights-centric approach to public policy across all levels in Brazil. These groups channelled their discontent with this plan through the 'evangelical caucus,' a group of evangelical members of parliament. In response to the publication of the PNDH3, the evangelical caucus proposed legislation to regulate decisions around gender identity and abortion rights, which were strongly rejected within the more conservative sections of the evangelical community.⁴⁰ The report of the aforementioned truth commission also included proposals to resolve doubts regarding human rights violations during the military dictatorship.⁴¹ Although each group had its own motivations, evangelicals and the armed forces both opposed the PT's human rights positions, bringing them closer together, and therefore, closer to Bolsonaro. This, in turn, created the possibility not only for joint political action within the Brazilian parliament, which materialized in 2016 during Rousseff's impeachment, but also for the alignment of evangelical church members with the causes of the military, thus bolstering support for the military from the neoconservative bases of the evangelical churches.⁴²

Another factor that made the alliance between Bolsonaro and the evangelical groups in Brazil possible was the existence of shared good relations with other actors and a shared rivalry with Lula da Silva and the Workers' Party. As already seen, Bolsonaro and the evangelicals were both nostalgic for the military dictatorship in Brazil. These shared affinities, however, were not only for the military. Such affinities also proliferated toward other groups in society. A clear example is the affinity that the evangelical churches

³⁹ Machado, "From the Time of Rights," 11-12.

⁴⁰ Guerreiro and Nublát, "Bancada Evangélica."

⁴¹ Machado, "From the Time of Rights," 11.

⁴² *Id.*, 12.

and Bolsonaro had towards the livestock sector, an increasingly powerful group in Brazil also known for its role in the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. For their part, evangelical churches have developed a logistical capacity to reach some of the most remote regions of the Amazon with the primary goal of evangelizing marginal and indigenous communities. Evangelical churches have a massive presence in the Amazon, and even provide certain basic services to Amazon communities, especially healthcare, although always under the premise of “spreading the message of Jesus.”⁴³ This presence of evangelical groups in the Amazon coincided with the presence of groups related to livestock and agricultural activities, who often had regional political weight.

An example of the affinities between Bolsonaro and agricultural groups can be seen in the case of Antonio Denarium, a businessman dedicated to soy who was elected governor of the state of Roráima in 2018 by the Social Liberal Party (PSL), then Bolsonaro’s party. Denarium and other regional politicians carried out a discursive war against the protection of the environment under the pretext that environmental protection impedes the development of a region rich in natural resources.⁴⁴ By joining the PSL, politicians such as Denarium were not only able to pursue their personal goals of implementing agroindustry-friendly policies, but also to serve as regional allies of the Bolsonaro campaign. The PT’s 2018 campaign plan clearly opposed the interests of large landowners and large-scale farming. The plan—making reference to “the right of land and territory” of indigenous communities and poor peasants with no access to arable land, and to how the PT would protect the human rights of these groups and “severely” use violence against those who threatened them—put the PT into a position of opposition to the interests of agribusiness entrepreneurs such as Denarium.⁴⁵ Partly as a result of debates like these, agroindustry interest groups have adopted an ‘anti-globalist’ discourse similar to that of evangelical groups. But rather than opposing the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, agroindustry instead calls positions such as indigenism and environmentalism ‘illogical’ and argues they contribute little to

⁴³ Pacheco, “Missões Evangelizadoras.” [My translation]

⁴⁴ Cowie, Costa, and Prado, “Brazil Votes.”

⁴⁵ Partido dos Trabalhadores, “Plan de Governo,” 59. [My translation]

the development of the regions of the Amazon.⁴⁶ While the goals of evangelicals and Amazon agroindustry interests are different, these groups use compatible methods. In the 2018 election campaign, this compatibility created a relationship—or at least an understanding—through which the groups became closer to each other and, therefore, to Bolsonaro’s candidacy.

As already mentioned, these evangelical groups had, like Bolsonaro, a fierce opposition to the Workers’ Party, a tendency called *anti-petismo*. This phenomenon was linked with a broader ‘anti-communist’ sentiment, which linked the PT with extreme left politics and was born in the anti-government protests of 2013. The rise of *anti-petismo* is generally understood to be the result of the combination of an international economic crisis, brought about mainly by a fall in commodity prices, and a growing perception of corruption in Brazil, which came to be associated with the PT as the governing party in 2013, hence leading to the aforementioned protests in that same year.⁴⁷ Hence, *anti-petismo* arose as an umbrella term under which the different opponents to the PT governments of Lula and Rousseff could identify with.

This section has argued that while evangelicals and the agribusiness sector opposed the PT for reasons with different origins, these forms of opposition ultimately led both toward Bolsonaro. In the case of the evangelicals, opposition to the PT was linked to evangelical rejection of socially progressive policies.⁴⁸ For the agricultural sector, on the other hand, the PT was perceived as a party with a strong environmental and pro-indigenous stance, threatening the profitability of large-scale agriculture in Brazil, specifically in the Amazon.⁴⁹ Both evangelical and agricultural groups found themselves in opposition to the PT, which helped them find in Bolsonaro and his candidacy a kind of bridge between the two, given that he was a political embodiment of the *anti-petismo* that first arose in 2013.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 171.

⁴⁷ Davis and Straubhaar, “Producing *Antipetismo*,” 86.

⁴⁸ Araújo, “Pentecostalismo,” 518–9.

⁴⁹ Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 188–92.

This article has analyzed three factors that fueled an alliance between Bolsonaro and evangelical groups in Brazil ahead of the 2018 presidential elections. First, there was a similarity between the conservative social agenda of Bolsonaro and that of the evangelical churches. This element explains the close relationship between Bolsonaro's opposition to the expansion of rights for the LGBTQ+ community—as well as to other progressive stances such as the legalization of therapeutic abortion—and the similar opposition of the evangelicals. This shared program created the basis for a political alliance. Second, I examined a shared sympathy for the armed forces. Here it was determined that Bolsonaro's nostalgia for the military dictatorship, although not exactly shared by the evangelical groups—who during the dictatorship had a primarily clientelist relationship with the regime—was related to the opposition of both to the implementation of a broader human rights agenda proposed during the government of Rousseff. Although at a discursive level the opposition to this agenda was different, given that the evangelical groups opposed aspects of the agenda related to health and reproductive education, Bolsonaro and evangelicals found sufficient similarities to support their shared opposition and used this common position to support Rousseff's impeachment process in 2016. Finally, favorable relations between evangelical groups and agricultural business groups, also important allies of Bolsonaro, were analyzed. This analysis suggests that although evangelicals and agricultural groups had different agendas, the conditions were right for them to coexist in the most peripheral regions of Brazil, particularly the Amazon, and find shared objectives in their opposition to the so-called 'globalist' agenda of the PT. This, combined with the wider opposition that both had towards the PT, known as *anti-petismo*, allowed evangelicals and agricultural business groups to together support the candidacy of Bolsonaro, who presented himself as friendly to the agendas of both groups and as the best option to defeat the PT.

This analysis suggests that the non-material features of the Bolsonaro campaign, those pertaining to 'values' and 'traditions,' were attractive to evangelical voters in Brazil, who found in his candidacy compelling positions regarding the turn they felt the country should take. Moreover, these shared positions were also

common ground for evangelical Christians and other groups that would end up supporting the Bolsonaro campaign. Opposition to the PT was a common ground allowing evangelical Christians to find understandings and create alliances with other groups based on their non-material or ideological opposition to the PT and left-wing politics in general. These alliances with other groups would form part of the broad base of support for Bolsonaro's ultimate victory in the 2018 presidential election.

The proposed concept of non-material politics can therefore offer a new approach on the impact of identity politics in contemporary political debates. As identity politics encompass issues involving the protection of the traditional characteristics that compose the identity of an individual or a community, non-material politics can be seen as a way in which politicians like Bolsonaro reach potential voters through the issue of protecting their identity. Non-material politics promises to protect certain voters' 'values' or 'customs' in a context where these voters perceive the identity-based claims of other groups—such as women or the LGBTQ+ community—as a threat to their own self-identity. This suggests that a non-material turn can be used to backtrack on the material advances of politics in the twentieth century. The non-material represents a new source of political alliances on both the right and the left in the shifting terrain of contemporary politics.

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Mao Zedong's Dialectical Materialism: A Matter of Translation

Berkant Isaev

In this paper I examine Mao Zedong's translation of the concept of dialectical materialism from its origins in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin to the Chinese context. Although the history, development, and influence of Maoism have received scholarly attention, considerably less has been written on Mao's dialectical materialism and its relation to Marxism and Chinese thought. To date, this relation has received only partial attention in histories of communist thought, such as in an article by Holubnychy and the more concentrated recent approaches.¹ Overall, there have been several views concerning Mao's dialectical materialism. One view, particularly popular among the Soviet academics of the past, is that Mao's dialectics are essentially those of Marx understood through the works of Lenin, and that Mao does not contribute anything substantial to the discourse on dialectical materialism. Another view maintains that Mao's dialectical materialism should be understood on its own terms as an autonomous concept that differs in significant ways from Lenin's interpretation of Marx and Engels, and in some ways even from the formulation by Marx and Engels themselves.² For example, it has been argued that Mao's dialectical materialism is distinct because of its use of correlative thinking, its heavy emphasis on contradiction as present within the very basic constituents of reality, and its limited epistemology (in comparison to that of Lenin).³

¹ Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics." See also: Knight, *Mao Zedong*; Tian, "Mao Zedong;" Dirlik, Healy, Knight, *Critical Perspectives*.

² See, for example, Althusser in Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics;" Knight, *Mao Zedong*; Tian, "Mao Zedong;" Dirlik, Healy, Knight, *Critical Perspectives*.

³ Tian, "Mao Zedong."

In this paper I follow a similar interpretation of Mao's dialectical materialism. My aim is not to disprove but to contribute to this discourse by examining the relation between Marx, Engels and Lenin's, and Mao's notions of dialectical materialism through the concept of translation. I understand Mao's approach to dialectical materialism and his later formulation of his own concept of it as an act of creative translation. On the one hand, Mao's concept of dialectical materialism refers back to Marx, Engels and Lenin in some key aspects, such as its purpose as a tool for the analysis of history, society, and reality, its conceptualization of contradiction, and its prediction of the culmination of history with the end of class struggle. On the other hand, Mao's concept of dialectical materialism is distinct as it relies on Confucian and Daoist concepts and approaches toward reality. Although Mao does not use these concepts and approaches in their own context, their meanings and implications influence his reading of dialectical materialism. I claim that Mao's reading and formation of his own concept of dialectical materialism should be understood in terms of creative translation.

Translation

The English word 'translation' comes from the Latin *translatio* which is a particular supine form of the verb *transferre*. *Transferre* means 'to bring across' or 'to carry over.' By 'translation,' for the purposes of this article, I refer to the act of carrying a specific item or a whole system of knowledge from one epistemic context to another and, in the course of that act, changing it so that it fits the new context it is put in, without altering the very core of the original item or system. This could apply to linguistic translation, as commonly understood, in which a signifier needs to be moved into a new language without that movement affecting its overall meaning or message. While this understanding of linguistic translation corresponds to the concept of translation used in this article, it does not exhaust that concept's meaning. Translation can also be understood in terms of communicating and moving ideas, practices, theories, subjectivity, and power from one context to another. The notion of vocabulary is useful here to illustrate the point more precisely. According to Richard Rorty, a vocabulary is a "collection

of concepts” that form complex interrelations within a system of thought.⁴ In Marxism, for example, the concept of dialectics is related to other concepts such as labor, materialism, etc., and these relations form the Marxist vocabulary. Dialectical materialism is therefore a concept that is part of the larger Marxist vocabulary. Marxist theory can be understood as a ‘text’ and its movement and introduction in China through Chinese philosophical vocabularies can be understood as an act of translation. Just as the translation of a text requires the translation of its every component, the translation of a theory requires the translation of the concepts that construct it.

Sometimes the product of a translation becomes so different from its source material that it barely resembles it at all, making this an act of creation of something autonomous, operating according to its own logic and not according to the core idea of the translated item. This outcome, however, need not be understood as something negative; it is one of the many nuances of translation. As Walter Benjamin argues, the task of the translator is not simply to make an exact translation or even communicate all the senses of the text.⁵ He writes: “however, a translation that seeks to transmit something can transmit nothing other than a message—that is, something inessential.”⁶ Benjamin claims that a good translation is that which finds and preserves what is essential to the original text and then transforms it into the other language.⁷ For him translation is not equivalence, but rather a transformation. Moreover, he writes, a good translation is possible if the translator strives towards a “pure language” (i.e., such a form of expression that can capture the core of the text in another language). Of course, Benjamin’s work is about the translation of ‘texts;’ because of that, I will not be following his philosophy strictly. I will, however, take a similar approach to the creative translation of concepts and, more precisely, to Mao’s translation of dialectical materialism. I argue that Mao is faithful to the core ideas of dialectical materialism but at the same time reads the concept through correlative thinking in Daoism and

⁴ Rorty, *Philosophy*, 48.

⁵ Benjamin, “The Task,” 153.

⁶ *Id.*, 151.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Confucianism, thereby transforming and articulating dialectical materialism in such a way that it becomes autonomous.

Dialectical Materialism according to Marx and Engels

Marx's concept of dialectics is inspired by Hegelian dialectics, although he develops his method as a critique of the philosophies of Hegel and the Young Hegelians. Marx sees the Hegelian view of history and subsequent Young Hegelian critique of society as attempts to understand consciousness and the development of ideas through the analysis of the dialectical movement of ideas. According to him and Engels, however, this critique is fruitless as it is only a critique of ideas, of ideology. In the Young Hegelian critique, for Marx and Engels, "men and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura," and the grounding of history remains abstract and thus unable to fully grasp historical progress.⁸ Marx and Engels then provide a view of history based

not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.⁹

According to Marx and Engels, the material conditions and the material base precede the movements of ideas between people. They argue that material reality (in the form of social-material relations between people) comes first and serves as the basis for the following development and historical progress. It is important to note that although Marx and Engels both apply the basic logic of Hegelian dialectics to changes in the material conditions and society, a distinction should be made between their understandings of dialectics. Marx's notion of dialectics is specifically concerned with historical change while Engels, especially in his later works, includes

⁸ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 120.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the natural processes of the world. That is not to say that Engels disagreed with Marx about dialectics. On the contrary, while preserving Marx's analysis and use of the concept, he built on and broadened the scope of Marx's dialectical analysis by applying it to the whole of reality.

According to Marx, the 'material base' is the way societies organize by engaging with matter through labor which transforms nature in order to maintain themselves and provide for their basic necessities.¹⁰ The foundation of society is the mode of production: the way the resources are extracted through the technology a society has, but also the relationship of the various members of that society to the means of production (i.e., if one group owns the physical place of production and the materials with which resources are acquired, then that group is the elite and all other groups are its subordinates).¹¹ The conflicts that arise from this order include the difference in interests between the ruling class and those below it, the friction between the middle and lower classes, the friction between the lower and the elite, and so on. Here, the dialectical nature of those conflicts can be seen: every social organization based on class contains various contradictions and the way in which those contradictions are resolved leads to the change of the whole social system. In more general terms, the base creates and influences the superstructure, and the superstructure influences the base until enough contradictions and solutions to those contradictions accumulate to be a prerequisite for a new base to emerge (e.g., contradictions in the superstructure can lead to the creation of new technologies, which in turn will significantly change the mode of production). This is how historical progress happens. The ultimate resolution of the class conflict and of history then, is the realization of a "classless, moneyless and stateless society."¹² In other words, the realization of a communist society in which class conflict does not exist as ownership is common.

In summary, Marx's notion of dialectics explains historical and social change through an analysis of the dialectical relations between classes. Engels uses several important components from

¹⁰ *Id.*, 47.

¹¹ *Id.*, 128.

¹² Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 212.

Marx's dialectics to broaden the concept. For example: first, the notion of qualitative change (i.e., the change from one way of organizing society to another, which according to Marx happens through changes in the technology of production, the quantity of production, etc.); second, the idea that every social organization is based on class and every class contains its own contradictions; third, the idea that every emergent social organization based on class will have its own negation from its internal contradictions. All of these components of Marx's dialectics were further developed by Engels, who used them to form a framework through which nature and reality as a whole could be investigated. Engels essentially based his three laws of dialectics on Marx's dialectical methodology. The first law states that qualitative changes can happen only in conditions of quantitative changes and the second law states that everything contains its own contradiction.¹³ Reality is therefore a fluctuating web of interactions in which each thing contains its own contradiction (or opposite). This is true for basic material particles as well as for the structures they form: each structure contains its own contradiction. In the same manner, human interactions are the result of countless contradictions and conflicts happening on a smaller material level and class conflict is a contradiction in the various human ways of organizing society around property. It should be noted that this conflict or contradiction that defines reality is not static; the interactions between opposites result in physical as well as social motion, which leads to quantitative change that ends in qualitative transformation. According to Engels, the third law of dialectics states that the process does not end simply by a transformation by negation (i.e., the contradiction happening within a thing or a system) but by 'negation of the negation' (i.e., when the first contradiction has resulted in qualitative change, it in turn faces its opposite and is negated).¹⁴

It should be clear by now that Engels understood dialectics largely in Marx's terms, with the difference that Engels gives dialectics a broadened scope and purpose. Because of that, Soviet scholars made a distinction between dialectical and historical

¹³ Lenin, *Materialism*, 48.

¹⁴ Jordan, "The Dialectical Materialism," 271.

materialism, with the former referring to the broader concept developed later by Engels, which includes natural processes in the world, and the latter referring to the concrete approach to history described above. In this paper, I use the term dialectical materialism for the broader concept that includes both Marx's historical materialism and Engels' enlargement of it. This is necessary for approaching Mao's definition of dialectical materialism because although Mao had little access to Engels' work, he was influenced by Lenin, who was heavily influenced by Engels.

Lenin's Dialectical Materialism

There are two important aspects to Lenin's articulation of dialectical materialism: the idea that objective reality in the form of matter exists independently of human experience and mind, and the inclusion of two of Engels's laws of dialectics.¹⁵ The idea that matter exists independently from human experience and interaction serves as the basis of Lenin's materialism—here, the mind-body dichotomy is superseded and humans are also in the domain of matter, so their being is ultimately material as is that of every being. Thus, when we grasp material things we grasp their essence.¹⁶ All the processes that happen to material essences are also processes that happen to and within us, so there must be universal laws to the basic processes that guide change in the world. Lenin understands Engels' two laws of dialectics as the basic laws through which reality and change should be understood, namely reality as a dynamic web of contradicting elements each of which contains its own contradiction and changes when enough quantitative changes accumulate, leading to a new cycle of negation and quantitative changes. Following Plekhanov, however, Lenin deems Engels' third law unnecessary as he sees it already implied in the first law.¹⁷ Moreover, Lenin uses the second law to account for the contradictions that exist within larger systems and complex bodies. Lenin largely omits Engels' idea that contradictions exist within every single element that constitutes the world. At the same time, this idea will be a very important part of Mao's dialectical materialism.

¹⁵ *Id.*, 272.

¹⁶ *Id.*, 274.

¹⁷ *Id.*, 275.

Tension and Clash between Concepts in Translation

As mentioned above, the main argument of this paper is that Mao's concept of dialectical materialism should be best understood in terms of creative translation. It is not to be understood as a one-directional translation of an epistemic item, nor as a mere continuation of an adopted idea. Moreover, it is not to be seen merely as a result of syncretism between Marxist, Leninist and Chinese philosophical ideas. Here, I will show why those approaches to understanding Mao's notion of dialectical materialism fail to grasp the rich nuances of its essence.

The predominant view amongst Soviet academics during the existence of the USSR was that Mao's notion of dialectical materialism is simply an adoption of the core ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, with small changes in the articulation here and there.¹⁸ But although Mao bases his understanding of dialectical materialism on Marx, Lenin, and Engels, his understanding of it is not simply an adoption or word-for-word translation. Throughout Mao's works, more than half of his references are to Confucian, Neo-Confucian, Mohist, and Daoist writings, Chinese folk legends, and contemporary Chinese intellectuals.¹⁹ Mao infrequently refers directly to Marx or Engels, usually doing so indirectly through the works of Lenin. Although Mao frequently cites Lenin in his main works dealing with dialectical materialism ("On Practice," "On Contradiction," "Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism"), he still uses a vocabulary borrowed mostly from Confucian and Daoist philosophers.²⁰ Moreover, as will be shown later, Mao's notion of dialectical materialism differs in some key aspects from those of Lenin, Engels and Marx.

On the other hand, the idea, noted and mentioned by Knight, that Mao's concept of dialectical materialism is syncretic, in the sense that it is a blend of Chinese and Marxist thought, presents the translation as a rather undisturbed flow of syncretic blending, without actually addressing the tensions and conflicts that would arise from such a flow of translation thus fails to appreciate the ways

¹⁸ Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics," 13.

¹⁹ *Id.*, 16.

²⁰ *Id.*, 18.