



Erich Fromm in China

A Review of the Reception of his Thought in China (1961 – 2013)

Preliminary Results¹

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Note: The Appendices mentioned here can be found at [Erich Fromm online](#) (English) under the menu item „Reception of Erich Fromm“. The literature cited below is also listed there [[Appendix 18](#)].

¹ This article is based on a ca. 160-page-long book version. [[Appendix 1](#): Contents]



A Fromm fever gripped China in the late 1980s, whereas our scholastic research on him began earlier and has continued ever since, wrote ZHANG Xiaowei of Guangxi Normal University's College of Politics and Public Relations in Guilin, China. During that first "fever" period, Fromm's concepts were strongly criticised as a form of negative humanitarianism, and Fromm was politically degraded as a target of opprobrium. In the second period, however, he became idolized as a seminal thinker, and his works were translated and published widely. In a third period, Fromm's humanitarianism was approached with a more nuanced attitude of dialectical criticism and was subjected to a more methodic, rational form of introspection. In the end, ZHANG complained that studies on the nature of his thought remain at the level of 40 years ago, without having taken a qualitative leap forward.²

The quotations above date from 2006, whereas Frommian thought had already become established in China in the mid-60s, at approximately the same time as the Cultural Revolution (1966). It is quite conceivable that Fromm was defamed in China at that time. This was the case, after all, with humanistic, West-Marxist thinkers, who were stigmatized at that time along with everything else from the West. Another possible reason for this could have been Fromm's implication that the Maoist Chinese regime had *aggressive tendencies* which, in conjunction with China's *economic isolation* and *political humiliation*, could finally trigger an atomic war against the western powers.³

I. Objectives and approaches

I discovered the above-mentioned Chinese author's article on the Internet more or less by accident. It made me curious and was for me a reason to devote myself more intensively to the reception of Fromm's thought in China, especially since almost no works of Chinese authors about Fromm were to be found in the Erich Fromm Archive (as of June 2012). The initial objective of the present work was therefore to give an overview of the subjects and contents covered by Chinese authors in their contributions on Erich Fromm as well as to provide a data record for every single contribution.

Even in the initial phase of this research, however, it became apparent that the number of contributions available online would be much higher than expected. This led to the next goal – to review contributions that could and should be analysed as representative examples. It also seemed possible that the results of this research would generate ideas for further projects.

With these goals in mind, I carried out from June 2012 thru May 2013 a serious of literature searches in different online databases, specializing on China in the process. In doing so, I restricted myself to databases that were available without charge and required no institutional affiliations. Of the many databases, [CNKI](#)⁴ (China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database KNS) quickly proved to be the largest and most user-friendly.

I downloaded all free abstracts of the contributions. If they were not translated into English by Chinese authors themselves (and this was the case up to fifty percent), I used automatic Chinese-English translation software. For reasons of time and costs, I did not download and analyse full texts, which existed almost exclusively in Chinese. Because of this approach and the "short life" of Internet data, the results presented here are only preliminary, especially with regard to statistical analysis.

² The English translation provided by the Chinese author was slightly improved here and in some other quotations that follow.

³ Erich Fromm, *May Man Prevail?* New York 1961, pp. 163f. (Erich-Fromm-Gesamtausgabe in zwölf Bänden [GA], edited by Rainer Funk, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1999, Volume V, page 138f.) Fromm pleaded for admission of the country to the *United Nations* and for China's *free trade*. These aims were met in 1971 and 2001.

⁴ A last data retrieval took place – unless otherwise noted – on April 19, 2015.



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| <p>I. CONTRIBUTIONS ON ERICH FROMM</p> <p>1. ERICH FROMM AND HIS BASIC REFLECTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Family and social background in Fromm– Psychoanalysis and Marxism / Analytic social psychology– Dynamic character concept and social character– Human nature <p>2. MAN AND SOCIETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– The social unconscious– Escape from freedom– Alienation– Alienation of consumer behaviour– Criticism of capitalism and "sane" society / Humanization of technological society <p>3. THEORY AND PRACTICE OF HUMANISM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Marxism and humanism– Humanistic psychoanalysis– Humanistic ethics– Religion– Education– The art of loving <p>II. CONTRIBUTIONS ON ERICH FROMM'S THEORIES TO LITERATURE AND ART STUDIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Interpretation of fiction and poetry– Other questions of literature and art <p>III. CONTRIBUTIONS MENTIONING ERICH FROMM</p> |
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Illustration 1

II. Categorization of contributions and statistical data

(1) Categorization and number of contributions

As of 17 May 2013, approximately 1,360 contributions by Chinese authors were to be found in relation to Erich Fromm [[Appendix 2](#)]. About 480 of these contributions were *about* Fromm, including almost 100 academic theses (89 master theses, 8 doctoral dissertations) (*Category 1*). In addition, more than 100 contributions dealt with the interpretation of fiction and poetry with the aid of Frommian social-psychological concepts (*Category 2*). Finally, Fromm was only *mentioned* in ca. 770 contributions (*Category 3*)⁵. Category 1 was divided in turn into the following three *thematic areas*:

- (1) Erich Fromm and the basic concepts of his thought;
- (2) the individual and society in Fromm's thought;
- (3) the theory and practice of humanism in Fromm's thought.

These thematic areas were then subdivided into *thematic groups* according to the subject matter of the corresponding contributions (*Illustration 1*).

⁵ More recent data see [Appendix 2a1, page 5 and 2b1, page 7](#).

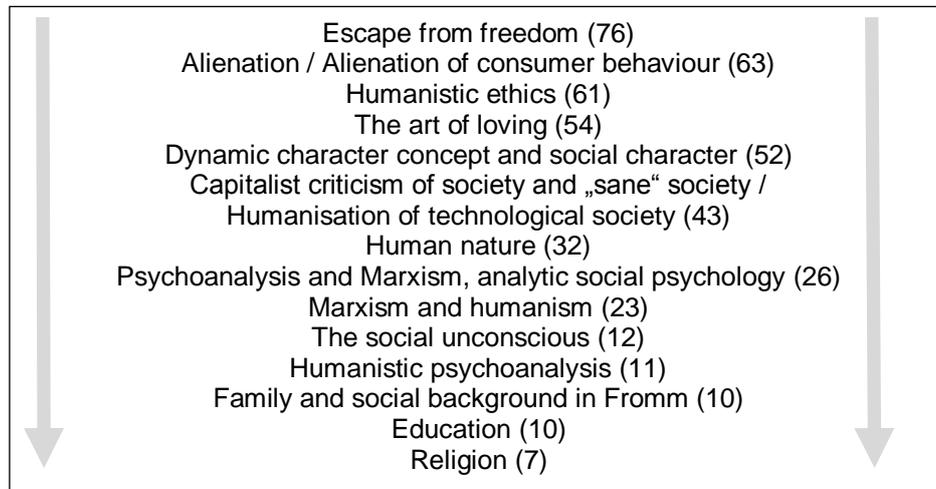


Illustration 2

Most of the academic theses and journal contributions which were found had to do with Fromm's idea of "escape from freedom", followed by "alienation / consumption alienation", "humanistic ethics", "The Art of Loving", "the dynamic character concept and social character" as well as "criticism of capitalism and 'sane' society". The fewest contributions had to do with "the social unconscious", "humanistic psychoanalysis", "education", and "religion". Again with regard to the academic theses, most titles were related to such thematic groups as "human nature", "The Art of Loving", "Escape from Freedom" and "alienation" (including "alienation of consumer behaviour"), whereas the smallest number had to do with "religion", "humanistic psychoanalysis" and "Marxism as humanism". (Illustration 2, and [Appendix 2a](#)⁶)

The number of contributions regarding Fromm increased from year to year over the years 1977 – 2012; this was largely due to numerous contributions which merely mentioned Fromm [[Appendix 3](#)]. A search carried out by entering last names in a title search in the CNKI database found similar numbers of works about Fromm (487) and about the Frankfurt School (480). That was more than the numbers of works about *Max Horkheimer* (35), *Wilhelm Reich* (50) or *Theodor W. Adorno* (205), but fewer than the numbers of works on *Herbert Marcuse* (804), *Abraham Maslow* (974) or *Sigmund Freud* (1.383). (For comparison: almost 50,000 works were published about *Mao Tse-dong* and almost 80,000 about *Karl Marx*) [[Appendix 4](#)].

(2) Authors

Some authors were more prolific than others in writing about Fromm. For example, *KONG Wenqing*, who wrote his doctor's degree on Fromm's moral philosophy in 2007 also wrote between 2000 and 2008, in addition to his dissertation, numerous journal contributions on different topics connected both with Frommian ethics and with "Fromm's Jewish roots", as well as on religion, freedom, and human nature. (2006a). *DENG Zhiwei* also wrote a doctoral thesis on Fromm's ethical concepts (2008a) and has published many articles on this topic, including a paper about the approach of the Frankfurt School to the ecological crisis (2008b).

Finally, *FANG Xingfu* should be mentioned. He presented his doctoral dissertation on Fromm's "hominology" in 2008 and has published papers on consumption, character, and alienation in Fromm's thought as well as on literature interpretation with the use of Frommian concepts. [[Appendix 5](#)]

⁶ More recent data see [Appendix 2a1](#), page 5.



(3) *Academic theses*

The *academic theses* found in this study were written at ca. 80 different universities.⁷ In some cases, several academic theses on Fromm and/or the application of Fromm's socio-psychological concepts to literature and art were written at one and the same university. Among these are for example the *Jilin University*, with 13 works, and the *Heilongjiang University* with 11. [[Appendix 6](#)]

The field of "Marxist philosophy" predominated in the academic theses *on* Fromm, (41 references). Next came frequent mentions of "foreign philosophy" (16), "ethics" (13), and "the philosophy of science and technology". Numerous other subjects were also discussed, including, among others, "Marxist theory and ideological and political education", "mental health education", "sociology", and "basic psychology". With reference to the academic theses on *literary and art studies*, the specialized field of "English language and literature" was at the centre of attention (39 references), followed by subjects like "comparative literature and world literature" (11), specialized fields like "literature and art" (3), and subjects like "Russian language and literature" (1) and "Chinese modern and comparative literature" (1).

Many of the academic theses had downloadable English contents. A sample layout of a doctoral dissertation is shown in [Appendix 7](#), and [Appendix 8](#) shows the reproduced title pages of a Master's thesis.

(4) *Journal articles*

The authors reviewed here published their articles in numerous different scientific and non-scientific journals.⁸ More than 500 journals with articles about Fromm or mentioning him were found in the field of literary studies. About 100 further titles were found in journals about philosophy and the social sciences. These were followed by more than 60 different titles concerning education and pedagogy though the contributions often did not refer to educational. The authors usually had a specialized background in the areas of Marxist philosophy and the social sciences. Apart from that, there was a great variety of subject areas such as "political science", "law", "economics", "sociology", "ideological and political theory" as well as "liberal arts" and "journalism".

Some journals, like the *Journal of Harbin University* (seven articles) published more than once about Fromm. Some others published four articles at the same time. Many contributions were only one or two pages long. The average length of scientific articles reached four pages in Chinese writing, which would be ca. 5–6 pages with a Latin alphabet. The longest scientific journal article had a total of 21 pages.⁹ The oldest article dated from 1961 and dealt – evidently in cooperation with non-Chinese authors – with the Neo-Freudian School's theory of personality (HALL et al., 1961).

As with the academic theses, English abstracts of journal articles were also found; these had been translated in some cases by the authors themselves from the Chinese or were products of automatic translation services [[Appendix 9](#)]. The title pages on these journals tended to change repeatedly and were sometimes truly colourful and full of fantasy – even for scientific journals [[Appendix 10](#)].

⁷ There were more than 2,000 colleges and universities in People's Republic China in 2012 according to the Chinese Ministry of Education; see: [Wikipedia English](#); [Wikipedia German](#) (both April 19, 2015).

⁸ The total number of academic journals in field „Arts and humanities“ was ca. 3,100. ([CNKI](#) – September 17, 2013).

⁹ „Fromm's life and the developmental background of his radical socialist humanism“ (ZHOU Lianqing, 2003).



(5) *About the literature used*

The *primary literature* most frequently quoted in academic theses consisted of Fromm's books "Escape from Freedom" (1941a¹⁰) "The Sane Society" (1955a) and "The Art of Loving" (1956a). With only a few exceptions, all individual editions published in English and all books in the "Erich Fromm Complete Edition" were quoted¹¹. Many quotes were based on a book entitled "The Love of Life" (2000, 1988). The book "Dialogue with Erich Fromm" (1966), in which conversations between Fromm and the social psychologist *Richard L. Evens* are presented, was also quoted. In addition, anthologies like "The Art of Being", edited by *Rainer Funk* (1993), or collections translated into Chinese, e.g. the "Fromm Book Selection" (1989) or "The Fromm Collection" (1997) were also found. Many authors also quoted from Fromm's numerous other publications, for example "Let Man Prevail – A Socialist Manifesto and Program" (1960b), "You shall be as Gods" (1966a), or "On Disobedience and Other Essays" (1981). Apart from these books, the authors also used book contributions like "Summerhill – For and Against" (1970) or journal contributions like "Love and Its Desintegration" (1956z). With regard to books, the authors often fell back on editions translated from English into Chinese. Besides official, licensed translations (listed on the <http://erich-fromm.de/> [[Appendix 11a](#)]), non-official, unlicensed translations were also used. Among these are, for example, "The Forgotten Language" (1951a / 2001), "Anatomy of Human Destructiveness" (1973/2000), and "The Crisis of Psychoanalysis" (1970a / 1988) or the book already mentioned above, "The Love of Life" (1988, 2000) [[Appendix 11b](#)].

An indispensable body of secondary literature on Fromm, often quoted by the Chinese authors, is found in the writings of *Rainer Funk*, for example his dissertation "The Courage to Be Human" ("Mut zum Menschen", 1982), which is also available as a book in English. Other contributions of his such as "Erich Fromm's Approach to Psychoanalysis" (2000v) or "Young People and the Post-modern Character" (2004a) were also quoted. Many other authors like *Romano Biancoli*, *Sandra Buechler*, *Adir Cohen*, *Gerhard Knapp*, *David Riesman* and *Helmut Wehr* were also mentioned. These examples show that the authors also made use of the possibility of downloading from the Erich Fromm Homepage and in this way profited from contributions from the English version of the *Fromm Forum* journal. Finally, they also took advantage of material found in the different Fromm biographies in English.

The *secondary literature*, which does not directly refer to Fromm, consists especially of writings by and about *Marx/Engels* and Marxism in Chinese translation. In general, the edition of "Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin Writings" (2001) drawn up by the "Compilation and Translation Agency of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China" was often quoted, along with a translation of Marx's "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" of 1844. Less frequently named were writings by and about *Freud*. The main works of the leading authorities *Kant*, *Hegel* and *Heidegger* have been translated into Chinese and were also used, as were the works of *Schopenhauer* and *Nietzsche* – extending all the way to members of the Frankfurt School like *Max Horkheimer*, *Herbert Marcuse* and, in the present day, *Jürgen Habermas*.

III. Contributions on Fromm

The authors mentioned here worked on "*classical*" Frommian subjects according to their professional backgrounds and their research interests regarding various issues and aspects of discussion.¹² In most cases,

¹⁰ The letters next to the years refer to data in the Erich Fromm Complete Edition (Volume X, pp. 373 – 479 and data found on the [Erich-Fromm-Website](#).

¹¹ Unfortunately, there is still no English translation of the German Erich Fromm Complete Edition in existence today. This German edition includes a one-of-a-kind index of all writings by Fromm and many comments of the editor that are apt to avoid misunderstandings of Fromm's terms and concepts.

¹² [Appendix 12](#) gives examples of thematic contributions to Fromm's thought on "Human Nature".



next to characterizations of Fromm's personality and his works (1), numerous specific core issues were important: the sources of Fromm's thought in Marx and Freud, respectively in Marxism and psychoanalysis (2), Marx and historical materialism, Marxism as humanism (3), the Frommian criticism of capitalism, and his ideas on a "sane" society (4), as well as his humanistic ethics (5). After Marx and Freud, many other thinkers were mentioned because their ideas had been discussed comparatively by Fromm (6). Finally, most authors discussed Frommian concepts in relation to the situation in China, regarding both theory and practice (7).

(1) *On Fromm's personality and works*

Erich Fromm's characteristics as a person and those of his scientific work were mentioned in the majority of the contributions discussed here, at least in short form ([Appendix 13](#)). A small fragment of the academic theses went into the personal, social and time-conditioned circumstances of his life in detail with the aim of explaining the sources of Fromm's thinking (e.g. LIU Chuanqi, 2011). For example, one journal article on "The Jewish roots of Fromm" analysed the influence of traditional Judaism on the framework of Fromm's thought and his basic principles, i.e. as a source of Fromm's theory of human nature and his orientation towards being (KONG Wenqing, 2006a). Another, entitled "The spiritual rhythm of Simone Weil and Erich Fromm", compared Fromm's life and thought with that of the French social philosopher *Simone Weil* (CHEN Zhengshuang, 2006).

埃里希 弗洛姆

Erich Fromm Āi lǐ xī fú luò mǔ
(Publications usually refer to Fromm's last name.)

(2) *On the sources of Fromm's thought and his basic concepts*

Numerous contributions studied the influence of Marx and Freud as sources of Fromm's psychoanalytic-social psychology. Other sources of Fromm's thought were mentioned less often, for instance *Bachofen's* theory of matriarchal rights and Zen Buddhism. The author of a journal article on "The formation process of Fromm's humanistic thinking" explained that Fromm's sociopsychological concept is not only *a pure fusion of Freudianism and Marxism* but also *integrates* [Bachofen's] *matriarchy theory, Spinoza's Ethics, and Marxism as an amendment to individual psychoanalytic theory* (DAN Huayan, 2009); similar comments are also present in a doctoral dissertation on human nature (HAN Song, 2008).

Fromm disapproved both *Freud's libido theory* and *Marx's exclusive socio-economic orientation* and welded the two together into his own concept. This was described in a journal article on Fromm's moral ideas (LI Shengqong, 1990). According to the above-mentioned article on Fromm and his socialist humanism ([see page 5, footnote 9](#)), *Fromm built his own system of thought on Socialist Humanism by trying to revise both Freud's of pan-sexualism and Marx's traditional theory of "Klassenkampf"* (ZHOU Lianqing, 2003) In an article on political psychology, the author posited an integration of Marx's and Freud's theories by Fromm as he tried to link them to his development of political psychology: the author asserts that *this integration not only gave consideration to such dimensions as history, society, economy and psychology, but also incorporated micro- and macro-theoretical perspectives, on which Fromm based his theory of social character and created a unique theoretical path to political psychology* (ZHANG Yanyang, 2012).



In addition to Marx and Marxism, *Freud* and *psychoanalysis* were also usually discussed in the context of Fromm's classical issues. For example, Fromm's idea of the *social unconscious* appeared in a doctoral dissertation on the modern history of development of theories on unconsciousness in language. The author's declared aim was to compare Freud's individual unconscious, Jung's collective unconscious, and Fromm's social unconscious in light of cognitive theories on the unconscious. He came to the conclusion that Fromm *combined the biological points of Freud's individual unconscious theories and the societal points of Jungian collective unconscious theories* (MENG Qiuli, 2007). A critical point was presented by another author in a journal article on Fromm's theory of the social unconscious, in which he found that this theory *breaks through the limitations of Freud's biologic quality of unconscious theory* and provides the possibility of *insight into society to some extent without breaking down the "psychology revolution"-framework of social critique theory* (DAI Guibin, 2001).

One author criticized Fromm in connection with the issue of *love* in the context of psychoanalysis and Marxism. In his article "A misunderstanding between Fromm and Freud – comparative analysis of Love by Fromm and Freud", he found it problematic that Fromm *tried to transform Freud's psychoanalysis by applying Marxist theory. The reason is that they are not on the same level when talking about love. Whereas Fromm studies true love, the nature of love, and the social conditions of love, Freud describes pathological forms of human love, analyses their pathological causes and conditions, and finds the negative aspects of sexual support of love* (YUAN Weiming, 2010). For this author, *Fromm's definition of love is more mature than Freud's, and his understanding on love is more optimistic*. A similar view is expressed in a doctoral dissertation entitled "Fromm's ethical concept of love", without, however, discussing the above-mentioned problematic aspect (HAN Wei, 2010).

(3) *Marx and historical materialism and Marxism as humanism*

Marx and historical materialism were central to many contributions, quite apart from their presentation as sources of Fromm's thought and basic principles. This is seen, for instance, with regard to need theory, the social character, and the concept of freedom. One master's thesis on *need theory* found, for example, that *Fromm's analysis of inheritance and development needs according to Marx help us to deeply understand the profound meaning of Marxist philosophy* (CUI Hairong, 2011). According to one author's article in *Journal of Nanjing Party Institute of CPC*¹³, Fromm described in detail the mechanism of interaction between the economic base and superstructure in relation to his *social character theory*, thus promoting the development of the doctrine of historical materialism (WANG Mingliang, 2011). The author of a master's thesis on the Frommian *freedom concept* took the view that Fromm and Marx *had always put freedom, development, refinement and dignity at the centre and both highlighted the great humanitarian spirit from which we should learn [...] in particular*. However, crucial differences between the freedom concepts of both thinkers are to be found in their views on human nature and human needs as well as in their thought about alienation and/or the ideal state of society. A comparative analysis would make possible a better *understanding of Marx's freedom concept*. That in turn would have *significant meaning for practice and would function as a model with regard to our life* (QIAO Yajun, 2009).

The authors of several works, including a doctoral dissertation and a master's thesis, studied Fromm's humanistic interpretation of Marx, based for the most part on the book "Marx's Concept of Man" (1961b) and on Marx's early "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" (1844), which were used by Fromm in this book. The humanistic interpretation of Marx was a moot topic among most of the authors: on the one hand it was described as untenable: *Fromm totally ignores the thought change in Marx's later period*, wrote the author of a doctoral dissertation (CHAI Tingting, 2008). A similar opinion was represented also by ZHANG

¹³ Communist Party of China.



Heping (2004) in an article about the "concept of alienation in Marcuse and Fromm": [...] a *humanitarian use of "alienation" represents a feature of Marxist philosophy in 1844 which is not representative of the mature Marx*. Another author argued against that view: *Fromm, a well-accepted western Marxist, views Marx's humanistic thought as the revolution of humanism science, and gives a creative and true explanation of it* (CHEN Yunyun, 2009).

(4) *Fromm's criticism of capitalism and his concept of a "sane" society*

Besides Marxism and psychoanalysis, Fromm's critique of capitalism, together with his ideas on a "sane" society, surfaced very often in the authors' contributions. On the one hand, Fromm's criticism of capitalism provided the authors with data for analysis and for an understanding of the life situation in modern Western industrial societies. While this led to reasoned comments on Fromm's humanistic understanding of Marx, *it also provides a theoretical weapon for understanding and analysing capitalist society comprehensively and objectively* (CHAI Tingting, 2008). Fromm's concept of *social character* was described as a *powerful weapon for criticizing and evaluating capitalist society* (ZHU Li, 2009). In his master's thesis on "Fromm's ethical concept of escape from freedom", the author found that *the dialectical relationship between "freedom" and "escape-from-freedom" is helpful for getting to understand the current situation of western capitalist society* (TAN Zhaojun, 2011).

On the other hand the authors confronted the contents of this Frommian criticism with the situation in their own country. Here are three examples: In a master's thesis on the "Humanistic socialist ideology of Fromm" the author states that *Fromm's analysis of social disorder in capitalist societies and various aspects of reforms carried out there provides a reference and has practical value for our current, ongoing reform* (XIONG Chen, 2011). A master's thesis on "Erich Fromm's 'Sane Society'-theory and its meaning for constructing a harmonious society" stated that *our theoretical and practical task is to look into Western theories of social theory [...] with an analytical, critical and learning attitude, in order to trace Fromm's ideal of "the sane society" from democratic capitalism to a real, sane, utopian society, that is, a harmonious socialist society* (YE Yusang, 2009). Finally, a third author writes that *Fromm's in-depth analysis on a variety of pathological conditions in real life provides us with a new perspective for examining ourselves and measuring modern society* (HAN Wei, 2010).

Fromm's ideas on *humanistic socialism* or, generally, on the "sane" society were heatedly discussed by the authors. On the one hand these ideas were welcomed, especially their humanistic aspect. Thus the author of a master's thesis entitled "Fromm's ideas of an intact society and its theoretical origins" described Fromm as *a great humanist scholar who strove to establish life for us in a harmonious society [...] and whose concern for people is always worth considering and studying* (YUAN Jing, 2011). On the other hand, his ideas were rejected as "humanistic utopia": *His implementation plan for the establishment of a sound society is only a cosmetic repair [...]. It failed to touch the roots of capitalist economic and political foundations, so that his so-called socialist ideal is merely a utopian fantasy* (HAN Wei, see above). His criticism of capitalism was *not profound enough* and his ideas about realizing a "sane" society *neglected the development of productive forces*, criticised one author (YE Yusang, 2009). According to Fromm, *a sane society can only emerge when all factors – economic and cultural - transform simultaneously*. A weak point for one author was that *this body of thought therefore lacks a realistic basis* (KONG Wenqing 2007).

(5) *Fromm's humanistic concept*

Apart from the issues of Marxism, psychoanalysis, criticism of capitalism and the "sane" society, the authors wrote on further subjects in numerous contexts in relation to *Fromm's humanistic concept*. They perceived



this humanism as having been realized in Fromm's personality and work. Fromm was characterised in this regard, for example, in an essay on his "social philosophy": *His fierce criticism and exposé of the evils of modern capitalist society and its morbidity, his tireless work for humanitarian ideals – goodness, justice, freedom, unity, victory and struggle; his uncompromising condemnation of any form of evil, and of the aggressive and violent manifestations of human society: Fromm's writings give people the most intense feeling of his theory of social philosophy, or rather his humanistic concept of social philosophies* (LIU Weimin, 1994).

This concept of Fromm was discussed not only in contributions of a thematic nature, i.e. regarding the *theory and practice of humanism*, but also in contributions to the two thematic areas of *Erich Fromm and his basic reflections* and *Man and Society*. For example, in a master's thesis, Fromm's *humanistic theory* was treated as an *ideological basis* for connecting psychoanalysis and Marxism (ZHAO Qiaona, 2011). The following three examples are taken from journal articles. In the context of humanism, Fromm's concept of *alienation of consumer behaviour* and overcoming it by means of a *healthy, humane consumer behaviour* (YAN Fangjie & SONG Dexiao, 2008) as well as the creation of consumer ethics by Fromm (CHENG Guangli, 2008) were both discussed and criticised: *it is necessary to recognize the limitations of its humanism, while at the same time to find out the value of a reasonable theory of consumer alienation and the ideological essence of constructing a harmonious society. Establishing a healthy consumer ethics is important*, the author stated (LANG Minglang, 2009). Finally, one author discussed Fromm's ideas on a harmonious society as part of a "*humanitarian, global philosophy of human beings*", with origins in the long humanitarian traditions of the Orient and the West in light of Fromm's humanistic ideas (WANG Songping, 2009, master's thesis).

(6) Comparison of Fromm's reflections with those of other thinkers

Numerous contributions dealt with a *comparison of Fromm's thoughts and concepts with those of other thinkers*. Besides Marx and Freud, (*see above, point 3, page 8*) the reflections of *Herbert Marcuse* and *Georg Lukács* were compared with Frommian ideas, for instance in the context of alienation (LAN Junli, 2004). In the same context, a thinker from present times, namely the French sociologist *Jean Baudrillard*, was also mentioned (HU Guangyi, 2010). Fromm's *freedom concept* was also juxtaposed with the concepts of *Jean-Paul Sartre* and *Isaiah Berlin*. While *Sartre's freedom is essentially a set of free awareness activities, and not reality, Fromm understood freedom as the individual personality's will to get rid of constraints and be independent*, the authors explained (WU Ronghua & GAO Handong, 1996). With regard to Berlin, Fromm's *analysis of escaping from freedom refutes Berlin's belief that negative liberty cannot be transformed into its reversal* (KONG Wenqing, 2006b).

In addition to Western thinkers, seminal Chinese writers were also mentioned. The Frommian *concept of human nature* was compared, for instance, with that of the ancient Chinese Confucian philosopher *Mencius*¹⁴. Both believed that human nature is good, albeit with some important differences. For Fromm, *self-consciousness, spontaneous love, and creativity* are part of human's nature. However, *according to Mencius, human nature includes virtue, morality, propriety, wisdom, loyalty and filial piety, which meet the needs of a feudal society: while Fromm thought highly of independence, creativity and affection for oneself and other people, Mencius denied them, preaching instead affection for relatives and respect for people of higher ranks. Fromm asserted that society is obliged to meet the basic mental needs of human beings. But Mencius called on people to abide by the autocratic hierarchy.* (WANG Yuanming, 2007)

¹⁴ 372 – 289 BC, Chinese name MENG Tzu.



Fromm's *theory of social unconscious* (see above, point 2, page 8) was used in the interpretation of ancient Chinese Taoist philosopher and poet *Chuang Tzu*¹⁵. The Frommian concept, wrote one author, *provides a new perspective for understanding the psychological reasons and cultural connotations of Chuang Tzu's attitude towards Confucian thought. This debate reveals the different understandings of humanity and a struggle for mastery over the social unconsciousness.* (WANG Yonghao, 2007)

(7) *Assessment of Fromm's reflections with regard to China*

Most of the works reviewed here tried to apply Fromm's reflections to China. They often treated Fromm's theories not only as a source of important impulses for further development of the (Marxist) theory but also as an inspiration for ongoing development in the present phase of social transformation (also called "transition"¹⁶) in China. Among the topics of interest for these authors were the *dynamic character concept and the social character (a), the escape from freedom (b), alienation of consumer behaviour (c), humanistic ethics (d), education (e), and the art of loving (f).* (See also point 4, page 9)

(a) The author of a master's thesis entitled "The social character and its traits during the period of social transformation" wrote about Fromm's concept of *social character*, first mentioned in the 1940s, which was used to explain the phenomenon that the *psychological characteristics and behaviours of certain social groups changed with the social environment.* The author was certain that *this has great significance for the modernized transition of China's socialist society and the overall healthy development of humans in terms of the social character and its traits during the period of social transformation.* (TANG Xiaoyu, 2009)

The social character in Fromm's works was also the subject of an empirical study: fifteen examination candidates were asked to what extent the productive (*rational*) and the unproductive (*marketing, receptive, hoarding, exploitative*) character orientations appeared and how the academic field influenced students in the sense of Frommian social characterology. The conclusion of the author was that *the rational orientation is dominant in creative academic life, in which unproductive orientations can change into reasonable needs and play positive roles in a certain extent, thus helping to avoid discontinuity between the scholar and the man, enabling one to lead a harmonious academic life* (SHE Yaowei, 2011). Finally, one journal article dealt with "Depersonalization on the Internet from a psychological perspective", and the author explained this phenomenon with the aid of reflections extending "from Fromm to Rollo May". (ZHENG Yan, 2009).

(b) The authors' examination of Fromm's *freedom concept* as applied to China resulted in a few titles such as "Escape from freedom as enlightenment for China's freedom construction" (WAN Xiang, 2008, master's thesis) and "The revelation of people's mental states during the social transition period in China from the perspective of Fromm's concept of "escape from freedom" (WANG Weihua, 2004, journal article). The author of one journal article identified the escape mechanisms of *mechanical conformity, wrecking desire and authoritarianism* as a *serious challenge to further development of the society in all aspects.* A master's thesis entitled "An analysis of Fromm's freedom plight theory" stated that Fromm's concept *has great reference value for the construction of socialism in our country* (ZHANG Jun, 2011). Finally, Fromm's freedom concept was used in other practice-relevant contributions, for instance in an analysis of the *migrant workers' predicament* (BIAN Guiping, 2010) or to explain of the *passivating effects of "fast-food" books on university students* (ZHAO Kejun & XIONG Huajun, 2012), or to help clarify *vocational students' mental confusion* in a society undergoing a dramatic transition process (JIANG Yingchun, 2011).

¹⁵ Around 365 – 290 BC, also Zhuangzi, ZHUANG Zhou.

¹⁶ In classical Marxism „transition phase“ means the transition from capitalism to socialism (see i.e. XU Yan, 2008).



(c) A master's thesis on *Alienation of consumer behaviour* had to do with the social group of *the new poor* in China, that is, those who earned well but spent or planned their money quickly and because of this actually always had too little money and lived continuously in poverty. With respect to Fromm, the author saw the this phenomenon as manifesting itself in an attitude of alienation to consumption and was sure that *it is very useful for our Chinese to look at the consumption alienation problem nowadays* (JI Yan, 2008). The author of another master's thesis thought that Fromm's concept would offer not only *instructive suggestions for a proper attitude towards consumption* but also for the *development of a harmonious society* (SUN Lingyun, 2006). Another, practice-relevant article studied consumerism in leisure sports. Among other things, the authors claimed, with regard to Fromm's consumption alienation theory, that *we should adopt a sustainable, people-orientated leisure sports consumption mode, [...] we should eliminate possessive value orientation, and build a creative personality* (SHEN Keyin et al., 2008).

(d) The aforementioned doctoral dissertation written by KONG Wenqing (2007) on "The Frommian autonomic morality and its meaning for building morality in the social transformation of China" (*see above, e.g. page 4*) had to do with Frommian *humanistic-ethical concepts* in connection with China. The author indicated that *a transforming societal characteristic of disordered morality calls for a reconstruction of morality, and it was important to cognitively recognize the autonomic attribute of morality in a socialistic market economy*. Fromm's concept would be *highly relevant for present-day China in settling some problems of creating a moral structure, including the shaping of subjective personality, the cultivation of individual moral character, and the construction of socialist institutional ethics* (DENG Zhiwei, 2008a). Another, master's thesis stated that Fromm's humanistic-ethical ideas were really valuable for *building a harmonious society, and the self-realization of people in modern society* (LIU Nanyan, 2008). Fromm's concept was seen even as *very helpful for guiding the practice of human development* (TAO Xue, 2009).

(e) Great importance for school education and education in the family was attached to Fromm's ideas on *education*. *The theory of humanistic moral education could be often used for criticism of and reflection on authoritarianism in the present education system, to find a way out of the dreadful state of moral education*, stated a journal article on "Fromm's view of humanistic ethics and reflections on our school morality" (JIAO Yuliang & QI Wunian, 2012). Humanistic concepts regarding the education of teachers in China could be seen as an *academic hot topic in our country these years* and could play an *important, inspirational role in the development and reformation of teacher education in our country*, wrote the author of a master's thesis on this problem. Besides Fromm, he also cited the humanistic concepts of *Rogers and Maslow*. He wanted to show what a teacher should be from all of these perspectives: *a self-actualizing, creative person with an attractive personality who is sincere towards students and trusts them. A teacher should be a facilitator who is able to establish a cooperation-system with students* (ZHU Xia, 2007).

(f) Fromm's *ideas about love* were also discussed with reference to practice in China, often with regard to education. This was the case in a master's thesis on "Erich Fromm's philosophical concept of love and its educational illumination" (HUANG Zhiping 2006) and in a journal article entitled "Fromm's 'The Art of Loving' – inspiration for the love education of college students". In the latter case, the author saw Fromm's book as a kind of manual for *ideological and political workers on how to guide and help college students know love and correctly treat the attitude of love in order to establish a healthy and progressive concept of love [...]* (GAO Tingting, 2011).

(8) Conclusion

In general, there were no detailed and comprehensible explanations in abstracts showing approval or disapproval of Frommian concepts by Chinese authors. WAN Xiang (*see above, page 11*) indicated the tension between the positive and negative responses of the authors to Fromm, but also their dilemma in their



evaluation of Fromm's theories most clearly by describing his own reception of Fromm's theories as follows: *leave the dregs, and take the essence* (WAN Xiang, 2008).

Nevertheless, we can say on the whole that Erich Fromm enjoyed high esteem in China's academic circles. The reason for this is not that Fromm was viewed as a witness of Western capitalism's mistakes. Indeed, the Frommian *criticism of capitalism* and his ideas on coping with the *plight of modern man* were mostly used by the authors to analyse problems in their own country. With this in mind, Fromm was seen as a provider of ideas and a "lateral thinker" regarding both theoretical and practical questions not only of society and the social milieu but also regarding the individual, mental and spiritual development of people in present-day China. All in all, Fromm's reflections were welcomed as important impulses for further development of theory and for rethinking practice, but simultaneously they were also criticised because of their *humanistic foundation* and *utopian content*, mostly by authors with a Marxist background.

IV. Fromm's theories in literature and art studies

The authors of more than 100 academic theses and journal contributions looked into the use of Erich Fromm's social-psychological and humanistic-ethical concepts in the interpretation of fiction and poetry and in other questions of art [[Appendix 14](#)]. Regarding the integration of Fromm's social-psychological concepts into the interpretation of work, advantages were found for Marxist literature theory and its reception: *there is a close relation between research work on Fromm's hominological theory and literary study. The study of Fromm's theory is beneficial to the development of Chinese literary theory. It widens the view of literary study in China. It promotes Marxist theory of art and literature in China and multiplies the receptive views of Marxist theory of art and literature*, as one already-mentioned author of a doctoral dissertation about Fromm's "hominology" stated (FANG Xingfu, 2008, [see above, page 4](#)).

(1) Interpretation of fiction and poetry

Of almost 60 *academic theses* in this area, most concerned "English language and literature". Some, however, concerned themselves with "Comparative literature and world literature", "Literature and art", "Foreign language and literature", "Russian language and literature", and "Chinese modern and comparative literature". The high proportion of works on "English language and literature" may be connected with the fact that the Chinese students were offered *courses on Erich Fromm* in English within the framework of their English studies. For example, one course offered on the Internet in [Advanced English](#) and named "The worker as creator or machine" contained a short introduction to Fromm's life and work as well as quotations from his "The Sane Society" – not, however, without some criticism of Fromm [[Appendix 15](#)].

The authors mainly offered interpretations of works by English-language writers of the 20th century (rarer the 19th century) from the USA (e.g. *Louise Erdrich, Paul Auster, Joyce Carol Oates, Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, Tennessee Williams, Ernest Hemingway, Hilda Doolittle [H. D.], Emily Dickinson*) and Great Britain (e.g. *Margaret Drabble, Harold Pinter, John Fowles, Doris Lessing, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Charles Dickens*) and Australia (e.g. *Brian Castro, Martin Boyd*). Authors from China were also discussed (e.g. *GU Long, BAI Xianyong, CHANG Eileen, CAO Yu, LU Xun*), rarely from Russia (*Michail Bulgakow*) or Japan (*Yukio Mishima*); and also from other countries, e.g. *Marguerite Duras, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Stefan Zweig*, as well as the "classic writers": *Jane Austen, Edgar Allan Poe, Jonathan Swift* – and, of course, *Shakespeare*. Some authors were discussed in several works, most often *Doris Lessing* (6 times) but also *Oates, Bellow, Drabble, Fowles, Morrison* and *Orwell* (each 3 times).



With regard to literature interpretation, the centre of attention was Fromm's alienation concept; apart from it, his theories of love and "escape from freedom" were also very important. Also his concept of social character in the form of his destructiveness theory, his concepts of human nature with need theory, of human isolation and loneliness, of humanistic psychoanalysis generally or his concept of dream interpretation were used. Occasionally the authors took other authors besides Fromm into consideration, as for example *Freud, Marx, Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, C. G. Jung, Ben Agger or Irvin D. Yalom*. Tangentially, the present study found that not only "serious" fiction and poetry were subjects of interpretation but also formats taken from the television entertainment business, like the television show "America's Next Top Model", which was interpreted in light of Fromm's observations on alienation of consumer behaviour (MA Lihui, 2012).

In the following, examples are given of the application of Fromm's concepts regarding loving (a), isolation and loneliness (b), and destructiveness (c), along with examples of interpretations of the artistic personality (d); all of these examples are from *diploma- or doctoral theses*.

(a) The author of a master's thesis felt that the story "Jerusalem the Golden" by the English novelist *Margaret Drabble*¹⁷ would require an interpretation perspective which goes beyond previous interpretations by taking the feminist point of view into consideration. The author bases this standpoint on Fromm's *theory of love* and discusses a road to spiritual redemption which is established by the love of the protagonist *Clara, who drives away loneliness and alienation through love, making it possible to live harmoniously with others and with the whole world* (CENG Lin, 2007). The author of another master's thesis arrived at similar conclusions based on an analysis of love stories by the Chinese writer *Eileen Chang*¹⁸. The author of the thesis summed up by writing that *if we can look on love as a kind of art that can be obtained by training according to Erich Fromm, the ceaseless, "desolation" and "vacuity" that plagues us will cease* (DU Ruihua, 2005). Finally, Fromm's concept of a mother's love was used in a comparison of the French writer *Margret Duras*¹⁹ with Eileen Chang. Among other points, the author explained that *their dysfunctional child experiences* made it possible for them to become writers and influenced their works (WU Xia, 2007).

(b) A master's thesis entitled "Loneliness in East and West" focused on a comparative study of the phenomenon of *loneliness* in the works of *Franz Kafka*²⁰ and *Lu Xun*²¹. The author asked why the images of loneliness-awareness in the works of both writers were different, although both authors concentrated on the same issues – "human existence", and "freedom". To this end, he attempted to use the Frommian understanding of freedom and loneliness to interpret the works of Lu Xun and Kafka. He also discussed the problematic aspects of interpretation. (WANG Meng, 2011)

(c) Fromm's concept of *human destructiveness* was used e.g. for an interpretation of the novel "The Collector" by *John Fowles*²². This concept has rarely been discussed in Chinese literary criticism to date, states the author of a doctoral dissertation entitled "Necrophiliac character versus biophilic character". The character structure of the protagonist *Clegg* indicates a principally destructive orientation and regresses increasingly in the direction of necrophilia. Clegg's character is hardly to be explained by means of the *pan-sexism of Sigmund Freud's libido theories*. Fromm's psychological characterology, however, provides a direct, evident image for Clegg's anomaly: *Clegg is a pathological character. He suffers from malignant narcissism, cold sadomasochism, and has a hoarding character with a necrophilous unconscious. John Fowles touches upon a very latent, dangerous and hidden human natural tendency: the syndrome of decay*

¹⁷ Born 1939.

¹⁸ Chinese name: ZHANG Ailing, born in 1920 in Shanghai, died in 1995 in Los Angeles.

¹⁹ 1914 – 1996.

²⁰ 1883 – 1924, German-language Jewish writer, born in Prague (then Austria-Hungary).

²¹ 1881 – 1936, Chinese writer and intellectual.

²² 1926 – 2005, English novelist.



which is a mixture of narcissism, anal-hoarding character, sadomasochism, and necrophilia. (PAN Jiayun, 2005)

The author of one master's thesis felt that a topic insufficiently acknowledged by literary reception in China to date is *isolation versus intimacy* as presented in "The Magus" – another novel written by John Fowles. The thesis author stated that he would *introduce the concept "isolation and intimacy" [...] to explore the behaviour of the literary character, Nicholas, in this work of fiction.* In doing so, he would adopt *the theories of Erich Fromm and Irvin D. Yalom²³ to explore how isolation and intimacy is reflected in The Magus.* (DUAN Dan, 2011)

(d) In addition to point (a) (*see above, page 14*), some Chinese authors also attempted to understand the personalities of the writers by applying Fromm's concepts. For example, *Stefan Zweig²⁴* was studied in light of Fromm's theories of freedom, alienation and loving (LENG Yandan, 2012). Or the American poets *Emily Dickinson²⁵* and *Hilda Doolittle²⁶* (known by her initials "H.D.") were examined in view of Fromm's concept of freedom. One author of a master's thesis attempted to interpret the latter poet's poems and letters by means of Fromm's theory of freedom. Using Frommian terminology, she wrote: *HD wanted to seek freedom, to keep her individuality, but the real world confined her. Freedom and understanding for her ended eventually in solitude, isolation and fear. In order to seek positive freedom and keep her own individuality, she intentionally chose to escape into her mythic, poetic world. She created an idealistic world through her writing of mythic poems and thus fulfilled spiritual freedom and self-realization, realizing the pursuit of beauty and truth, the pursuit of women's equality, the pursuit of the freedom of belief, the pursuit of the freedom of love and pursuit of the freedom of creation. HD created a rich world in her mythic poetry, fulfilled her spiritual transcendence, and gained positive freedom* (LI Yufen, 2009).

A similar variety of interpretations resulting from the use of Fromm's concepts was found in ca. 50 *journal articles*. Among others, the following works were interpreted:

- *Herman Melville's²⁷* novel "Moby Dick". The author used for its interpretation *both Fromm's psychological concepts of the social unconscious and social character* (BAI Anyang, 2006);
- *Cormac McCarthy's²⁸* novel "Blood Meridian". Its main character, who is a supporter of war, is interpreted by author with use of Fromm's *destructiveness theory*. The author's conclusion: *The bloody scenes presented in the novel reflect the cruelty of war, and indicate the long existence of war, thus reminding people to fight against the source of war in order to enjoy a peaceful life* (ZHANG Xun, 2012);
- *Franz Kafka's* stories "A Hunger Artist" and "The Metamorphosis". For the story "A Hunger Artist" the author used Fromm's concept of "humanistic conscience", for "The Metamorphosis" – his alienation concept (YANG Jiale, 2006), that also served e.g. for interpretation of *Robert Frost's²⁹* poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (AI Guiqin & HOU Lixiang, 2010);
- *Tennessee Williams³⁰* play "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" was interpreted in light of Fromm's "theory of love" (LI Zaoxia, 2008). This concept was also used in an analysis of the novel "Lucinda Brayford" by Aus-

²³ Born 1931, US-American existential psychotherapist.

²⁴ 1881 – 1942, Austrian writer.

²⁵ 1830 – 1886.

²⁶ 1886 – 1961.

²⁷ 1819 – 1891, US-American writer.

²⁸ Born in 1933, US-American novelist and therapist.

²⁹ 1874 – 1963, US-American poet.

³⁰ 1911 – 1983, US-American writer.



tralian writer *Martin Boyd*³¹ (Cai Xuemei, 2011) as well as "Pride and Prejudice", by the English writer *Jane Austen*³² (ZHENG Baojun, 2011).

(2) Other questions of literature and art

General and practical issues of literature and art came up in a few contributions. For example, in a *master's thesis* the problem of "Fear of literary activities" was discussed in light of Fromm's freedom concept (LI Xiuzhen, 2011). The author also studied the "influence of traditional culture on modern design", or, more directly, how a *loss of one's spiritual home can be avoided* in a culture where lifestyle is geared to possession. With regard to modern product design, this means that one should orientate oneself more towards traditional culture, with its emphasis on *humanistic values such as the advocacy of nature, simplicity and frugality, with a return to purity and simplicity and humans at the centre of attention* – all of which are not found often enough in modern product design (LÜ Xin, 2005). Various *journal articles* also took up philosophical and specific literary-critical and practice-relevant questions. This included, for instance, the psychoanalytical problem of the Oedipus complex in literary criticism, which was called into question in light of a correct theory of matriarchy – as described by Fromm according to *Bachofen* (JI Li, 2010).

(3) Conclusion

According to FANG as quoted ([see above, page 13](#)), an integration of Fromm's social psychological concepts makes a further development of Marxist literature and art theory possible. No such positive statements were found in the abstracts of other authors' contributions. Would it be possible to prove Fromm's importance at least quantitatively? In the case of *Saul Bellow*, for example, a comparison of the total number of works on literary and art studies with the number of works in which Frommian concepts were used produced more than 200 works in total, but only five in which Frommian concepts were used. On the whole, depending on the respective artist, the ratio ranged from 2,000 / 1 (*Lu Xun*) to 42 / 3 (*Margaret Drabble*), which *numerically* would indicate a rather minor importance of Fromm in Chinese literary and art studies. [[Appendix 16](#)]

V. Discussion (theses)

An evaluation based on abstracts is possible only to a limited extent, especially in view of the rapid pace of change of Internet data. Therefore only theses are mentioned in the following, and their validity would also need to be verified by collating the full texts of the Chinese-language original works or at least their translations. [[Appendix 17](#)]

(1) Fromm reception in China centres around an analysis of his reflections. In the context of this analysis he is seen as a representative of "Western Marxism" and a humanistic thinker.

(2) Fromm's "classic" thought was discussed with regard to its importance for theory and practice. In the case of theory, historical materialism and ethical questions were in the forefront of attention. With regard to actual practice, the attention of the Chinese authors focused mostly on aspects of social and societal relations in China, usually in the context of present social and societal transition. The Frommian concepts most frequently discussed were:

³¹ 1893 – 1972.

³² 1775 – 1817.



- escape from freedom;
- alienation, including alienation of consumer behaviour;
- humanistic ethics.

Discussions of Fromm's religious concepts were comparatively seldom, even though these concepts are central to Fromm's thought. Also touched upon rather infrequently were the issues of "humanistic psychoanalysis" and "education".

(3) Most Chinese authors writing *about* Fromm came from a background of "Marxist philosophy", followed by backgrounds in "ethics" and numerous different, generally socio-scientific fields. The discipline of "psychology" was rarely introduced, and "psychoanalysis" not at all. This might be due to the fact that the academic study of psychological disciplines again became acceptable only after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976). In the specialist psychoanalytic literature that I was able to find up to now, the name of Fromm is practically absent, and is never found in the writings of the two other schools of psychotherapeutic thought presently applied in China, namely behavioural therapy and systematic therapy. Fromm was briefly mentioned in only one article entitled "Humanistic Psychology in China" – next to *Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers* and *Rollo May* (XU Jinsheng, 2007).³³

(4) The Chinese authors of the numerous academic theses attempted first and foremost to understand and adequately describe Fromm's reflections on the basis of the primary literature. In doing so, they opened themselves partly to new ways of understanding and interpreting. They did not get lost in the abstraction desert of modern philosophy or experimental psychology. Their principal aim was to analyse the possibilities of realizing Fromm's concepts in life practice and societal practice. This, however, raises the issue of a possible problem – namely that of trying to apply Fromm's ideas and concepts in recipe-form and only fragmentarily. The psychoanalyst *Antje Haag*, who conducted many training courses in psychoanalytic psychotherapy in China between 1988 and 2008, observed such a pattern among many of her students, namely that *they participated in courses of different schools of therapy at the same time and simultaneously mixed together elements of different types of therapy* in their therapeutic applications. This made them suspect that *our efforts led more to an imitation than to a deep understanding of a new, subject-related theory of the human soul for China* (HAAG, 2012, p. 144f.).

(5) The Marxist interpretation of Frommian reflections follows no consistent pattern. It ranges from the "Sino-Marxism" of the 1960s to Marxism with a humanistic impression and with "socialist" and "capitalist" elements. Discussion in this area also reflects the diversity of currents of Marxist thought in present-day China, as observers have testified. (See e.g. *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, 2009)

(6) Fromm's humanistic foundations of thought and the drafts of his writings on individual and societal change were controversially discussed by the authors. Fromm tended to win more approval from authors with an ethical or other specialist background than from those in exclusively Marxist fields. On the whole, most of the authors regarded Fromm's reflections at least as a stimulus for further thought regarding both theory and social and societal practice in China.

(7) Whether the discussion of Fromm's thought has been "stuck" in China for the last 40 years, as the author quoted at the beginning stated (*see above, page 2*), one cannot assess adequately on the basis of titles and abstracts. An evaluation of the reception of Frommian thought in China should be oriented in any case less towards Western criteria and a Western focus of discussion than towards the cognitive interests of scientists in the face of social and societal problems in China.

³³ See e.g. HAAG (2012); SIMON et al. (2011); PLÄNKERS (2010); Internet: [Psychoanalytikerinnen. Biografisches Lexikon](#); [OSNOS](#) (2011); [VARVIN & GERLACH](#) (2011); [XU Jinsheng](#) (2007); [XU Yong et al.](#) (2011); [ZHANG Jingyuan](#) (2003); [ELZER](#) (2000).



(8) The social-psychological concepts of Fromm have a certain place in Chinese literary and art studies. They tend to be (unreflectively?) taken over using Frommian specialist terms. The use of Fromm's concepts is justified by the statement that they are new and more effective than previous patterns of interpretation, e.g. according to Freud. The specialist background of the authors reviewed here is predominantly that of "English language and literature". Here the interpretation of fiction and poetry takes advantage of Fromm's concepts of alienation (including consumer alienation), of love, and of "escape from freedom" (escape mechanisms, negative and positive freedom).

To sum up, China's academic world continues to accompany the country's social and societal transition critically. The social-psychological concepts of Erich Fromm play a certain role here. An analysis of the reception of Frommian thought in China can lead in the West to a deeper understanding of relationships in both culture groups.

VI. Project ideas

If initiated and carried out in actual practice, the project ideas below would support the reception of Fromm's thought in China while also contributing to that reception in the West. While these ideas may seem far-fetched at first, I find them absolutely realistic.

(1) *Translation of the Erich Fromm Archive and the International Erich Fromm Society web pages into Chinese.*

(2) *Issuing the International Erich Fromm Society's journal "Fromm Forum" in the Chinese language.*

(3) *Translation of sample Chinese publications (academic theses, journal contributions) into English.*
Here the most appropriate titles from [Appendix 17](#) should be chosen.

(4) *Translation of Erich Fromm: Complete Edition into Chinese (including an index of subjects and persons and editorial notes [see page 6, footnote 11](#)).*

(5) *Initiation and advisory support for academic theses by German-speaking Chinese and/or Chinese-speaking German authors.*

A possible topic: "The reception of Erich Fromm's thought in China" at a Chinese university (see for example [Appendix 6](#)) and / or at a German university.

(6) *A conference at a university in China.*

The subject of conference should express the tension in which Fromm reception in China exists, and include a reference to the definition of "harmonious society" at the 17th Congress of CPC and its implementation efforts until today; see e.g. [Feicht et al. \(2007\)](#). The conference could possibly take place in cooperation with the [World Ethics Institute at Peking University](#), which was founded successfully in 2012 as an [initiative of Karl Schlecht](#).

(7) *A conference in Germany about the opportunities for studying the humanistic reflections of Fromm in China.*



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