I came to know the name “Edward Friedman” as a China specialist even before I left China and came to the United States in the mid 1990s. Now after years of communication with him I am one of his Chinese friends of the younger generation. I should say that the connection between him and me not only helps me scholarly in many ways, but also shows some unintended but very interesting crossovers between my scholarly pursuit and his academic career.

The first time I corresponded with him was sometime in 2002 when I completed my first article in English for publication. The article was about a discussion on Che Guevara in the Chinese intelligentsia at the turn of the century. The discussion, on the one hand, served old and new Maoists’ political agenda to denounce China’s reforms and accuse the Chinese liberal intellectuals of serving the interests of the West; but on the other hand it facilitated revolutionary nostalgia among various people in a time of increasingly growing social inequity. Since I was trained as a world historian and knew no one in the circle of China studies, I thought I should send it to someone in that circle to get some credit. I sent it to several big names in the field but only Ed responded quickly with some comments and said he liked it very much. I took it for granted that he was interested in my article just for the sake of the topical value. But only very recently as I was preparing
this brief and read Bruce Gilley’s selective bibliography of Ed, did I come to know that Ed actually wrote an article in 1970 on Mao and Che.¹ According to Bruce, Ed was involved in a debate, typical of the time, I guess, on who was more revolutionary: Mao or Che. I am not sure whether that debate was still fresh in his memory 30 years later as he read another article on Guevara, Mao and revolution; but I know the big questions about revolution raised in the two debates have always lived with him.

That discussion on Guevara and Chinese intellectuals started our correspondence. Five years later, 2007, he suggested me to write a review on liberalism in China to commemorate its resurface since the late 1990s. The idea was supported by Shuisheng Zhao and the essay was published in *Journal of Contemporary China*. During the course of writing I emailed him many times asking for his advices and opinions.

Another crossover between my research interest and Ed’s is even more meaningful to me, and it is about revolution and Maoism, too. Around 2004 I was working on a project on the relationship between Maoist Cultural Revolution ideology and cosmology, or physics. It was meant to answer the question: why did Maoism go such an extreme in seeking its political goals, and how would Maoists justify the chaos and disasters the Chinese society suffered during the Cultural Revolution (I believe Mao and his followers knew what was happening around the country.)? I found that the answer somehow lay in Maoist interpretation of cosmology, the perception of the working of the universe. Maoist cosmological discourse claimed to apply Marxist dialectical materialism to cosmology. It

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held that within an infinite time/space continuum, everything in the universe incessantly develops contradictions from within and constantly engages in dialectical transformation between oppositions. Mao himself and Maoist ideologists drew deeply on this thesis when they responded to scientific findings that had cosmological implications, whether matter is divisible or the universe has a limit in particular. All theories consistent with an infinite universe are politically correct, otherwise are bourgeois, revealing a pessimistic mood of the doomed class.

Mao’s obsession with the infinite divisibility of the micro world (elementary particles) began to emerge as early as the mid 1950s and grew stronger as his theory about class struggle under socialism gradually took shape. His obsession, or “faith in” in his own words, with the endless divisibility of elementary particles suddenly became an ideological issue in 1965, one year before the Cultural Revolution, when Red Flag published lengthy articles and discussions on Sakata Shoijouchi. Sakata was a Japanese physicist who applied dialectical materialism in elementary particle physics and believed that the matter was indefinitely divisible. The “Sakata Model” was promoted by Mao himself and thus became an ideologically significant physics hypothesis in China of the time. From a particular angle, the discussion on Sakata and the divisibility of matter disclose what was in Mao’s mind right before he threw China into a pandemonium.

Maoist discussion on physics continued to develop during the Cultural Revolution. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Maoist ideologues launched a campaign attacking Albert Einstein, mainly because his relativity suggests a closed universe whose time and space are both limited, therefore motion, contradiction, struggle, dialectical transformation
between oppositions, all of these Marxist-Maoist concepts are going die by the end of the universe. That idea scared Maoists. In the early 1970s, Maoist ideologues were engaged in a new campaign denouncing scientific theories in astrophysics that suggested a limited universe with new observable evidence. This discussion even continued after 1976 in a lesser extent, as orthodox Marxists still tried to suppress scientific discussions on a limited universe.

My argument was that Maoist discussion on physics was essentially part of the Cultural Revolution ideology, developed to justify the Revolution and other political campaigns in scientific terms by defining them as part of the cosmic order, which is characterized by all-pervading internal conflict and struggle. In this regard Marxist dialectical materialism was degraded into a modern-day “mandate of heaven”, created to justify the reign of Maoism.

What had driven me in this project could be traced back to the early 1970s, when I was in junior high school. After years of cultural barrenness since 1966, all of the sudden many major newspapers and magazines were publishing articles on cosmology and physics. At the macro level of the cosmos terms such as extragalactic nebula, the black hole, the 3K microwave background radiation, the red shift, the big bang, the heat-death of the universe, and Einstein’s relativity, etc, are filled with these publications; and at the micro level, we came to know names of elementary particles layer after layer (atom, proton, neutron, etc). It seemed a scientific renaissance was on the way. These terms deeply impressed me not because I liked science, but simply because they are knowledge about
the world other than class struggle or continuous revolution under proletarian dictatorship.

More than 20 years later, as I studied more about Maoism and the Cultural Revolution, I came to understand the correlation between that “scientific renaissance” and the renewed Maoist efforts in the early 1970s to perpetuate the Cultural Revolution.

During the course of the research, I was surprised to find Ed had published 3 articles on the subject—which had stayed with me since the 1970s when I was a teenager—in the 1980s. More impressively, he made research trips to Japan in the 1970s to get first-hand knowledge about Sakata, Mao’s favorite scientist who facilitated Mao’s ideological needs with physics language. Sakata was also treated seriously in my research. The most important article Ed wrote on the subject was titled “Einstein and Mao: Metaphors of Revolution”, in *The China Quarterly*. Ed published it in 1983, a time he was in the beginning of a “Conservative Phase”, according to Bruce Gilley, meaning a “critical reappraisal of the revolution” which holds that Maoist revolution destroyed the “social fabric on which all decency, progress, and happiness depends”. In this opinion, “Mao is no longer a revolutionary but a tyrant.” Ed’s article(s) on science and Maoism in this regard marked the significant change but in the meantime were controversial. In these articles, Ed criticized Maoists for their abusive and arbitrary interferences into science, which was an early contribution to the subject and still stands today. But when he suggested an Einstein influence on Mao—or even “Einsteinian Maoism”, as he put it, some influential Chinese scientific dissidents such as Xu Liangying and Fang Lizi would

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not agree and Xu published his criticism in Chinese.³ What Ed meant by “Einstein’s influence on Maoism”, I hope I understand correctly, was a practice-based epistemological approach toward genuine knowledge, and the emphasis on radical changes, unbalanced growth and struggle. He found these elements were absorbed by Mao to legitimate his liberation from the Soviet leaders who did not have firsthand knowledge about China, and more importantly, to justify his continuing revolution under socialism by emancipating people’s revolutionary potentiality. Then how—in technical terms—did Mao or Maoists approach Einstein? One particular explanation Ed offered was through Sakata Shoiyouchi.

When I read his articles and his Chinese critics, the first thing coming to my mind was Ed had not seen the bulk of materials revealing the anti-Einstein campaign by the time he wrote those articles—these materials would be made available 2 or 3 years thereafter.⁴ I understood that he was trying to make sense of Maoist excesses in the Cultural Revolution by looking for their roots deeper than a political ideology in normative forms, because the extraordinary turmoil demanded extraordinary explanations. But for his Chinese critics, who had just survived the Cultural Revolution in which Einstein was attacked but remained as a major source of their scientific and intellectual independence,

³ Xu Liangying, *Xu Liangying Wen Ji* (Hong Kong: Mirror Press, 2002).
⁴ Because the campaign was launched largely inside China’s scientific community in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not much material about it was published. A very small portion of the materials did come out right after the “Gang of Four” was arrested, but the purpose of releasing them had nothing to do with criticizing Maoist ideology. Instead, it was merely to serve the party’s political needs—the Gang of Four attacked Einstein on the surface, but their real goal was Zhou Enlai, because Zhou was a patron of the Chinese scientists and scientific research. The details and the process of the campaign was later made public by Qu Jincheng and Xu Liangying’s long article “An Investigation on the Critique Movement of Einstein and the Relativity”, published in series in the *Bulletin of Dialectics of Nature* in 1984-1985.
any affinities or mutual influences between Einstein and Mao were simply inconceivable and hard to accept.

I was fortunate to observe this discussion from afar and benefited from both sides to establish my own interpretations. I think critique, instead of appreciation, was indeed Maoist attitude toward Einstein whose theory shook the foundation of Maoist doctrine. But the idea that a profound understanding of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution entailed something beyond political ideology and deep into science would help us to get much closer to an effective interpretation of the excesses under Mao. It was exactly what Ed had experimented with in the early 1980s with limited data and I was trying again 20 years later with much more copious sources and historical hindsight. After I completed my article, I sent it to Ed and I think he read it with pleasure. He emailed me back and simply said Mao “was justifying killing.” In 2006 I organized a panel on the Cultural Revolution for the AAS annual meeting, on which I presented the paper and Ed was the discussant.

Now all of these discussions are in history, but what will continue to live with me forever are those heartening crossovers and communications between Ed and me.

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