The Erosion of Chinese Communist Ideology

Marxism-Leninism, Mao’s Thought, Dengism, and the Thinking of Jiang Zemin

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1. Summary

The Chinese make a clear distinction between practical ideology and pure ideology in their political communication. The Chinese communist ideology consists of three basic elements: (1) the influence of the Chinese Revolution, particularly the intellectual ferment of the May Fourth Movement; (2) the ideas of Marxism-Leninism; (3) the thought of Mao Zedong.

The theoretical foundation of the Chinese communist ideology is Marxism-Leninism. It is the guiding principle for both the party and the state. The first key Marxist concept is historical materialism. The character of any society is determined by the manner or the mode of production by which people make their living. Every human society has at it foundation on economic base that is supported by superstructures of culture, law, courts, and governmental institutions.

Society had passed through historical process: the primitive communal society, the slave society, feudal society, and the capitalistic society. Through these stages which human history must pass, people can reach the communist stage, utopia. Before the arrival of the communist stage, there must be intense class struggle.

Lenin made two basic modifications to Marxism. One was that capitalism had expanded and grown by seeking new sources of raw materials abroad, in undeveloped parts of the world. Lenin’s second major modifications of Marxism were in regard to organization for the revolution party and doctrine of “democratic centralism”.

Mao’s contribution to the development of the Chinese communist ideology is truly enormous. There are several points of the Thought Of Mao Zedong. First, Mao was the first orthodox Marxist-Leninist to advocate using the peasantry as a major rather than a secondary force. He urged that “a revolutionary tidal wave” must be generated in the countryside to mobilize the masses and to “wield them into his great force” for revolution. Second, He insisted the concept of “from the masses to the masses,” commonly known as the mass line. This means
that a party policy is good only of the ideas of that policy come originally from the masses. It is considered Mao’s theoretical contribution to populism. Third, Mao emphasized on ‘practice’. Mao said theory or idea should involve practice. Only through practice, people can discover knowledge and truth. It must become an integral part of theory, or conceptual knowledge.

Forth, the heart of Maoism is theory of contradiction, which asserts that society has always been full of contradictions. All conflicts are class conflicts between social groups: prior to socialism, peasants versus landlords, proletariat versus bourgeoisie. The key objective of struggle and criticism is to proletariate the behavior and thinking of the individual, “proletarian consciousness”. There are two types of contradictions: “antagonistic contradiction” between ourselves and the enemy; and “non-antagonistic contradiction” which are matters of ideological and political right and wrong among working people, between peasants and workers, or between cadres and the masses. They have different methods to resolve each conflict. Class struggle must continue from the beginning to the end and while the society is undergoing transformation. The contradictions must be solved by continuous struggle or revolution. The ideas about change and struggle between classes lead to his concept of a permanent, or continuous, revolution. In order to be ‘new socialist man’, ceaseless change and upheaval which change society with contradictions must be necessary to be the normal condition.

The thinking of Mao was very complex. His ideas had their roots in the Chinese intellectual tradition. Mao’s practical ideology also has functioned as a guide on which individuals in Chinese society shape their attitudes and regulate their behavior. However, De-Maoism started in 1976 and Mao has been subjected to intensive criticism since 1978. Mentioned Mao would not be Marxist to demand that a revolutionary leader be free of all shortcomings, and errors, the party’s official assessment identified five major political errors that were largely
attributed to Mao. Five mistakes were launching ‘rightist’ rectification campaign, Great Leap Forward and the commune programs, Discrediting and vilifying a number of senior party leaders who disagree with Mao, expanding erroneous policy of class struggle and wrong applying the theory of contradiction, and the Cultural Revolution.

With passing the conflict periods among party leaders after Mao was died, China is now facing an ideological dilemma: how to make identification of Chinese ideology with promptly meeting the needs of the times and situation in China. In order to bridge the gap between the two factors existed, the party leaders agreed the Four Basic Principles asserted by Deng. After 1989, Deng’s Four Basic Principles been reemphasized, Deng declared that adherence to it must be combined with the policies of reform and opening to the outside world.

A collection of Deng’s remarks is called “Theory of Deng” or “Dengism.” It is to concern the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics that include market-style reforms and an open door to foreign investment. Deng's theory is now regarded as the product of the integration of the universal principle of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese Second Revolution economic construction, reform and opening to the outside world. By the benefit of the Deng’s market reform, China was in booming economy. Even though there are controversies about Deng’s ideas of “socialism with Chinese characteristics, it has been acknowledged ideological theory that the Chinese Communist Party takes it as its guide to action.

As heir to Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin insisted that China must search for a ‘new way of thinking to going into twenty-first century. During the period holding on power, Jiang Zemin advanced his own thoughts as a way of ideologically establishing socialism with Chinese characteristics’ or a ‘socialist market economy’. He pushed for “spiritual civilization” that new ideological campaign against moral and ethical deterioration and social disorder. It
proceeded with two points which are praising Deng Xiaoping’s ‘theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics,’ and identifying the existing problems in social, ethical, and cultural life under Deng’s reform. To solve these problems, his “spiritual civilization” calls for education in patriotism, collectivism, and socialism and vigorous advancement of "social morality, professional ethics and family virtues.

So as to establish ideological correctness to support the economic reform that has been going on and will continue, Jiang Zemin pronounced that “China is still in the primary stage of socialism.” The basic task for China been put on the primary stage of socialism is to concentrate efforts to develop social productive forces. That is, the Chinese people can take the socialist road with going through the stage of fully developed capitalism. Every move by Jiang Zemin seems obvious that he must justify ideologically why economic reforms must continue and that these reform measures have not really deviated from the basic tenets of Marxism.

2. Strength and Weakness

It's been a long time that Chinese leaders use 'ideology' to control the enormous and complicated China stably. They acknowledged applying ideology to real policies was effective and justified their government system. The Thought of Mao Zedong is a result that ordinary theory, which is Marxism-Leninism, applied to China where it was special historical and cultural real society. Maoism is not only the experience and ideology of the public but the spirit of that age what Mao wanted to reflect.

Strength

According to our article, in spite of some faults of the Mao are to be blamed, Maoism and his emphasizing on practice can be highly appreciated. Mao was the chairman of China who
made continuous attempts for China’s development. Since Mao died in 1976, Chinese have been missing and respected him.

The writer described detail that Mao used advantages of China’s local situation wisely to apply Marxist theory to China and to reach the socialist revolution. He mentioned Mao as the first orthodox Marxist-Leninist to advocate using the peasantry as a major rather than a secondary force. In those days, Leaders of The Chinese Communist Party insisted that the Socialist revolution should be relied on the urban proletariat. Mao, however, began to organized peasants who accounted for 80% of the population of China as a vanguard of a socialist revolution. As the writer said, it can be evaluated well how Mao took effective and practical strategy in suitable situation to come closer China’s socialist revolution.

Mao designed main idea representing mass’ interest, living in real life of mass and could complete ‘The Thought of Mao’ based on ‘the new democracy’, and ‘the theory of contradiction and practice.’ Following the strategies and policies from Maoism, Mao pushed on some big projects that have strong effect on Chinese society to build up socialism country.

Of course, Mao and Maoism have been evaluated that they made crisis of socialism with Chinese characteristics deepen because of for failure left lots of damages and sacrifices. But, Mao’s socialism made their exact goal to build ‘Strong Socialistic New China’ up and fixed the direction for China’s development at first. In order to achieve this goal, it is obvious that the thought of Mao can be admitted ‘socialism with China characteristics’, ‘Chinese-Marxism’ by applying Marxist theory to specific society of China.

**Weakness**

In article, there is much explanation about Marxism-Leninism and especially Maoism. Compare to them, The Theory of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin’s Thought are have few parts of contents relatively. However, for understanding Chinese ideology what it has
undergone a change and has had effect on Chinese society until now, reforms conducted by Deng should be given a great deal of weight. Furthermore, the writer was just focus on Deng’s economic reform that has big difference with Mao.

Even though Mao and Deng tried to lead the Chinese people by different ways, both of them have come from Marxist ideology. We should understand all Chinese leaders’ ideologies by putting a one line started from Marxism. The Theory of Deng is a matter of important concern to understand today’s China not only as economics but also as ideology. That is, we have understanding how Deng accepted and applied Marxist thought to his thought as that of Mao.

Deng's theory is regarded as "The product of the integration of the universal principle of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese Second Revolution-economic construction, reform and opening to the outside world” at the Party Congress. As Deng’s idea and policies on reform were evaluated highly, we have to analyze what Deng did well or not. Deng criticized that Mao's time was "ultra-Left" line and failing policies. He carried active and opening reform and uneven growth economic policies out. It made that some class much richer than people in lower class like capitalistic society. During Deng was doing reform, he was not bounded traditional Marxism and Maoism. He took a bold capitalistic element for overcoming China's economic difficulties at the side of the pragmatist. After Deng’s reform, the base of ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ has been on parts of capitalistic economic system and changed socialist ideology what Mao first insist as a guide of China from Marxist ideology. Thus, on that point, it deserved to pose a question about whether Deng’s socialism with Chinese characteristics is true socialism or not.

3. Our opinions

Our group has discussed what Maoism and Dengism have the elements from Marxism-
Leninism. This discussion started from the point that both the thought of Mao and Deng are China characteristic socialism gotten process Marxism-Leninism has applied to China society. Moreover we think, we should have base that China is a socialist state, no doubt, when we identify Chinese identity socially and politically.

The thought of Mao and Deng has been tools for efforts that are to spread Marxism in China society and to achieve socialistic goals, achieving communist China. It should be needed to realized Marxist principles to China where has specific their own characteristics. With these environmental factors, we think that Chinese leaders focused on practical elements of Marxism to their theory.

Mao said socialism was meaningless things without leading practice and couldn’t be ideology for China. He always emphasized that political leader should make China painting of Marxist theory. Deng also insisted that Marxism and Maoism should be proved as truth through constant practice. Two leaders had viewpoint that suitable theory to resolve China’s issues –changing and developing of China- is genuine theory, when they accepted Marxism as state ideology.

According to Marxist theory, the main point of that is labors’ spontaneous actions and awareness of their life in reality. Underlining practical things of Maoism and Dengism can be understand in the same vein.

There have been many disputes whether the thought of Mao and Deng as socialism with China characteristic is socialism originated by Marxism or not. It’s about that China style socialism is creative and realistic applying to China, or is new ideology out of Marxism focus.

Our opinion is that ideological root of Chinese socialism as socialism of Marxism has continued. As Marxism said historical process that society had passed, the theory of Mao and Deng stressed main points what it should be necessary in each stages of historical process,
especially in transition period.

Mao’s political revolution and Deng’s economic reform could be regarded useful strategy and policies as following Marxism. It is also to make known the appropriateness of reform to Chinese leaders, Mao and Deng. Thus, controversy about China’s identity has to discuss on a base that China style socialism has rooted in Marxism.

4. Questions

1) What kind of elements does Marxism-Leninism’s in 'the Chinese characteristic socialism'?

2) Do you think Maoism and Dengism are the branch come from the Marxism-Leninism or different new theory?

3) There are two controversies about Mao; A Good Mao or A Bad Mao. What do you think of it?