

Seven Currents of Social Thoughts and their Development in Contemporary China with a Focus on Innovative Marxism*

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Nowadays the political and economic development in Socialist China cannot be separated from ideological and theoretical development, and is reflected by or contained in the following seven currents of social theories: neo-liberalism, democratic socialism, new leftism, eclectic Marxism, orthodox Marxism, revivalism and innovative Marxism. The social currents here are a neutral term, of which Marxism is one type.

1. Neo-liberalism

Chinese neo-liberalism has three policy suggestions. First, it insists on deregulating and liberalizing the economy, including finance, trade, and investment, which means that private monopolies and oligarchs have freedom to control economy, media, education and politics both at home and abroad. If possible, public actions should be replaced with private ones without government interference. Neo-liberalists also suggest the government be small and weak in order to prevent its interference. While agreeing with the notion of small government, I argue here that the small one should be strong on governing functions, with support from a strong congress. For instance, a great number of government and Party ministries should be reduced into several larger ministries, which I have argued for two decades. The neo-liberalists maintain that government should have small number of staff, simple structure, and little role, only in order to have the monopolies play a greater part.

Secondly, neo-liberalism insists on privatization. It calls for privatizing reform of the existing public sectors on the basis that privatization is the foundation for the well-functioning of market system and the private enterprises are the most efficient ones. The representative of this notion, Professor Zhang Weiyong, former dean of Guanghua School of Administration at Peking University, argues that lands, enterprises, schools, postal services, mines, public facilities and transportation should all be privatized.

Thirdly, the neo-liberalists insist on the individualization of the welfare system. They oppose the establishment of the welfare state

* Paper presented at the EMS Academy, Thiruvananthapuram on December 12, 2012

and the increase of people's welfare, which is the common feature of neo-liberalism both at home and abroad, but has not been clearly summarized by the academia in both contexts. In China, neo-liberalism is also against such laws as the minimum wage and employment contracts. Those who subscribe to neo-liberalism and Washington consensus are few in number, but are gaining more and more influence.

2. Democratic Socialism

The democratic socialism in China contains the following assertions.

First, in terms of its guiding theories, democratic socialism denies Marxism as the only guiding theory. It supports the diversity of worldviews and guiding theories, i.e., the diversity of socialism in terms of its constitution and theoretical sources. It regards Bernstein's revisionism and Keynes' economics as its sources and components. Numerous currents and ideas are combined into one in the name of diversification and democracy of thinking, which in fact only constitute a kind of ratatouille.

Secondly, in terms of the political system, it defends multi-party competition and government rotation. It claims that as an interest group, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has its own special interests and is unable to avoid corruptions as the only possible party in power.

Thirdly, in terms of the economic system, it argues that socialism can be realized without transforming capitalist private ownership of the sources of production because the ownership structure of the sources of production is not the measurement of social essence. They suggest a mixed economic system combining state-owned, private and other enterprises, and the distribution system based on capital within the framework of private ownership. In terms of the ultimate goal, it considers communism as utopian.

In China, the representatives of democratic socialism include Professor Xin Ziling and Professor Xie Tao, with *Yanhuangchunqiu* as their journal.

3. New Leftism

New leftism is composed of a loose group of intellectuals who have attracted the public attention through publishing articles on journals or websites so as to influence the Chinese political process. Most of them have the experience of studying abroad. Some of them still live overseas.

Wuyouzhixiang (www.wyzxsx.com) is their major theoretical platform. Its founder, Han Deqiang holds a PhD in Marxism, but is not a Marxist, for he is opposed to the theory of labour theory of value and historical materialism even though he supports public ownership and critiques neo-liberalism.

In contrast with neo-liberalism, new leftism has the following three characters.

First, it calls for a powerful government which dominates during market reforms. This idea was reflected in *The Report of Chinese State Power* written by Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang in 1993. The report triggered the tax reform of January 1994 which separated the local tax from the state one. The reform has had a far-reaching influence over Chinese society since then. In this respect, neo-liberalists argue that state must release its power in order to promote the market economy.

Secondly, new-leftists criticize capitalist globalization, and argue that it has resulted in the wide spreading of capitalism in China. The social problems in China have their root outside China, i.e., the globalization, international capital, and market economy. Neo-liberalists would insist on the internal cause in this respect, and that the solution to the social problems should be further marketization, especially neo-liberalist reforms in both political and economic terms.

Thirdly, it argues that marketization reforms have resulted in the widening gap between the rich and the poor. It emphasizes economic equality, not economic growth at any expense. The total rejection of the Marxist and communist idea of redistribution is ruthless and immoral. In the view of neo-liberalists, income inequality does not result from markets, but from corruption and tradeoffs between power and money. Fundamentally it is the result of a dictatorship.

Although new leftists try their best to stand on the side of laborers, their criticism and policy suggestions cannot be realized in reality. Some of their discussions did have positive influence in Chinese society. For instance, Professor Cui Zhiyuan, who received his PhD in political science in USA, has employed the game theory and mathematical method of economics to demonstrate why the collective-owned enterprises have higher efficiency through the case study of Nanjie Village.

4. Revivalism

Revivalism, the current of antiquity worship, considers ancient kings and sages to be the paramount ideal of personality, and ancient society as the ideal one. It has almost penetrated every type of ideologies in China and become a flourishing current. Revivalists worship political thoughts and philosophical ideas from ancient sages, commending the idea of benevolent governing and prioritizing the common people from Confucius, and advocating the natural, unchained, and free spirit of Taoism. They also worship ancient ethics and think highly of benevolence, justice, rituals, wisdom, and the notion of serving the public. They suggest that the perfectly scientific socialist ethics is the development of the essence

of Confucianism, which is suitable for a socialist society, and is the crystallization of the most progressive thoughts of mankind possibly developed in both the East and the West. Its birth and applications not only guarantees the rapid and healthy advance of the Chinese socialism, but also revolutionizes Marxist theories constitute the lighthouse that will usher the world into the communist society.

The major representatives of revivalism are Deng Xiaojun and Jiang Qing. Deng Xiaojun is the author of *The logical combination of Confucianism and democratic ideas*, published by Sichuan People's Publishing House in 1995, in which he concluded that Confucianism, in essence, is consistent with the democratic ideas in its theoretical orientation and core logic. Therefore, Confucianism and democratic ideas can and should be logically integrated. Jiang Qing, known as the most eloquent spokesmen of Neo-Confucianism in mainland China, argues in his book *Political Confucianism*, published by SDX Joint Publishing Company in 2003, that in addition to Confucianist theories about mind-nature there is a political Confucianist tradition in Chinese Confucianism. And this political tradition of Confucianism is such a great resource that it can replace the Western political tradition and meet China's current political needs. This point is contextualized by his refuting of Deng Xiaojun's theory. Jiang Qing believes that the question concerning the integration of Confucianism and democratic ideas is a question of "necessity" and "possibility". His answer is that there is neither "necessity" nor "possibility".

Some revivalist businessmen even raised the absurd idea that we should emigrate hundreds of millions of people abroad to take over international market. In fact, Confucianism can not and should not be revived at the political (or state) level, but only can and should be revived at the social and personal level. The study of a national legacy is appreciable, but the revivalism certainly can hardly work.

5. Eclectic Marxism

The eclectic Marxism is the theory and method which interpolate the two sides of contradiction without priority, and mechanically mix opposing ideas and theories with no consistent principle. The representative figures of eclectic Marxism are Wang Dongjing, Dong Degang and Wang Changjiang, who are all professors of the Central Party School criticized by the central leadership of the CPC.

Wang Dongjing, former director of the Economics Department of the Central Party School, praises the superiority of private ownership in a lecture to the provincial and ministerial leaders. He views selfishness as a human nature, and agrees with the completely self-serving *homo economics* postulate and the idea of "man dies for money as birds die for food". He puts emphasis on efficiency and completely ignored equity, while only recognizing that

human selfishness is what leads to increased social collaboration and public welfare[†]. He speaks fully on behalf of property owners without any consideration of the exploitation of workers. I wrote an article on the first issue of *Social Sciences in China* in 2007 to critique Wang's argument and elaborated on the four theoretical hypotheses that an innovative modern Marxist political economy should have, namely, "the new hypothesis of value created by new living labor", "the hypothesis of both egoistic and altruistic economic man", "the hypothesis of dual constraints of resources and needs", and "the hypothesis of the mutual reinforcement and proportional relationship between equity and efficiency".[‡] In fact, there has been a growing literature in the West exploring altruistic economic hypothesis and theoretical models, which could have a positive effect on institutional arrangements, building integrity, the education of ethics, and could further lead to the increase of social collaboration and public welfare.

Wang Dongjing did not oppose Marxism when advocating that modern economics could guide the development of China's economic reform and opening up. He actually added in the concluding part of his article that he would hold high the Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thought of Jiang Zemin. Thus he could be classified as Eclectic Marxist.

In his article titled "We Should Further Emancipate Our Minds Concerning the Question of Ownership," Dong Degang, the former deputy director of the Philosophy Department of the Central Party School, emphasized that the purpose of socialism and the adjustment and changes meant to achieve socialism, should be important guiding principles for building socialism.

He stressed that we should not be overly concerned about the proportion of public ownership and non-public economy, but should pay more attention to making the fruits of economic development to be shared by the vast majority of people on the premise of the development of productive forces. The concept of sharing by the vast majority of people is equal to common prosperity, but it is an abstract notion of common prosperity without the dominant position of public ownership and the distribution according to each one's labor.

Is it possible that the decreased proportion of public ownership will not really weaken the Party's ruling foundation? Frankly speaking, the proportion of the state economy in China's national

[†]Wang Dongjing. The theoretical pivot of operating economy, *Wenhui Daily*. June 7, 2004. Also see his Clarification of three major economic problems, *China Reform* no. 6. 2006.

[‡]Chen Enfu. Four Theoretical Hypotheses of Modern Marxist Political Economy, *Social Sciences in China* no. 1 2007.

economy has dropped to less than one-third while the private economy and foreign economies has risen to two-thirds. This situation is bound to make social wealth gradually concentrate to a few people. Deng Xiaoping warned us in his older age that “in China only socialism, rather than polarization could work”[§]. The idea that the decreased proportion of public ownership is unable to really weaken the Party’s ruling foundation is corrosive to the socialist economic base. It seems that many of Dong Degang’s articles are trying to explain socialism with Chinese characteristics and to emancipate the mind. In essence, they entail the revisionism that Lenin mentioned, which could be described by a new term, i.e., eclectic Marxism. Under the name of the emancipation of mind, it distorts the sinization of Marxist theory.

Wang Changjiang, the director of Party Building Department of the Central Party School, published an article titled “It is an objective reality that the Party has its own interests” in issue no. 534 of *Study Times* sponsored by the Central Party School. In his point of view, only when we practically and realistically recognize the existence of the Party’s interests, could we objectively study the relationship between the various interests, especially the relationship between the interests of the people and that of the Party as their representative, and place the interests of the Party in a appropriate position.** His argument is clearly contrary to the “Communist Manifesto” and the Chinese Communist Party’s constitution. According to the Communist Manifesto, the Communist Party does not have any interests different from the interests of the proletariat as a whole, while according to Chinese Communist Party’s constitution, the party should insist on serving the people wholeheartedly. Besides the interests of the working class and the overwhelming majority of the people, Chinese Communist Party should not have any special interests.

In the process of economic and political development, eclectic Marxism is one of our main targets of the critique. It is important to criticize eclectic Marxism thought to find out what Marxism is and what the real socialism with Chinese characteristics is.

6. Traditional Marxism

The representative medium of traditional Marxist thought is *Mao’s Flag*, a website with the declaration of “Make Mao Zedong’s flag rise high”. There are many cadres from inside and outside the Party, as well as old scholars as its contributors.

The major representatives of the traditional Marxism include Li Chengrui, former director of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, Bai Yang, etc. “Defend Mao Zedong’s Flag” by Bai Yang can

[§] Chinese Communist Party Literature Research Center. 2004. *Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1997)*. Vol. 2: 1317. Beijing: The central literature press.

** Wang Changjiang: It is an objective reality that party has self-interest. *Study Times*, no. 534.

be seen as the manifesto of the traditional Marxist thought. Its core ideas are:

First, the guiding status of Mao Zedong Thought should be re-established. The core of it is defending the Constitution and the Party's Constitution for the people. Among the Four Cardinal Principles of the Party, the most important one is to adhere to Mao Zedong Thought, which is the foundation for the existence of Chinese Communist Party and People's Republic of China, the basis of governing and rejuvenating the country, and the source of innovation and development.

Secondly, Mao Zedong's later years should be fairly evaluated. Chairman Mao's later years were the most glorious period of time when a great Marxist dedicated all his life to serve the people and to fight for communism. The fundamental problem of a fair evaluation of Mao Zedong in his later year is to practically, realistically, objectively and impartially evaluate the Cultural Revolution initiated and led by Chairman Mao. This is a major political task of our party which could not and should not be avoided. Due to various extremely complex reasons, the Cultural Revolution has committed a serious error of "overthrowing everything" and "full-scale civil war". However, the general orientation, the principles and spirit of the Cultural Revolution are completely correct.

Thirdly, Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought should be vigorously studied and advocated. Deng Xiaoping particularly emphasized that there could be no new China without Chairman Mao. And Mao Zedong Thought has educated several generations. We must hold high the great flag of Mao Zedong Thought from generation to generation forever. However, since the 1990s, the publicity of Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought has been weaker and weaker.

Fourthly, the demonization of Mao Zedong should be severely critiqued. The people are the God in the mind of Chairman Mao, while Chairman Mao is the red sun in the hearts of the people. In the past 30 years, despite the complete denial of his later years, in civil society, the people spontaneously produced wave after wave of "Mao fever", carrying out the activities to commemorate Chairman Mao in various ways. However, some so-called elites have repeatedly fought against the public opinion, and reacted with wave after wave of the demonization of Chairman Mao. Li Rui and Yuan Tengfei are representatives of such demonization.^{††}

The positive significance of the traditional Marxist thought is its fierce critique of some erroneous ideas, especially neo-liberalism, democratic socialism, and eclectic Marxism. However, some criticism, particularly those defending the Cultural Revolution tend to go too far. They prefer mass criticism and name calling as their

^{††} Bai Yang. Defend Mao Zedong's banner to the death.
<http://mzd.wyzxsx.com/Article/Class18/201007/3361.html>.

basic approach. And elderly scholars are not good at reviewing domestic and foreign literature. Thus there have been excess of criticism and inadequate innovation in their writing.

7. Innovative Marxism

The representative scholar in the field of innovative Marxism is the famous economist Liu Guoguang, who used to be the Vice President of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and now serves as a CASS special adviser. I am also recognized as one of the major representative scholars in this field. Innovative Marxism conforms to the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party in terms of the fundamental direction and theory.

First, in terms of the guiding principle, innovative Marxism insists on the guiding position of Marxism in China. Of course, the formulation of the guiding ideology varies across socialist countries, where it is Ho Chi Minh Thought in Vietnam, Jose Marti Thought in Cuba, and the Juche Idea of Kim Il Sung in North Korea. In my opinion, the formulation of the guiding ideology of China should be unified into one sentence – the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and its localized theory in China, instead of some never ending list which is ridiculed by the academia.

Secondly, in terms of the political system, innovative Marxism adheres to the leadership of the political party of the working class in China. China must adhere to the Communist Party as the vanguard of the working class in nature, the principle of democratic centralism, and the leadership of the Communist Party in the socialist cause. The multi-party cooperation and political consultation system under the leadership of the Communist Party at the current stage is a form of democratic centralism, which is the fundamental organizational principle and institution for the Communist Party and the country under its governance, as well as the political criteria to correctly handle the relationship inside and outside the Party.

Thirdly, in term of the economic system, innovative Marxism insists on the dominant position of public ownership of the means of production in China. The essential difference between socialism and capitalism with respect to the basic economic system lies in the social ownership structure of production. The dominance of public ownership with both qualitative and quantitative advantage, in the form of a strong state-owned economy, plays a pivotal role in building a strong country and socialism and in getting its people better off. Therefore, it is the economic base of a socialist nature for the superstructure of the governance by the Communist Party.

Fourthly, in terms of its ultimate goal, innovative Marxism believes that China must adhere to the socialist nature and principle, aiming at emancipating and developing productive forces, while eliminating exploitation and polarization so as to achieve

common prosperity, and ultimately realizing communism based on socialism with immense progress in productive forces. This is a long process of historical evolution and system innovation.

Studies on Marxism and *Marxism Digests* are representative journals on innovative Marxism, especially the latter one, which concentrates on publishing the theoretical perspectives of innovative Marxism. The website of Marxism Research Network also reflects the theoretical dynamics of innovative Marxism in a timely manner.

In my opinion, the theoretical innovation and research or the policy making in China should be ultimately based on the situation in China while taking into consideration of “the circumstances of the world”. The correct sequence of policy making – whether it is to execute the opening up and reform, or other major policies relating to China’s development – would be first to understand the domestic and the world situation, and then to create certain specification, and then to test or implement the policy. If this order is reversed, for example, the test of policies are conducted just in mind, or the officials undertake the so-called trials in a affirmative way in accordance to their own will, then such policy making without referring to the law and regulation will often leave a lot drawbacks in the subsequent implementation. In short, innovation of Marxism in China should be a “comprehensive innovation”, which adheres to the fundamental principles of “Marxism at the base, national legacy at the root, and Western thoughts as the tool”, while taking into consideration of the world situation and social reality, and prioritizing the status of CPC.

Now, to further clarify the view of innovative Marxism and the places where it can play an important role, we emphasize that the direction of socialism and its scientific development in the 21st century must focus on developing and perfecting “the system of institutions”:

First, in terms of building the economic system, socialism with Chinese characteristics means to improve the basic economic system in a way that will keep public ownership in a dominant position and have diverse forms of ownership by its side. The essential difference between socialism and capitalism with respect to the basic economic system lies in the social ownership structure of means of production, to paraphrase Deng Xiaoping. The dominance of public ownership with both qualitative and quantitative advantage, in the form of a strong state-owned economy and the active collective and cooperative economy, plays a pivotal role in building a strong country and socialism and in getting its people better off. Therefore, it constitutes the economic base of socialism for the superstructure of the ruling of the Communist Party of China, as Jiang Zemin suggested.

Although China cannot achieve the full public ownership of means of production due to underdeveloped productive forces right now, it

must adhere to the dominant position of public ownership while developing a variety of private economy at the same time. Only by adhering to the dominant position of public ownership under the conditions of market economy, can the wealth and income distribution system be truly improved in a way dominated by distribution according to each one's labor, common prosperity, equity and justice be achieved, and the people-centered scientific concept of development be implemented, all of which will provide the economic basis for participatory democracy and for achieving the sound and rapid economic and social development.

Secondly, in terms of the political system, socialism with Chinese characteristics will improve a "three-element and four-layer system". That is to insist on the organic unification of the three elements, i.e., the leadership of CPC, people's position as the master and the rule of law in handling state affair. It also means to uphold and improve the people's congress system, multi-party cooperation and political consultation system under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the regional autonomy system for ethnic minorities and the policy of "two systems within one country", and the autonomy at the grassroots level, so as to continue to promote self-improvement and development of the socialist political system, to consolidate the people's democratic dictatorship, in which participatory democracy is the extremely important content and style. China must adhere to a Communist Party whose nature is the vanguard of the working class, the principle of democratic centralism, and the leadership of the Communist Party in the socialist cause. In front of the new scientific and technological revolution, the working class is still the representative of advanced productive forces and the embodiment of advanced relations of production, is still the group of people committing to the historical mission to overthrow capitalism and construct socialism and communism. Under the new pattern of the emergence and coexistence of a variety of social classes and strata, the Communist Party still must maintain its nature as the vanguard of the working and rely on the working class wholeheartedly. The multi-party cooperation and political consultation system under the leadership of the Communist Party at the current stage is a form of democratic centralism which is the fundamental organizational principle and institution for the Communist Party and the country under its governance, and the political criteria to correctly handling the relationship inside and outside the Party.

Thirdly, in terms of the cultural system, socialism with Chinese characteristics will improve the socialist core value system with Marxism as its soul, and let it better lead a variety of social thoughts and social practices, and promote cultural development and prosperity. As a scientific world outlook and methodology, Marxism is the theoretical basis of the socialist movement, which

should serve as the guide in the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. To treat it as the guide is to combine the universal principles of Marxism with China's reality at the current stage to study new situations, sum up new experience and solve new problems. Marxism is a scientific system which opens itself to other thoughts and moves forward with the development of science and practice, with strong and lasting academic vitality and practical guiding force.

Fourthly, in terms of building the social system, socialism with Chinese characteristics will improve the system of "one structure, three interactions, and four mechanisms". First of all, building a socialist harmonious society requires the improvement of the social management structure featuring leadership of party committees, government responsibility, nongovernmental support and public participation".^{‡‡} Secondly, we must innovate the public administration system under the leadership of the party, and actively promote the connection between government control and the social coordination, and the complementary relationship between the government administration and social autonomy, in order to form scientific and effective mechanisms for the coordination of interests, expression of demands, conflict mediation, and rights protection.

It should be pointed out that since the socialist democratic system is not yet perfect, some people without the understanding of Socialism would equate capitalism with democracy and socialism with autocracy. If we only criticize the hypocrisy of neoliberalism, social democracy and democratic socialism without improving the system of socialist democracy, then it's impossible to eradicate the soil nurturing Western democracy. One of the means to surpass the Western democracies is for socialist countries to continually make a greater achievement than any other country in aspects of participatory democracy, social justice and economic development, and to give full play to the superiority of socialism to capitalism. Under the background of the adoption and implementation of the scientific concept of development, building a socialist harmonious society, and the sound and fast economic development of national economy, we are fully capable to do this. If we follow the footsteps of Gorbachev's democratic socialist reform, it is bound to bring misery to the country and the people. China must not repeat that same mistake.

It should also be noted that the direction and destiny of socialism in China will be determined by whether the innovative school of Marxism can become the mainstream thought among the Chinese academia and politicians.

^{‡‡} *Selected Important Documents since the Sixteenth CPC Congress, Part □*, the Central Literature Publishing House, 2008, pp.662.