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Deng Xiaoping's Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

by Li Junru

In order to establish socialism or to perfect it in a great oriental power that is backward both in economy and politics, the Chinese communists from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping have gradually worked out a new ideology of scientific socialism, i.e., the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It combines the national character with that of time into one since the third plenary session of the 11th Congress of the Central Committee of the CPC after protracted struggles.

Historical Origin

The theory of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a new scientific idea plotted out by Deng Xiaoping according to the actual conditions of China. But the new idea can be traced back to the practices of Mao Zedong and his comrades-in-arms during the mid-1950s, and also to a series of important ideas based on these practices.

In the history of socialist development, 1956 is a year that should not be neglected. The year 1956 witnessed successful completion of the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicraft and capitalist industry and commerce. Also in 1956, Mao Zedong and his comrades-in-arms had realized that the socialist system that was just established had its serious drawbacks which had to be overcome. On April 25, Mao Zedong made his famous speech "On Ten Major Relationships" after his investigaton and research. The ten major relation-

ships he mentioned are ten pairs of contradictions in the socialist construction created by the Chinese Communist Party. As a matter of fact, these ten pairs of contradictions represented the contradictions between the socialist system of the Soviet model and China's national conditions'. Mao's speech caused shock among the highranking cadres of the Party. In order to reach a common understanding, Mao Zedong made another important speech at the enlarged session of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on April 28. Among the ten problems he mentioned, the third one was "Reform of the Socialist Economic System" and the fifth one was the "Policy of Letting a Hundred Flowers Blossom, and Letting a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend". Afterwards, many leading comrades like Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and so on, began to probe into socialist contradictions², proceeding from the actual conditions of China

From then on, Mao Zedong and his comrades-in-arms in the Central Committee of the Party made three investigations which were more or less geared to actual circumstances.

The first investigation took place before the struggle against the bourgeois Rightists from 1956 to 1957. At that time, new ideas were promoted, including developing heavy industry through the development of agriculture and light industry³; allowing local administration and state-owned enterprises to have some independent power⁴; increased consideration for the interests of the state, the collective, and the individual; defining the percentage of the capitalist private economy which could be developed into socialist society; supervising long-term coexistence of the Chinese Communist Party and democratic parties⁵; practising the policy of "letting a hundred flowers blossom, and letting a hundred schools of thought contend" in the science and art fields⁶; handling correctly and distinguishing two different kinds of contradictions in nature⁷. All these ideas have provided valuable ideological data and an

experience base for the exploration of socialism with Chinese characteristics. When this exploration came to a premature end, we had taken a roundabout course. Politically, we broadened the scope of class struggle, and economically, we had launched the objective campaigns for the Great Leap Forward and for the movement for rural people's communes.

The second investigation lasted from the Zhengzhou Meeting of the Party at the end of 1958 to the early days of Lushan Meeting in 19598. In this period, through correcting the mistakes created by stirring up a "communist wind", the Party came back to China's reality again to study China's socialist problem. Then set forth a series of positions such as "China is still in a period of underdeveloped socialism9." making a clear distinction between socialism and communism. and between enterprises owned by the collective; that we must adhere to "distribution according to work" and that we must expand socialist commodity production and commodity exchange, etc. Quite a number of arguments had direct impacts on the advancement of the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It was a pity that this exploration met with twists. The struggle against "Right Opportunism" gradually gathered its momentum after the Lushan Meeting.

The third investigation lasted from the end of 1960 to the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution". In this period Mao Zedong's theory stipulated that we must grasp the realm of socialist necessity and reduce our blindness; that we must expand democracy and strengthen democratic centralism (the organizational principle of our Party, namely, centralism on the basis of democracy and democracy under centralized guidance); that the basic accounting unit of the people's commune should go back to production teams. The correct ideas were set forth in a series of regulations, such as "Seventy Articles for Industry", "Forty Articles for Industry", "Forty Articles for Higher Education". They are all the precious wealth of thought.

From the very beginning through to the end, Deng Xiaoping was a participant in the three investigations. He was well aware of the rich experiences gained in them and of the bitter lessons gained by the interruption of them. The theory of "socialism with Chinese characteristics", based upon these lessons, is established through scientifically developing what is useful or healthy, and discarding what is not. Mao Zedong's probe into socialism and Deng Xiaoping's exploration of socialism are related and cannot be taken separately. We must scientifically study the ideological links and the historical conditions of these two great men, and see how Deng Xiaoping's Socialist Thought is inherited or developed from Mao Zedong Thought.

Origins and Connotation

Deng Xiaoping's ideas on socialism with Chinese characteristics has been gradually taking form in the process of its application.

The mid-fifties was the germinating period of thought concerning "socialism with Chinese charcteristics". In his important works like "Marxism Must Combine with the Actual Conditions of China" (November, 1956), "The Main Task in the Future to Engage in Construction", "The Communist Party Must Accept Supervision" (April, 1957), in accordance with the serious drawbacks being revealed in socialist reconstruction, Deng Xiaoping advanced the theory that, to build socialism, we must face the reality of our country, face the demands of the masses, and let the classical communist principles be suited to China's reality. He said we will achieve our goals through multi-level supervision of the masses inside and outside the Party.

At the beginning of the 1960's, the theory of socialism with Chinese charateristics had a hearing for the first time. Summing up the lessons of the Great Leap Forward and the movement to establish rural communes, and energeically

encouraging the practices of conducting investigation and studies, as well as probing into the development laws of socialist economy in China, Deng Xiaoping put forward his important idea of solving the problem of developing productivity in terms of the system. He said "the best form for the relations of production, I think, should adopt the following attitude; we must take the position that agricultural production can recover, or develop in that place, choose the forms the masses are willing to take, and illegal ones must be turned into legitimate ones"10. Deng's idea applied the philosophical principle of "proceeding from actual conditions to the realm of political economy," taking a great step forward as compared with the ideas of the mid-fifties. To a great extent, this idea was reflected in a series of important regulations, such as "Seventy Articles for Industry" which Deng Xiaoping drafted or presided over.

The period in which Deng took charge of routine matters of the Party's Central Committee he advanced his theory of Socialism with Chinese characteristics. After being tempered through the great storms of the "cultural revolution", he had a clearer understanding of China's problems in the realms of armed forces, industry, agriculture, education, literature and art. These rectifications were targetted at the disorder caused by the "Cultural Revolution", but were not confined to these. In these rectifications he emphasized that we must make stability and unity prerequisites. This emphasis was closely related to his idea that "stability prevails over everything". The rectification he meant, so far as its content is concerned, contains the meaning of structural reorganization, or reforms. His rectification criteria, contained in his article "On the General Programme of All Kinds of Works of the Whole Party and Whole Country" distinguish real and sham Marxism, and real and sham creteria of productive force. The transfer of the focal point of work to reforms and open policy at the end of the 1970s is directly related to Deng Xiaoping's ideas in 1975.

The period after the third plenary session of the 11th Party Congress was the formative period of Deng Xiaoping's theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. After discussing the criteria of truth, bringing order out of chaos, summing up experiences, and with his feet planted on China's solid ground, Deng Xiaoping stood facing the world. He faced the future with the heavy responsibility of "general designer" of reforms and open policy. He finally formed his new ideas of scientific socialism with individual character and put forward a basic train of thought. The basic principles of socialism with Chinese characteristics include:

Socialism with Chinese characteristics, a scientific concept, breaks with the Soviet mode of socialism, that is, with "leftist", or overanxious-for-quick-results, socialist concepts. It runs counter to the ideological trend of bourgeois liberalism with respect to radical reforms. It bases itself either upon China's tradition and reality, or upon scientific socialist conceptions. It is a conception of rich, civilized and democratic socialism, taking productivity as a key goal.

Socialism with Chinese characteristics is a renovated institution. First, it has the characteristics of modern socialism in its productivity structure, while emphasis has been placed on a socialist material base, which in turn is based on productivity through technological innovations. Deng Xiaoping stresses that intellectuals linked with productivity must be regarded as a nucleus. His views and arguments have given significance to scientific socialism, which has industrial production as its base. Furthermore, in the economic system, it has the characteristics of "subject" Socialism. In all Deng's expositions on socialism, "subject" is a prominent concept. For example, in the ownership mechanism, public ownership is a subject, while in the distribution mechanism, distribution according to work is a subject. In the principle of "one country, two systems", which refers to future state institutions, socialism is a subject. "Subject" socialism is a socialism with a variety of characteristics. The term "subject" reflects a sense of socialist principles which includes flexibility in the application of socialist principles. accordance with the demand that the principle must combine with flexibility, and after his research into the new situations of contemporary economic development, Deng stressed that central planning is not equal to socialism, while market forces are not equal to capitalism. If we build a planned commodity economy based on public ownership, that is, with a socialist economic formation, innovation will be shown. Secondly, in political systems, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has the characteristics of socialist law and order. Deng has repeatedly stressed adhering to the political goal of unity in the people's democratic dictatorship, as well as the values of democracy and centralism, freedom and discipline, unified will and individual ease-of-mind, on which the democratic political systems with Chinese characteristics, such as the institutions of the National People's Congress, the multi-party cooperation under the leadership of the CCP and political consultations, as well as regional autonomy of minority nationalities, all depend. Deng Xiaoping emphasized that problems in Mao Zedong's political teaching, and in its practice, must be overcome through Legal reconstruction. In other words, we must make socialist democracy more perfect, strengthen and improve the Party's leadership, oppose the traditional drawbacks and the bad impact of strains of feudal autocracy and patriarchy. Thirdly, in the cultural and ideological mechanism, Deng's theory has the socialist characteristics of combining the scientific nature with national and temporal natures. While adhering to his theory that Marxism must be combined with China's reality, and that we must inherit and enrich the splendid cultural heritage of our country, Deng Xiaoping strongly stressed that we must stand facing the world with an open posture, absorb all positive fruits of world civilizations so as to enrich or develop Marxism Leninism and Mao Zedong

Thought, and to thereby build a socialist culture. Every design for a socialist system or mechanism has the characteristics of renovated socialism.

The socialism with Chinese characteristics is a road of steadily developing renovation and realization. In order to reach the target of a socialist system with Chinese characteristics, Deng Xiaoping advanced the following interconnected and intersected roads or ways of realization: first, ideologically, it is a road of building socialism proceeding from China's actual conditions through uninterrupted ideological emancipation; secondly, in behaviour, it is a road of revitalizing socialism through reforms and open policy; thirdly, in the field of control and operations the road of developing socialism pursues social stability under the leadership of the Party.

In short, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a new formation of scientific socialism that is composed of multi-type forms, such as specific ideology, systems, or roads of realization. Deng Xiaoping has made creative and historical contributions in explicating this new approach to the socialist system.

Theoretical Value

The advancement of a "theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics" has enriched the scientific system of Mao Zedong Thought, and has put forward the correct conception of the "second part" of Mao Zedong Thought. In the democratic revolution, which itself proceeded from actual conditions, and after deep and penetrating research into the state of society, Mao Zedong pointed out that only by following two steps (a new democratic revolution and socialist revolution) can the Chinese revolution realize its socialist ideal. He vividly depicted these two revolutions as two parts of one "article". Over quite a long period of time, our Party and Mao Zedong devoted their efforts to the "First Part" of the article. From publication of Analysis of Class in Chinese

Society to Our New Democracy, from the advancement of Chinese made Marxism to the victory of the new democratic revolution; all these reflect the First Part of an article written by our Party and Mao Zedong in a prominent paper in the social sciences.

The success of the First Part of the article not only laid good foundations for the Second Part of the article, but also put forward many difficult questions for articulating the Second Part of it. By successfully using its experience in integrating theory with practice, analyzing classes, organizing the united front, etc, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, our Party found the road for the socialist transformation of capitalist industry and commerce by means of "peaceful redemption". It also put forward the Party's general line for the transition period promoting industrialization and socialist transformation, and carried out socialist transformation with Chinese characteristics. But, due to a lack of adequate preparations for the second step of the revolution (i.e. how to build socialism ideologically and theoretically), there was no time to undertake detailed research into China's socialist revolution. Therefore, although the necessary economic, political, ideological and cultural conditions for socialist revolution existed. China could only carry out that revolution in a country where productivity was backward, or imbalanced. The small commodity economy still accounted for the main proportions of the economy Mao Zedong paid specific attention to, and after completion of the socialist ownership transformation, he purposely distinguished the concept of "establishing of socialism" from that of "building socialism". He pointed out that the socialist system of our country "has just been established, but its building has not been accomplished yet; it still needs to be consolidated"11. At the same time, he said, "only when modern industry and modern agriculture have been established can the socialist economic and political systems" gain a more abundant material base of their own"12.

These views demonstrate that he had a definite understanding of the specific problems of building socialism in China. The historical documents tell us that he was quite optimistic that we were building socialism. Although during the first eight years we copied foreign experiences, since 1956, when "the Ten Major Relationships were put forward, we began to seek out a line suited to China"13. However, practice told us that it is no easy job to build socialism proceeding from China's actual conditions. Although we made many useful explorations, our Party still did not enter the realm of freedom to build socialism. From 1960 to 1962, Mao Zedong time and again mentioned this problem, pointing out that we still had many blind spots in building socialism, and still were in the realm of necessity. The difficult issues in the Second Part of the Chinese revolution are how to understand the objective laws of Chinese socialism, as well as how to build socialism proceeding from China's actual conditions. During the rest of his whole life. Mao was not able to fulfill the Second Part of the article. As Deng Xiaoping's proposition on building socialism with Chinese characteristics itself reflects the scientific spirit of integrating Marxist-Leninist theory with China's practices, and contains the idea of the unity of universality and particularity, it has become the theme of the second part of the Chinese revolution, The first part of Deng's theory is democratism with Chinese characteristics while the second part of it is socialism with Chinese characteristics. The two parts enable the whole article, i.e. the scientific system of Mao Zedong Thought, to be fully unified logically, overcoming the problem of the "first step" having a specific character and the "second step" having no specific character. The theoretical value of socialism with Chinese characteristics rests upon the fact that it has put forward a new ideological framework for the practices of the second step. The conclusion may be drawn that the scientific system of Mao Zedong Thought is composed of two Parts: the first part contains a theory of new