

Contradiction: The Key to Understanding the Sinification of Marxism

Published as: 2016 ‘矛盾：理解马克思主义中国化的关键’ (Contradiction: The Key to Understanding the Sinification of Marxism). 中国社会科学报 – *Chinese Social Sciences Today* (Social Sciences in China Press), 12 April: 2.

http://phil.cssn.cn/zhx/zx_zxdh/201604/t20160412_2962150.shtml;

http://unt.cssn.cn/sf/bwsf_zx/201604/t20160412_2962894.shtml.

In 1938, Mao Zedong proposed the “sinification of Marxism,” by which he meant “making certain that in all its manifestations it is imbued with Chinese characteristics, using it according to Chinese peculiarities.” In 1982, Deng Xiaoping pointed out: “we must integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China, blaze a path of our own and build a socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Most foreign scholars do not fully understand these claims. I think the Marxist theory of contradiction is the key to understanding the problem.

The internal contradictions of socialism in China have multiple levels of expression. Mao Zedong pointed out in his article that conflicts are manifold, but there is a dominant contradiction in comparison with other contradictions. This paradox is that people should be the main concern. In order better to understand the conflicts, especially in terms of economic, scientific, intellectual and political contradictions, one should continue to develop the theory, and constantly return to seek real improvement in the theory. It is very important to determine at any time the principal contradiction and decide the best way to solve this contradiction in terms the development of this theory.

Mao Zedong’s critical analysis indicates that at all stages of socialism and even communism stage there is ongoing conflict. This suggests that the contradiction between productive forces and production relations in Socialist conditions continue to exist. In fact, in Mao Zedong’s view, “socialist society grows more united and consolidated through the ceaseless process of correctly handling and resolving contradictions”. These contradictions are not antagonistic, but should be resolved through intervention and adjustment.

So, how are contradictions this manifested in a socialist society with Chinese characteristics? First, contradictions still exist between the forces and relations of production. As the forces move ahead, the relations of production may drag behind and therefore need constant readjustment. As the old contradictions are resolved, new ones will arise that require yet further reform and adjustment. Sometimes changes in relations of production can influence the forces or production in moving forward. Further, in China today there is a continued presence of some traditional assumptions about social relations. Many of these have been adjusted in light of the development of productive forces, others have found new expression in light of the rapid changes in production, while others become a drag on further development. The result is that China has a unique conjunction of traditional and very modern social assumptions. As a result, traditional and modern assumptions in China is a unique combination.

Perhaps today, the principal contradiction in Chinese society is a complex dialectical relationship. At a theoretical level one should expect that the contradictions of former modes of production are not resolved in a new mode of production. Instead, the old contradictions reappear in new ways, making the new situation even more complex. Traditionally, Marxism

has spoken of the 'narrative' of modes of production: tribal society and hunter-gatherer existence are replaced by slavery, or perhaps by the 'Asiatic mode of production', which are in turn replaced by feudalism, which is replaced by capitalism, which is then overcome by socialism and communism. Each mode of production is both enabled by internal contradictions (which are thereby constitutive contradictions), but those same contradictions lead to its undoing. Thus, a subsequent mode of production overcomes those contradictions only to produce new ones that are simultaneously constitutive and disabling.

A new theoretical approach argues that each new mode of production absorbs all those that have come before (this is really a different and perhaps more sophisticated form of dialectical understanding). Thus, we find that the earlier contradictions are now included within the new mode of production, creating multiple contradictions that remain unresolved. At the same time, the functions of those earlier modes of production are altered, so that they work within the new mode of production. Socialism has the potential to absorb all of the previous modes of production at yet a higher level of complexity. Indeed, within socialist theory we find the argument that communism unleashes the forces of production hindered by capitalism. However, if you want to liberate of productive forces, it is necessary to use the mechanisms of capitalism-- technological innovation, modes of management and organisation for production, industrialised techniques, forms of agriculture, so that they can be further improved.

The author believes that China's rise on the world stage is the result of many factors: its omnipresent influence around the world; ongoing negotiations, foreign contributions in response to challenges in the China; and especially the cultural persistence of Marxism in China. To this end, and to persist in seeking truth from facts, the truth "is" materialism and the "facts" come from the Socialist economic, political and scientific experiments and construction of practice.

The interpretation of socialism with Chinese characteristics show us the direction of, and also provides a starting point for, further research. For example, maintaining diversity in the Marxist tradition is important. While Marxism may have core principles, they are applied and developed in various ways among different communities. This can also be seen as the dialectic of the universal and particular: universal in order to prevent the degradation of Marxism as a hodgepodge of some irrelevant views; and particular in order to resist outside control and dogmatic understandings of Marxism.

Socialism with Chinese characteristics emphasizes China's unique historical situation, works according to China's national conditions, and creative and flexible in the use of Marxism. This history includes the entire period of revolution, construction and reform. Marxism is needed to emancipate the mind and keep pace with socialism with Chinese characteristics. In this way, Marxism can become a fresh and lively tradition, inclusive of new ideas and concepts. Socialism with Chinese characteristics is inclusive: it involves not only economics and politics, but also all aspects of people's lives, including culture and Socialist democracy. Socialism with Chinese characteristics emphasizes peaceful socialist modernization, which is different from capitalism, which relies on the modern history of colonialism and exploitation of the oppressed, and it is different from the Soviet Union in its highly destructive modernization process in the 1930s.

Chinese traditional culture and the relationship with Marxism is one of the factors that influences the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. To talk about Chinese culture now means that one does so in terms of socialist characteristics. But first we need to rethink traditions. Perhaps we can say that, in a certain sense, ancient traditions and realities seem to be unchanging, but in historical terms tradition involves constant changes and remodelling. Without experience and constant reinterpretation in each era, without adjustments in each generation, tradition is no longer “traditional.” Of course, the premise of every reinterpretation is to restore traditional thoughts, and these are usually understood to be the same thoughts. However, in the process of continuously reinterpreting the tradition, in reading texts again in different circumstances, people gain new insights. The relationship between Marxism and the traditions of the past should follow the dialectic of the old and the new. I think that using this traditional method of dialectical Marxism has resulted in leading Chinese cultural development.

(Author, translator: Beijing Centre for Studies of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics)