

# *The Need for, and Function of the Communist Ideology*

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*Sergio Ticozzi*

The great concern of the Chinese people during the second part of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century was with the “salvation” of the country, that is liberating it from the “semi-colonial” situation, as well as with the ambition of becoming once again the “centre of the world.” The concern was partly due to a strong inferiority complex on economic and military levels. The Russian revolution with its Communist ideology appealed to China, because, having lost faith in its Confucian tradition, the nation was badly in need of a new belief system to “save” its society. The revolution was considered quite effective in Russia, and its utopian vision of Marxism-Leninism was accepted as the best tool. In China Communism also advanced under the strong influence of Russian Comintern agents.<sup>1</sup>

The idealistic dimension of Marxism, expressed by the deterministic conviction, considered as “scientific,” that Communism was bound to triumph over Capitalism and spread all over the world, accorded with the Chinese desire to catch up with, and surpass the capitalist West and fulfil the traditional self-identity as the centre of the world.

Lenin’s distinction between the “consciousness” of the intelligentsia and the “spontaneity” among the masses granted a special role to the revolutionary party, for the proletariat were to exercise dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, thus justifying the

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<sup>1</sup> See Chow Tse-Tung, *The May Fourth Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 244. Early in 1920 the International Communism (Comintern), impressed by the May Fourth vitality, started sending agents to China, who helped to establish in March 1920 at the Beijing University a Society for the study of Marxism together with a Society for the Study of Russia. Although texts by Marx and books on the New Thought were already translated, the content and “the terms were very much confused during this period.”

Communist Party of China (CPC) as the absolute élite, the embodiment of proletarian consciousness.

But the adoption of Marxism-Leninism proceeded in the gradual and practical Chinese way. Due to the different social conditions in China, the role of the workers, through the initiative mainly of Mao Zedong,<sup>2</sup> was combined with that of the peasants; and Lenin's lack of faith in the masses was replaced by Mao's romantic "populism," that is the belief in the "revolutionary voluntarism" of the masses of people who could perform 'wonders.'" The ideological innovations brought in by Mao became the "Mao Zedong Thought."

Wu Xiaochun says that the term "Mao Zedong Thought" was invented by Wang Jiaxiang, who proposed it in an article written on the 22nd anniversary of the CPC in 1943. "Today and in the coming times," Wang wrote, "the correct road is the thought of Comrade Mao Zedong, what Comrade Mao Zedong has laid down is Chinese Marxism-Leninism; it is Chinese Bolshevism; it is Chinese Communism."<sup>3</sup>

"Mao Zedong Thought" was officially introduced in the CPC Constitution which was adopted at the 7th Party Congress on 1 June 1945: "The Communist Party of China takes the thought of the unity of Marxism-Leninism and the practice of China revolution—the Thought of Mao Zedong—as its guide to action, and opposes all dogmatic or empirical deviation."<sup>4</sup>

However, this specific reference to the Thought of Mao Zedong was deleted when the Party Constitution was revised at the 8th Party Congress in 1956. Probably it was excised by some Party

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<sup>2</sup> However, history testifies that the first to start the revolutionary movement among the peasants was Peng Pai (1896-1929) in Hailufeng area, north Guangdong, in the early 1920s. According to a 16 June 2018 article in *People's Daily*, Mao Zedong recognized the fact, but officially the merit is attributed to him.

<sup>3</sup> Lazslo Ladany, *The Communist Party of China and Marxism, 1921-1985* (London: C. Hurst & co., 1988), 65.

<sup>4</sup> James Chieh Hsiung, *Ideology and Practice* (New York-Washington-London, Praeger Publishing, 1970), 133. Wen-shun Chi, *Readings in Chinese Communist Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 1.

members who wished to bolster collective leadership against the tendency toward establishing “independent kingdom.” In fact, on 26 September 1956, the Constitution of CPC officially adopted only the Russian ideology:

The CPC takes Marxism-Leninism as its guide to action. Only Marxism-Leninism correctly sets forth the laws of the development of society and correctly charts the path leading to the achievement of socialism and communism. The Party adheres to the Marxism-Leninism world outlook of dialectical and historical materialism, and opposes the world outlook of idealism and metaphysics...

It was mainly Lin Biao who, during the years of the Cultural Revolution, and with the publication of the booklet *Quotations of Chairman Mao*, greatly promoted the issue. In a talk at the Central Committee conference in late 1966, he proposed five criteria for a qualified leader, the first one being “a staunch belief in Marxism-Leninism and the Thought of Mao Zedong, as a higher stage of development of Marxism-Leninism.”

On 6 November 1967, at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Russian revolution, Lin Biao said: “Comrade Mao Zedong’s development of Marxist-Leninist doctrine on proletarian dictatorship is epoch-making. In the history of Marxism, this is the third great monument [after Marx and Lenin]. The revolutionary people of the world have come to recognise ever more clearly that Comrade Mao Zedong is the greatest teacher and the most outstanding leader. Comrade Mao is the Lenin of the present age. The Thoughts of Mao Zedong are the perfection of Marxism-Leninism. By means of the Thought of Mao Zedong, one can distinguish genuine Marxism from [Russian] revisionism...”<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, the draft of CPC Constitution adopted on 31 October 1968 stated in the General Program:

The Communist Party of China takes Marxism, Leninism and the Thought of Mao Zedong as the theoretical basis guiding its thought. The Thought of Mao Zedong is

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<sup>5</sup> Ladany, op.cit., 344.

Marxism-Leninism of the era in which imperialism is heading toward total collapse while Socialism is heading toward worldwide victory.<sup>6</sup>

So Mao Zedong Thought became, and remained part and parcel of the official ideology, although later it was considered not the product of Mao Zedong's personal wisdom alone, but the product of the wisdom of Mao and his comrades-in-arms, the "crystallisation of the collective wisdom of the Chinese Communist Party."

### **Introduction of ideology in China's National Constitution**

Wang Gungwu wrote:<sup>7</sup>

The People's Republic remains, of course, Chinese, but this is to be a new kind of Chineseness, since from 1949 it embraces all within the present borders. It is characterized by a common Marxist-Leninism and the Thought of Mao Zedong, which replaced Confucianism as the dominant ideology. From this is expected to flow the main ingredients of the new Chinese civilization...

The official adoption of the ideology in China's Constitution proceeded in a slow pace and, in general, followed the amendments in the Party Constitution.

The Common Program, adopted by the People's Political Consultative Conference (21-30 September 1949), just stated that "the People's Republic of China is a new-democratic or a people's democratic state. It carries out the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class, based upon the alliance of workers and peasants, and uniting all democratic classes and all nationalities in China."

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<sup>6</sup> *Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 1, 236.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Gungwu, *The Chineseness of China* (Hong Kong-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press 1991), 7.

The first Constitution of the People's Republic of China (enacted on 20 September, 1954) mentioned the "indestructible friendship with the great Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," but referenced neither Marxism nor Leninism.

Following the 1969 Party Constitution which, as we have seen, put "Mao Zedong Thought" in a central position, the 1975 National Constitution stated for the first time:

We must adhere to the basic line and policies of the Communist Party of China for the entire historical period of Socialism and persist in a continued revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, so that our great motherland will always advance along the road indicated by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

The 1978 Constitution followed the same line:

The dictatorship of the proletariat in our country has been consolidated and strengthened, and China has become a socialist country with the beginning of prosperity. Chairman Mao Zedong was the founder of the People's Republic of China. All our victories in revolution and construction have been won under the guidance of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought...

The present 1982 Constitution repeats the same formula:

Both the victory of China's new-democratic revolution and the successes of its socialist cause have been achieved by the Chinese people of all nationalities under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and by upholding truth, correcting errors and overcoming numerous difficulties and hardships.

### **Recent amendments of the Preamble of China's National Constitution**

The search for a more pragmatic and localised ideology gave rise to further amendments both in the CPC and in the National Constitutions.

After the launch of the “Four Modernisations” in January 1975 by Zhou Enlai (1878–1976) and the death of Mao Zedong eight months later (1883–1976), the new leaders tried their best to find an ideology which could justify and favour the economic reforms and the liberalisation process they planned to carry out. Deng Xiaoping launched the slogans, “seek truth from facts,” “it is glorious to get rich,” and “it does not matter if the cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice.” The general impression was that ideology was set aside momentarily, since the party concern became more pragmatic, interested only in economic results and in the betterment of people’s life. Some writers spoke about “a detour on the road to Capitalism.” Deng Xiaoping, however, did not mean it: he emphasised keeping the “Four Basic Principles” as guidance, that is the socialist way, the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, the guiding role of the Party and the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Thought. He paid close attention to the new conditions and demands of society, with a view to “building up Socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Zhao Ziyang launched the theory that China was still in the first stage of Socialism, and combined it with the emphasis on patriotism or love for the motherland. The construction of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics became “Deng Xiaoping Theory” which was made official in 1992 at the 14th CPC National Congress and consequently in the 1999 National Constitution.

The theory of the “Three Represents,” first proposed by Jiang Zemin in 2000, namely that “the CPC always represents the development trend of China’s productive force, the orientation of China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of Chinese people,” was included in the Party Constitution at the 16th CPC National Congress in 2002, and in the National Constitution in 2004, but without including the name of Jiang Zemin.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thought of Three Represents, the Chinese people of all nationalities will continue to adhere to the people’s democratic dictatorship

and the socialist road, persevere in reform and opening to the outside world...

The Third Plenum of the 16th CPC Central Committee in 2010 summarised the ideas proposed by Hu Jintao in the ideology of “Scientific Outlook on Development,” with the aim of building up a “Harmonious Socialist Society” as a sub-ideology of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, that is the “Deng Xiaoping Theory.”

With the election of Xi Jinping as the top leader of the country since 2013, his speeches and writings were given great prominence. Following the amendment of the Party’s Constitution, adopted on 24 October 2017, which reads “The Communist Party of China uses Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as its guides to action,” the National People’s Congress, on March 11, 2018, amended also the National Constitution. It endorsed a set of revisions to further cement the Communist Party’s control and supremacy, through the National Supervisory Commission, and added “Scientific Outlook on Development” and “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” into the Preamble of the Constitution. It also removed term limits for the President and the Vice President of the Republic.

Different from his immediate predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, whose theories were incorporated, but without their names, the name of Xi Jinping was added, thus setting up a triumvirate of Chinese leaders: Mao, Deng, and Xi. The aim is to reinforce Xi’s role and ambition.

The motivations for amending the 1982 National Constitution five times in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004, and 2018 are generally attributed to the need to adapt to new social changes and to incorporate what are considered the achievements made by the Party.

For the latest amendment, there could be other reasons, as it has been prepared for some years with the launching of Xi Jinping’s emphasis on “Chinese Dream” for the national renewal and patriotism, as well as with the greatly publicised diffusion of the

volumes of his speeches. The common slogan is that “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is a guideline that the Party and State will uphold in the long run.”

The careful and long preparation for the amendment shows the importance Xi Jinping and his collaborators attribute to ideology. They think that, in recent years, the liberalisation launched by Deng Xiaoping raised the living standard of the nation but, at the same time, caused several social evils, such as corruption, money worshipping, loss of ideals, values and morality, westernisation, etc. According to them, the evils were caused by the lack of a strong central control. Therefore, they try to increase the leading and supervisory role of the Party, with Xi Jinping at its core, with a strong ideology that turns up the love for the country (Chinese dream, nationalism, patriotism, sinicisation), in view of an all-inclusive development (“the five-sphere integrated plan”: economic, political, cultural, social and ecological advancement). They aim at the practical goals of building a moderately prosperous society by 2020, of achieving a basic socialist modernisation by 2035, and of turning China into a great modern socialist country by 2049. In order to achieve these goals, they tightened up the supervision of the Party, and increased the emphasis on ideological work, as well as on the personality cult of Xi Jinping, through restrictive measures on all sectors of the social life.

### **Why does China need to specify in its Constitution an official ideology?**

One can seek the answer to the question on two levels: its positive functions and the specific nature of ideology in Chinese history.

Regarding the functions, Communist ideology offers to authorities and people a new intellectual framework for interpreting historical processes, that is, a new philosophical system that is considered “scientific” and infallible. It also provides a set of national goals and programs, thus infusing hope and assuring success. Consequently, it gives to society a new set of basic moral values and priorities, as a standard for both the individual and the community, upon which to judge the thinking and behaviour of all.



Another function of the ideology is its complexity and flexibility that elude a complete and sure understanding. Consequently, it allows various interpretations by experts, who, out of their better understanding, can provide explanations and simple versions to the ordinary people according to the situation.

Jiwei Ci clearly distinguishes between the two levels of the ideology:

The very need for interpretation confers flexibility on the ideological apparatus, for the first level of ideology can be given different interpretations in the light of the changing needs and circumstances. Such flexibility, unless it is exercised too often or too blatantly, need not undermine the stability of the ideological apparatus, since different interpretations are seen as interpretations of the same first-level ideology... The interpretations dismissed can simply be treated as distortions of the first-level ideology, which in itself remains holy and pure. Those who win politically always win ideologically. And they win with the help of those officially appointed interpreters of the first-level ideology, whose job is to mediate between the first and the second levels of the ideology and to prove that the politically powerful are the ideologically correct.<sup>8</sup>

About the specific nature of ideology in China, we have to consider it from the historical perspective, because since early history, the imperial system has adopted Confucianism as its official ideology. All kinds of authority, both civil and religious, was in the hands of the Emperor, who was the Son of Heaven, who adopted the Confucian thought as an instrument for the education of his subjects and as guidance for the good governance of the empire. For this purpose, Confucianism became what modern scholars call a “civic religion” and, as all religious traditions, it required a set of “sacred texts.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jiwei Ci, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 117.

<sup>9</sup> For more details on Confucianism as religion, see Y.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., reprint 1994).

James Chieh Hsiung pointed out in 1970:

The Confucian *li*, the all-pervasive and resilient morality or ethos under which the traditional society operated, has been replaced by the new Communist ideology. It functions today in ways reminiscent of the Confucian *li* before 1949, although the regime disposes of modern means of communication to give its application greater range and effectiveness...

The separation between morality and politics, or church and state, that we know in the West, is foreign to the Chinese tradition... In China, no such distinction has ever existed. Under the Communist regime, as in the past, morality and authority are inseparable, as if church and state were one...<sup>10</sup>

Communist China has always kept an ambiguous attitude toward Confucius and Confucianism: it ranged from the attack during the campaign “Down with Confucius and company” to the present rehabilitation and revival: it is a hate-love relationship for both Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping.

Mao found both the greatest help and the greatest hindrance in the old Confucian order, which had collapsed on the visible political stage but not quite in the inner world of consciousness and still less in the unconscious. Mao Zedong had no desire to rid his people of the Confucian virtues of self-denial and compliance, but he wanted to replace Confucianism with himself and his own thought—Mao Zedong Thought—as the object and beneficiary of these virtues. And he wanted these virtues to be known, not as new versions of old Confucian virtues but as brand-new communist virtues to be exercised in a brand-new social order. Thus, the Confucian order was to be forgotten and remembered at the same time. The

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<sup>10</sup> Hsiung, op. cit, 110. 106-107.

Confucian virtues were to be remembered, but both their origin and their old object of allegiance were to be forgotten...<sup>11</sup>

The same evaluation can be considered valid also for the approach to Confucianism of Xi Jinping and the present leadership.

In the all-inclusive view of China inherited by the Communist leaders, supreme authority is said to come from the people, and through the success of a revolution is given to the Party. Such a perspective, therefore, puts Communist ideology on the level of a “civic religion,” similar to Confucianism in the past, but with the difference that everything is now considered secular. As in the imperial days, “sacred scriptures” were required, so they are now. The official “scriptures” become the source of the guiding principles and the predominant provider of the true identity, the hope of the society and the proper scale of social values. The ruling class, the Party and its leaders, are the only authority for the right interpretation. Since the Communist authorities are atheist, everything is considered and interpreted only according to its secular and political advantage. Consequently, ideology with its moral values, spiritual concerns and religious activities can all be understood only from this perspective.

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<sup>11</sup> Ci, op.cit, 63.