

Chinese Socialism and Foreign Policy

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I. Redefinition of Socialism and Foreign Policy

Since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 China has entered a new era in its socialism and foreign policy. In order to meet the requirements of changes in their domestic and international environment Chinese leaders have redefined the meaning of socialism and the direction of foreign policy. As a result what they call "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" means their efforts to justify the reforms and open-door policy while upholding party supremacy and public ownership. As part of these efforts they have redirected Chinese foreign policy so as to meet the requirements of domestic reforms and national security.

The redefinition of socialism has resulted from the domestic political changes generated after Mao's death. The Chinese Communist Party's emphasis on "four modernizations" and reforms under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping has necessitated a redirection of Chinese foreign policy toward realism and pragmatism. By "socialism" here I mean the official interpretation of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and by "foreign policy" China's policy directed toward foreign countries.

For the sake of better understanding some sweeping generalizations are in order. First, as already noted, with the new line called "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" Deng and his followers are legitimating what they are doing for the modernization and reform programs. In the sense that this is an attempt to build socialism in their own way it also represents a streak of nationalism.

Second, the overall direction of Chinese foreign policy since 1976 has been to serve the priorities of domestic reforms and economic development more than ideological and historical imperatives. Hence, Beijing has stressed the importance of independence, opening, peace and international cooperation.

Third, there have been both continuity and change in Chinese foreign policy. The emphasis on national security and independence and the style of balancing act reflects continuity and the open-door policy and acceptance of the existing international order and regimes reflect change.

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Fourth, these trends are likely to continue at least by the end of this century but when China becomes as major power in the twenty first century its policy may well take on those aspects common to all powerful states in human history.

For the time being, however, Chinese socialism seems to mean what the CCP says it is and as long as the party is preoccupied with economic development the current state of Chinese foreign policy will continue. To a large extent, therefore, Chinese foreign policy is a function of China's economic and political situation. Under this circumstance, socialism and foreign policy tend to become deradicalized to reflect primarily the national interests as defined by the Chinese leaders and people. On the whole, China's foreign policy continues to be propelled by national interests rather than ideology.

II. "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics"

The redefinition of socialism, if any, was necessary when the party shifted its primary task from class struggle to modernization under Deng's leadership. The advent of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" was inevitable as the mobilizational phase of the Chinese communist system under Mao was succeeded by a post-mobilizational phase under Deng. As a result of this shift, domestic policy has tended to be reformist rather than revolutionary. As long as they adhered to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong, however, Chinese leaders cannot abandon socialism outright. Hence, they have been forced to justify the four modernization in terms of ideological tenet. It was for this reason that they came to advocate the doctrine of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics."

It should be recalled that even before Mao died there had been debates between two versions of socialism. During the initial period of the People's Republic, the Chinese leadership shared a consensus on the need for a gradual transformation to socialism under the rationale of New Democracy. But beginning in 1953 Mao set out to have the party adopt a new general line contending that China had already entered the stage of socialism in 1949. Yet at the Eighth Party Congress in 1956 Liu Shaoqi advanced the consensus view that the party's main task was to raise a backward economy to a developed one because class struggle had been almost completed with the socialization of the means of production. In initiating the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Great Leap Forward Mao refuted Liu's view and imposed his view on the party that the class struggle continued to be the party's main task during the socialist transition to communism. (Byung-Joon Ahn, 1976:9-28).

In fact, Mao justified not only the Great Leap but also such other mass

campaigns as the Socialist Education Movement and the Cultural Revolution with the class struggle thesis until he passed away. During the Cultural Revolution he sought to transform the superstructure including the party and even people's ideas to a proletarian state so that it could conform to the economic base which was said to have already become socialist. Many leaders were accused of being "revisionist" or "capitalist roaders" and subsequently purged. Even though this was clearly a power struggle, it is true that the ideology as defined by Mao dictated party policy so that it could serve as the guide for transforming society and men. (Byung-Joon Ahn, 1976:185-228).

After Deng assumed leadership at the Third Plenum in December 1978, however, he made the four modernizations the party's primary task. Instead of class struggle, therefore, the party's job was to rapidly develop "productive forces" in Marxist lexicon. To do away with the excessive struggles and campaigns that had been carried out in the name of Maoist ideology Deng emphasised the principle of "seeking truth from facts." According to this precept, only practice is the "sole criterion of truth." As he stated in 1962, black or white cats are all good as long as they can catch mice. (Byung-Joon Ahn, 1976:76). In other words the ultimate test of truth including presumably socialism is whether it can produce results and meet the requirements of the four modernization.

Indeed, when the party adopted a new resolution on its history in 1981, it stated: "We must strive to reform those specific features which are not in keeping with the expansion of the productive forces and the interests of the people." (Xue Muqiao, 1986:14). Nevertheless, Deng had to defend this line within the Marxist framework. He therefore argued in 1982 that the party's task was to synthesize the truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China. (Lam, 1987:10).

But no sooner this new premise was known to students and intellectuals in 1979 than they went so far as to challenge the very hegemony of the party during their democratization movement. Faced with this Deng could not help but defend the party as the final arbiter on ideological questions. For this purpose he came up with the so-called "four cardinal principles" which have been used as the final weapons for defending socialism in China. (Byung-Joon Ahn, 1985:301-320). They are: (1) adhere to the socialist road, (2) uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat, (3) defend the authority of the communist party, and (4) adhere to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

Thus, Deng still was bent on guarding the party's integrity and public ownership as the final limit of socialism. But as the household responsibility system was promoted throughout the country after 1978 and especially after the decision on encouraging the market mechanism in October 1984, defending public

ownership began to lose force. Some theoreticians argued that the law of value is bound to operate in a socialist society and therefore, there is a "planned commodity economy." (Xue Xuqiao, 1986:291). Apparently, some critics of reforms wondered about how this economy differed from capitalism, citing Marxist theory. Responding to this the party explained that Karl Marx of the nineteenth century could not provide solutions to all of China's contemporary problems. (Renmin Ribao, December 7, 1984).

Against this background, beginning in the campaign against "spiritual pollution" in 1983-85 and then against "bourgeois liberalism" in 1986-87, the Chinese leadership increasingly resorted to arousing nationalist sentiments. In effect, they were saying that their reform and open-door policy represented "Chinese characteristics" in building socialism. Hardly was this convincing to the people, let alone intellectuals. Therefore, at the Thirteenth Party Congress in October 1987, Zhao Ziyang suggested a new characteristic in the name of the "primary stage of socialism" as follows:

"The specific stage China must necessarily go through while building socialism under conditions of backward productive forces and an underdeveloped commodity economy. It will be at least 100 years from the 1950's...to the time when socialist modernization will have been in the main accomplished, and all these years belong to the primary stage of socialism." (Zhao Ziyang, 1987:27).

Zhao candidly admitted that while China is trying to modernize it is at "the primary stage of socialism." This kind of socialism is coterminous with what Chinese are doing. Beyond this it is not clear what is Chinese characteristic and what is socialist. With the new measures permitting sales of land-rights, hired labor, bankruptcy and even auction of land to foreign bidders, the line of public ownership is being blurred. These are the kind of reforms that hit at the heart of Marxism. But the CCP is still far from carrying out meaningful democratization. In this regard, the party is clinging to Leninism without Marxism. Can it continue to justify one-party dictatorship without resorting to Marxism? To what extent can China find a balance between planning and market? (Scalapino, 1987:80). These are some of the fundamental dilemmas Chinese socialism is facing especially in reconciling the four modernizations and the four cardinal principles.

There is little doubt that the reform and open-door policy has had an impact on foreign policy. Equally true is that China's foreign policy in recent years also has had an important impact on China's domestic reforms as China has gradually joined the international system.

III. Open-Door and Independent Foreign Policy

China's open-door and "independent" foreign policy has resulted from the shift in its domestic priorities from continuous revolution under Mao to economic modernization and reform under Deng. The contents of this policy have been articulated in such a way that they can meet the domestic goals of reform. As a result, Chinese foreign policy since 1978 has been not so different from that of non-socialist countries as it has turned non-ideological in action, if not in rhetorics.

In general, Mao's foreign policy put greater emphasis on self reliance, national liberation in the Third World, and anti-American and Western themes. By contrast, Deng's policy has stressed the importance of opening and interdependence, international cooperation and transaction with the Western capitalist countries. The difference here is a matter of degree.

In discussing Chinese foreign policy, however, two dimensions must be distinguished: strategic relations and economic-cultural relations. (Yahuda, 1983:3-8). Even though these are interrelated, they nevertheless are differently considered by Chinese leaders. Foreign policy sets national goals for achieving three core interests: security, prosperity and prestige. China is not an exception to this rule. As for defending security interests, the socialist countries including China and the Soviet Union for that matter are not different from other countries. In fact, there seems to have been more continuity and consensus on China's security issues and strategic relations than on its economic relations and domestic issues.

With this caveat, it is still possible to distinguish Chinese foreign policy before and that after Mao's death. Before 1976 it had had more ideological and revolutionary contents and styles. When Mao decided to lean to the Soviet side, he did so out of strategic and ideological considerations. When Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated in the 1960's, however, Mao accused Moscow of being "revisionist" and "social imperialist" and tried to form a united front with "progressive elements" of the Third World. At the peak of the Cultural Revolution Beijing suspended most of its diplomatic activities abroad.

Only when Moscow applied military pressure on Chinese borders at the end of the 1960's did Mao and Zhou Enlai seek rapprochement with Washington. Hence, in 1974 Mao moderated his view on the two blocs by suggesting "three worlds." (Carol, 1986:41). This was an attempt to reflect changes emerging in China's geopolitical environment.

After the death of Mao in 1976 China's domestic and international situations changed drastically. Especially in the 1980's reform and open-door policies

were given the highest priority while the strategic competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union reached a parity. Now that there was an urgent need for economic development at home and no longer an imminent security threat abroad, Chinese leaders could afford to sound more accommodative in their foreign policy pronouncement.

Since the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982 Beijing has stressed four broad trends. First, it has expressed genuine desire for a peaceful and stable international environment necessary for domestic reforms. Second, it has joined all the important international organizations and thereby chosen to work within the international system as it exists. Third, it has shown a great deal of pragmatism on regional and economic issues. (Harding, 1987:242-247). Fourth, foreign policy making has become institutionalized and professionalized with the input of diverse research institutes. (Barnett, 1985:119-130).

In the contents, too, Beijing has revealed several broad themes. One of these is the theme that it does not seek alliance with either the U.S. or the Soviet Union because it is against hegemony. By emphasizing "an independent foreign policy," it has diversified its diplomatic activities. Resuming a detente with Moscow while maintaining amicable relations with Washington is a good example of its triangular diplomacy.

In dealing with Japan, for example, China has shown great care and finesse. Occasionally there were outbursts of protest against danger of reviving Japanese militarism. But as Li Peng described Japan as a close neighbor with close economic and trade relations at the NPC in March 1988, Beijing regards Japan as the most important source of capital, technology and know-how. (FBIS, 1988:22). This is understandable in view of the fact that Takeshita is to offer another loan package of \$6 billion when he meets with Chinese leaders in August 1988.

China's policy of promoting peace and stability on its border is well demonstrated in its approaches to Taiwan and South Korea. Not only is Beijing openly allowing trade and exchange visits but more importantly, it is interested in some form of political dialogue with these divided countries. For the Korean peninsula it is urging both North and South Korea to resume dialogue as the best means for easing tension.

China is now supporting arms control negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Beijing praised the INF treaty. And yet it is selling long-range missiles to Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the four modernizations, too, defense remains the last priority.

In diplomatic style, too, China has been known as a best player of the "balancing act." (Kennedy, 1987:447-457). By playing the Soviet Union against the U.S., Korea against Japan, and North Korea against South Korea, this

ancient technique of "using barbarians against barbarians" China is trying to draw maximum benefits as a pivot or swing. Doing so can easily be defended as part of its independent foreign policy.

At the NPC in March 1988 Wu Xuechun, former foreign minister, stated that socialist modernization is the basic framework guiding Chinese foreign policy. As the contents of China's "independent foreign policy of peace," he elaborated on five points as follow:

- (1) opposing hegemonism and working to maintain peace,
- (2) deciding policy issues pragmatically case by case,
- (3) avoiding alliance or strategic relationships with the Soviet Union and the U.S.
- (4) strengthening cooperation with Third World Countries, and
- (5) cooperating on economics, trade, science and technology with anyone. (F-BIS, 1988:14-19).

It should be clear that these five points succinctly summarize the direction of Chinese foreign policy as implemented by Beijing in the 1980's. Explicit in these is the deep understanding by the Chinese leadership of the changes rapidly emerging in the international economic system.

IV. Continuity and Change in Chinese Foreign Policy

The forgoing analysis makes clear that socialism has little to do with Chinese foreign policy. Gone is the period when "international proletarianism" and revolution on a global scale were repeated in all official pronouncements. If ideology is not seriously taken into consideration in foreign policy making, geopolitics continues to guide China's security policy. The restructured domestic politics under Deng, the new leadership's firm commitment to modernization at home and their appreciation of the globalizing international economy seem to have had a major impact on Chinese foreign policy.

In efforts to guard their security and political interests Chinese leaders have shown remarkable continuity and consistency. Their concerns with and emphasis on national security and independence are clearly discernible. (Harding, 1984:209). Perhaps this tradition has originated from their historical experiences. During the ancient dynasties their ancestors had been invaded by nomadic people; when the Manchu emperor was unable to cope with the encroachment by the Western "barbarians," the Chinese felt a profound sense of humiliation. Since the 1860's when some gentry called for upholding the "essence" of Chinese traditions while learning the "technology" of Western military and commerce, Chinese people have been ambivalent toward the West. The effort to keep Chineseness in their institutions is a deeply ingrained

nationalist trend that has continued to this day.

In dealing with the superpowers and minor states, China has also continued to apply the age-old balancing act among contending forces. It seems evident that Beijing wants to enjoy a swing role between the two superpowers by playing one against the other. By so doing it expects to improve relations with both and to enhance its vital security and economic interests from the U.S. and the Soviet Union. That both superpowers seek better relations with China makes this triangular diplomacy possible.

In contrast to these political aspects, China's foreign policy for economic issues has changed considerably. Its opening to and joining the international economic system stand out as two important changes. Not only does Beijing welcome trade, investment and technology transfer from foreign countries but it actually opens most of China's eastern coast either as special economic zones or development zones offering specific privileges to those foreign firms interested in making investment there. The leadership has reaffirmed that the open-door policy will continue without serious interruption.

Related to this is the degree to which China accepts and takes advantage of the Western international economic system. Having become a member of IBRD, IMF, ADB, PECC and other organizations, China is now applying for a membership at GATT. From these organizations it has received a substantial amount of financial aids. Moreover, Chinese economists and scholars are acutely aware of the nature of the global economy which has been increasingly interdependent. One can detect some similarities between the Chinese theory of "cycles in the world economy" and the Western theory of product cycles and comparative advantage.

In this regard, the new plan that Zhao revealed at the NPC in April 1988 on coastal economic development seems to be aiming at developing constructive economic relations with the Asian NIC's and other Pacific rim countries. Under this plan, several provinces like Shantung and Liaoning are seriously seeking investment and trade relations with South Korea. In fact, insofar as its attitude toward Korea is concerned, Beijing is practicing a policy of separating politics and economics, notwithstanding its official denial.

Thus, there is more continuity in China's policy to preserve state autonomy by emphasizing sovereignty and independence but more change in its policy to utilize the international economic system. This being the case, Chinese policy is not all that different from other states' policy, for like others China also is determined to preserve peace in its environment and to accelerate economic development by interacting with foreign countries and institutions.

V. Prospect

There is little element of socialism in Chinese foreign policy. If this is true, there is doubt about whether such thing called "socialist international relations" make difference. A better understanding of Chinese foreign policy and any other socialist state's policy can be obtained from an international political economy perspective.

In efforts to justify one party state in its domestic affairs, for example, Chinese leaders are paying their lip service to socialism even while they are accommodating many elements of capitalism. In order to speed up modernization and reforms they are busy cultivating economic cooperation with Western countries.

Will this state of policy continue after Deng leaves the scene? The answer to this question depends on what will happen in Chinese domestic politics. But there is a consensus that the current course of policy is irreversible although there can be ups and downs. This is so because it is producing results and therefore supported by the majority of the people. But the most difficult problem remains: how to cope with the degree of inequality that is rising from the reform and open-door programs as the gaps between individuals, groups and regions grow in the years ahead.

Despite this problem, the present leadership is determined to continue reforms including those on prices and foreign direct investments. At the Thirteenth Party Congress, for example, Zhao stated: "Reform and opening to the outside world have broken down the rigid economic structure and injected life into the economy the national spirit." (Zhao Ziyang, 1987:38).

Since Zhao also said that the primary stage of socialism will last for "at least 100 years from the 1950's," it is highly likely that the current state of Chinese foreign policy will continue at least by the end of this century unless some drastic changes occur in China's domestic and international environment. Beyond this it is really difficult to predict accurately what will happen other than China's power will substantially grow. One only hopes that it continue to be a stabilizing influence in East Asia.

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