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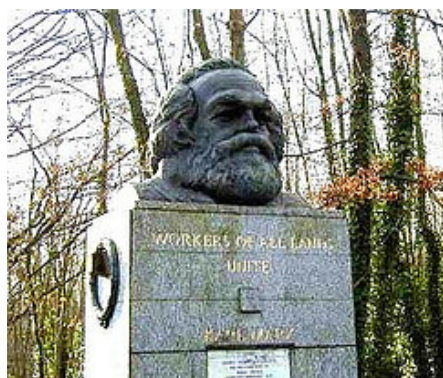
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马克思不过时

马克思思想的起点是黑格尔的辩证法，即两种矛盾的思想可以融合产生更先进思想，但又同时引出更先进的反对思想，新的矛盾，同更先进的融合；他把这个模式放在社会分析上，导出一套社会逐步发展的理论，并设想最后结果会是一个无阶级矛盾的共产社会。这里他有理想没操作方法，犯了同他批评的空想社会主义同样的错误。后来列宁发明铁纪律专政党的操作方法，得到有限度成功，但最后是失败了 不过这可能只说明列宁的方法在现代经济社会不适用，不一定表示马克思的分析错误。他批评资本主义会引起生产过剩经济危机，已经一再得到历史证实，包括1997年开始的亚洲经济风暴，和90年代初开始的日本经济衰退，其实到现在还没有真正解决

其实马老的基本思想，已经融合在现代资本主义社会中；科技水平，经济模式，阶级分别同社会结构之间有密切关系，在今天是人人懂的常识；人的思维同阶级觉悟有关，也是不言而喻的。今天的统治阶级，得到了马列主义的警告，对反对思想十分敏感，尽可能及早把重要的部分拿来用，融合进统治机制内。现在连最有钱人也要子女去读书工作，以个人有能力为荣，而不是有钱就够了。可以说，现在人人都是马克思的信徒。

Karl Marx and Bubble Economics

Section 0: Ideology

An ideology is a system of ideas concerning how a society functions. Because the functioning of a society involves economics, politics, psychology, historical tradition, etc, an ideological system tends to contain a mixed bag of concepts from various fields, rather than a simple and obviously coherent theory. While individual parts might be subjected to rigorous analysis and testing, an ideology as whole rarely can be scientifically established in theory and in practice, especially as one cannot take a society and experimentally try out ideology X or Y just to see whether they are correct or not, and even if one does try such experiments, the meaning of the outcome would be highly debatable.

An ideology would therefore tend to contain a significant element of faith, meaning that its ideas find some

kind of psychological resonance in its audience causing them to take comfort in it. This produces a frequently observed similarity between ideology and religion, especially as many ideologies concern future directions of a society, so that its proponents often acquire a messianic and sometimes utopian fervor.

An existing society and its members must by necessity operate on a set of common ideas, but often without explicitly articulating and explaining them. For example, capitalism is an ideology which has been widely followed over the world for an extended period of time, but most members of capitalist societies would have a hard time explaining what exactly is capitalist ideology, nor why they follow it. Indeed, many members would deny that they believe in capitalism at all or would claim substantial dissent from parts of it, while functioning within it by the necessity of having been born under the system or joining because of the need to make a living.

In a democratic society, the ideology that most closely approximates the thinking of the majority is adopted, by the elected government formulating various social and economic policies that enforce the ideas and translate them into routine practice. In recognition of the possibility that a future majority might think differently, a democratic society also leaves room for other ideologies to be maintained and promoted. This however raises the tricky issue of whether anti-democratic ideologies should be permitted, since such ideologies do NOT recognize these needs. This issue is not completely settled. No such argument exists in totalitarian societies that assume the absolute correctness of the current ideology, with the consequence that they are slow to adapt to changing conditions and are more likely to disintegrate than to evolve.

section 1 {Marx in our time}

Given that some would believe that Nostradamus predicted the WTC attack, and the election of George W Bush with "village idiot will be king", it is certainly easy to agree that Marx predicted the Asian economic meltdown and a host of other historical events. While we have our reservation about such claims, it is nevertheless useful to review his relevance to our times.

The starting point of Marxism is philosophy, specifically Hegel's theory of the dynamics of ideas: a thesis is opposed by an antithesis, until a new idea containing both emerges, the synthesis, which then starts a new round of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Marx replaced "idea" by "social force" resulting in a theory of class struggle: the ruling class with an ideology based on economic interest is opposed by the oppressed class, until a new ruling ideology emerges to preside over a different kind of society. Because his theory has its roots in philosophy and logic, Marx considered it scientific and indeed inevitable, hence the name "scientific socialism", in contrast to the earlier utopian socialism for improving the condition of society. The supposedly scientifically based conviction that history is on their side has always been an inspirational motif for his followers.

As theories go, Marxism is neither good philosophy, nor good economics, nor good political science, nor even the best kind of sociology, but it is far better in providing an analysis of the shortcomings of capitalism: in striving to maximize profit, capitalists constantly invest in better technology and higher productivity, until production exceeds the limits imposed by the resources and needs of society, and has to be cut back resulting in widespread unemployment, which further reduces consumption and causes even more unemployment... Hence, capitalism suffers periodic recessions and depressions. Further, competition between capitalist nations for markets and resources, in order to support their expanding production, leads to conflict, including wars, and economic bankruptcies for the weaker competitors.

The world wars and great depression of the earlier half of the 20th century, and the sudden collapse of the Asian economic miracle near the end of the millennium, show that the analysis still has its potency, and the search for the capitalism antithesis did get somewhere. However, in the "synthesis" aspect Marx has come up empty. His prediction of a new classless society of unselfish individuals, who will collectively control capital without the profit motive of the capitalists, has been shown to be as utopian as the earlier ideas, indeed much more harmful in its consequences. By breeding an inflexible world view together with a "scientific" disregard for spiritual values, and hence a ruthless willingness to use all unscrupulous means to achieve heaven on earth, Marxism has produced some of the most destructive political movements of this century, both following it and in opposition to it.

Yet, regardless of its lack of success as a practical political system, Marxism remains one of the most important undercurrents of modern thinking. Like Einstein's relativity, which too has few direct uses but forms an integral part of modern physics and scientific awareness, Marx's way of looking at history and society

permeates, like it or not, through the way we see things. Today we automatically link economics with politics, and think of individuals in terms of their class consciousness. Constantly and nervously, the ruling class looks over its shoulder to see if some ideas of the lower class need to be "synthesized" and neutralized before it starts to cause big trouble. Whereas living off one's capital and not having to work used to be the mark of the gentleman, today that would be embarrassing, and even the richest people would make an effort at something and try to be some kind of worker rather than a mere capitalist.

In short, we are all Marxists.

section 2 {Living without Marx}

In any society, attitude towards inequality forms the great divide between the opposing ideologies. Generally, conservatives (usually representing the upper classes who want to "conserve" what they have) believe that inequality is inevitable and to some extent desirable: it provides incentive for people to work and invest, while liberals consider it to be a social defect caused by selfishness and inefficient distribution, which must be countered by government intervention. Somewhat paradoxically, on moral issues, conservatives usually want greater government intervention to maintain standards, while liberals want less, but this is for another essay.

Both points of view are valid, and actual government policies, regardless of which group is in power, are compromises between the two. In other words, inequality is not necessarily unfair; the point is how much. It is the co-existence of both ideas that makes possible a two party system with groups of equal legitimacy which alternate in government, as is common in the western democracies. This model has so far not succeeded in planting itself in Asia: Asian governments tend to consider themselves to embody the best of each country, and opposition parties are almost automatically considered second class and even unpatriotic. But this too is for another essay.

In the normal course of events, there is always a tendency for the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer, because the former have the resources to take advantage of investment opportunities, and are better able to cope with temporary setbacks like sickness, bad harvest or economic recession. A deliberate effort by governments, elected by the majority who are more likely to be poor than rich, to redistribute wealth and curb the economic freedom of the rich, is the natural result. The tricky question is how far to go, without seriously hurting economic incentive and national competitiveness.

Economic development almost always increases inequality, at least in the earlier stages: resources previously not in economic use and so freely available to everyone, such as beaches, forests and vacant land, came to be used by the restricted few, and cease to be free. Prices of land and food rise as golf courses replace fruit trees people used to freely harvest, while farmers and fishermen become waiters. Girls who used to marry early and take care of their husbands now go and work in restaurants, or brothels. Beaches everyone used to be able to go to get enclosed as part of hotels, and house prices soar, putting accommodation beyond the reach of the poor. While those who are directly involved in the new economic activities might benefit, those who for various reasons are excluded from them, very often are worse off. Much resentment about the perceived unfairness can built up, as China discovered in 1989 and Indonesia in 1998. Efforts to make a better distribution of the benefits are almost always too late and come about in a disruptive way.

Technology changes are also almost always likely to increase inequality, since the already well off are more able to adapt through their better access to education and their ability to invest in new ventures. Fear of new technology is therefore not merely a matter of ignorance, but has sound social justifications. Again the question is how far to take it without condemning a country to stagnation and backwardness.

Here lie the roots of Marxism's failure as a governing ideology: placing so much emphasis on inequality as a social evil inevitably led to economic and technological stagnation, and the need to cover up the continuing existence of considerable inequality between those with and those without power using a facade of egalitarianism engenders a high level of hypocrisy. Though there is a little Marxism in all of us, we cannot follow it as a way of life; those who live by Marxism can only expect to die by it.

section 3 {Marxism's Asian hangover}

Asia is where Marxism achieved its greatest successes. Not only did the Chinese revolution add 600 million people to the communist camp in 1949, it was communist North Vietnam that took on France and then USA in a nationalistic war extending over 30 years, and won. The deep social cleavage in almost every Asian nation of

the mid 20th century was a conservative establishment of landowners and compradors that successively collaborated with various colonial governments, versus left wing insurgents, usually rural followers led by middle class leaders, with Marxism as their motivating ideology. To cater for the deviation of his movement's composition from the urban proletariat prescribed in orthodox Marxism, Chairman Mao had to invent a new "city versus country" theory of class division, incorporating the idea of lowtech guerrilla warfare against hightech imperialists.

Such was the dominance of Marxism as the default opposition ideology of Asia that once it collapsed, there was nothing to take its place. While the conservative establishment in each country had no problem adopting the Confucian approach of trying to co-opt all the elite power blocs through some form of meritocratic selection of promising talent, it has been more difficult to find coherent ideas to coalesce the opposition forces. From time to time slogans are invented against authoritarianism, crony capitalism and militarism, but rarely do these slogans have the holding power to maintain movements and inspire them to build up as powerful social forces.

Yet, Asia is where the Marxist critique of capitalist economic development was being proved many times over. Following its astounding economic successes over three decades, cumulating in the great stock market and real estate bubble of the late 1980s, Japan went into a deflationary recession in the early 1990s and has not recovered more than 10 years later. A similar bust after boom cycle has played out in South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia, with lesser crises occurring in Hongkong, Singapore and later Taiwan. In each, capital inflows led to overinvestment and production in excess of export opportunities, followed by capital outflows, credit crunches, business closures, tumbling exchange rates and share markets, rapidly rising unemployment, and varying levels of social unrest

In each case, foresight and appropriate social policies might have mitigated the crises. Japan's was a powerhouse for producing mass market products that reliably meet consumer needs, and hightech gizmos that satisfy the latest fashionable crazes, but its economy has limited means to absorb the foreign exchange earnings: its distribution system is not equipped to bring massive imports for enjoyment by its hardworking but low consuming population, who prefer, whether by personal or social choice, to pay high prices to eat Japanese rice produced by suburban farmers working tiny plots for a highly protected market, rather than cheap imports from California. Using the surpluses for further industrial investment to produce even more exports even more efficiently, makes no sense if the markets are already fully met by existing Japanese gizmos, while offering the goods cheaply to Japanese consumers could only provide a limited solution: fearful of hard times and saving instead of consuming, the people made the task of what to do with financial surpluses even greater. Forays by Japanese corporations into the US real estate market, such as Mitsubishi's purchase of Rockefeller Center, did not turn out successfully, nor did company takeovers like Bridgestone's purchase of Firestone. By lending generously to Southeast Asia, Japanese banks merely transferred the bubble from Tokyo to the rest of Asia, with bad loans eroding credit standings and disrupting regular financial processes.

Instead of identifying real long term interests for their nations as a whole and ensuring a fair distribution of the benefits of economic development with careful mitigation of its negative side effects, the political and business elites of the new developing countries, in varying degrees, saw rampant opportunities for clique profiteering. For example, during the Estrada corruption trial, evidence was presented that he granted his crony control over the allocation of frequency bands for cellular phones, to extract large bribes, a share of which went into Estrada's secret bank accounts. Similar scams involving road toll collection, airline license, banking permit and car import concession were discovered relating to companies in which the children of Suharto had shares. The elite members grasped for riches as if there was no tomorrow, which, in their case, turned out to be all too correct.

This is not just a matter of individual failures, but reflects a deeper problem, an Asian spiritual deficiency, on the part of both the upper and lower classes. Like it or not, Asia need to re-learn its Marxist lessons, and re-formulate an opposition ideology that would allow the disadvantaged classes an appropriate voice, both to monitor government performances and control abuses of power, and to bring in policies that ensure more balanced economic and social developments, just as each government need to formulate sustainable social contracts that would motivate the lower classes to go along rather than be left out, so that in both bad times and good, it would have sufficient support to make hard decisions. Instead of both sides seeing opposition merely opposing with little positive ideas to offer, given a better understanding of ideological differences, it becomes far more likely that the two sides can have positive and sustainable dialogs within a democratic framework, to encourage Confucian moderation and self criticism on the part of power holders



Lenin

Few people would profess to be communists today. As everyone knows, communism brutalized and impoverished nations; perhaps even more importantly as no one likes to fail, it failed. Yet, we would do well to remember that the idea once attracted some of the best and the brightest, both in the East and the West. For example, Anthony Blunt and Kim Philby, both highly intelligent and capable members of the British aristocracy, took up communism at Cambridge and willingly spied for the Soviet Union over several decades.

To both radical intellectuals and disadvantaged classes, communism offered Marx's highly seductive and supposedly scientific analyses of the shortcomings of capitalist societies, promising the inevitable arrival of the proletariat utopia in which money and exploitation will be unknown. With such ideological inspiration, and with highly effective organizational techniques initiated by Lenin, communist parties triumphed, however briefly, in Russia the largest country in the world, and China the most populous, despite the backward development of capitalism in these countries and their weak working classes, while failing to make headway in the more mature capitalist economies that are supposedly more ready to move to the next stage.

The cases of Russia and China demonstrate that, for the purpose of achieving power, the political economy of communism is less important than its organizational technique. If you do the second well, you can succeed despite the low applicability of the first. For over half a century Communism was the favoured ideology of all revolutionary leaders, most of them of middleclass rather than proletariat background, because it provided a ready-made set of propaganda and organizational tools. Communism might die, but Leninism lives on. The ideological buzzwords change, and photos of Yeltsin replace those of Gorbachev, but the same machinery of control can remain in operation.

Lenin's revolutionary machinery, the Bolshevik party, was a network of individuals whose total loyalty was devoted to the organization: personal feelings and common humanity were not only secondary, they were suspect and dangerous. Given such an "iron discipline" organization, the trusted individuals were placed into all the important parts of the society. Army units had their political commissars, and civil service units, collective farms, factories, schools, trade unions and sports clubs all had their party secretariats. Among other things, the party achieved control over all parts of the economy; hence, private ownership of property ceased to exist, and a nominally Communist society came into being. Since all aspects of life were under control, moulding a new man fit for the communist utopia was realistic to contemplate. This seemed to be a very attractive scheme to highly power-conscious revolutionaries out to make a better world. The only drawback is: it did not work.

But perhaps the failure was simply due to its trying to achieve too much? The communist utopia envisaged a society of selfless individuals, who do not own and do not desire private property, and who, without coercion, would work to their best abilities and take only enough that satisfies their needs. The concept of economic incentive is eliminated. The consequence was that, with the suppression of market forces and individual initiatives that encourage the production of food and consumer goods, the old Russia and old China found themselves unable to deliver material wealth to its populace, and hence, unable to provide adequate rewards to enforce conformity.

However, there is no reason why a Leninist control structure cannot be imposed on a capitalist society that fully accommodates market forces and individual economic initiatives: you can still build up a network of

trusted individuals and place them in the key positions of all organizations. It simply takes a higher and more refined level of knowledge and skill to carry this out, instead of the crude and brutal methods used by the communists. This was being attempted, even successfully achieved, in many nations, whether communist, feudal, colonial or merely capitalist,



Gorbachev

20 years ago when reforms in USSR and China were both still in early stages, western observers were convinced Gorbachev was on the right track and Deng Xiaoping was not, because one was undertaking political and economic reforms together while the other was trying to open up economically only. Unknowingly, the observers were following Marxist orthodoxy, with economic relationships of a society determining its political structure so that the two cannot be separated. In 1989 when things began to look chaotic in China (with Gorbachev having contributed to the crisis: because of his impending visit, the Beijing government was reluctant to use force to clear the demonstrators from Tiananmen Square when they still had the chance to do so without bloodshed), they thought they were proven right. However, a string of disasters then befell Gorbachev, starting with the disintegration of East European communist governments in late 1989, the decision by the Baltic states to break off from USSR in 1990, a failed coup against him by disillusioned communist leaders in 1991, his subsequent sidelining by Boris Yeltsin after the coup itself failed, and the official disappearance of USSR later that year.

In the mean time, China's economic development showed impressive results as overseas Chinese investors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia found ways to implant factories, hotels and other enterprises within the existing political control structures. They were soon followed by American and European investment, and then indigenous businesses found it possible to join the game as well, with the system making up rules as it went along with just minor hiccups here and there. The boom spread quickly from initial localities like Shenzhen, Canton and Beijing to traditional commercial centres like Shanghai, Wenzhou and Xiamen then to all over China.

Yeltsin too suffered numerous political disasters, but somehow managed to survive, and eventually handed over to his chosen successor Putin, who managed to put the lid on various problems and even succeeded in reining in, using methods which seem highly questionable to western observers, the tycoons that got hold of various pieces of the Russian economy during Yeltsin's reign and also tried to pull political strings. He further benefited from the sudden rise in oil prices that occurred in the last 2-3 years - he and the Russian people now understand from first hand experience the benefits of a free market, which Gorbachev had great difficulty explaining to his followers (assuming he understood it himself).

As Gorbachev's grip on power declined, he was widely seen as an incompetent, almost comical, figure. Assuming things continue to improve in Russia, however, I believe history would become kinder to him again, as the person who started it all.

We now have a second contrast, between Taiwan and Mainland China, on the right way of implementing democracy. How will history judge Lee Teng Hui versus Deng Xiaoping?



Communism, Feudalism and Political Conflict in China

(written in 1989; looked at it again in 2007, it is impressive how little progress towards democracy there has been, despite the economic advance)

Since the recent bloodshed in China, many commentators have written about the bankruptcy of communist ideology. Without wanting to defend communism, I would suggest that the behaviour of the ruling Chinese regime actually has little to do with communism itself, but is merely the continuation of traditional feudalistic practices in a modern form.

Communism includes many strands of ideas, and out of these, three may be singled out for attention: 1. The element of Marxist Political Economy: Marx hypothesized that the political processes of a society are determined by its underlying economic processes. Technological developments produce changes in the economic structure, and consequently lead to changes in the political and social structures. History is therefore driven by technology and economics.

Though Marx's own study of history, economics and politics had many critics, there seems no reason to doubt that a close connection does exist between economics and politics, and even the most ardent capitalists are in some ways good followers of Marx. For example, any comment along the line "the recent events in China show that economic liberalization must be followed by political liberalization" is merely repeating a Marxist truism. In contrast, in attempting to achieve a capitalist style economy without significant political reforms, Deng Xiaoping was acting contrary to basic Marxist theory. Mao, who believed that a cultural revolution was needed before China could be modernized, was a closer follower of Marx.

2. The element of Marxist Social Utopia: Marx forecasted that in due course, the proletariat would rise up to implement a new social structure in which the private ownership of capital would be abolished, and eventually there will be a utopian society of plenty in which everyone will, without coercion, work to his best abilities and take only according his needs. Marx was, unfortunately, rather vague about how to make this happen and how long it would take, and his own organizational efforts were generally political as well as financial failures, but this has not stopped old and new communists from continuing to profess belief in this utopian prospect. Liberal capitalists are usually not utopian: if they believe in utopia, usually they do not wish to impose their choice on other people, while most right wing capitalists would leave paradise in the hands of God. On the other hand, the pro-democracy protesters of China displayed a highly utopian attitude, and were, in this sense, better Marxists than Deng Xiaoping, the great pragmatist.

3. The element of Leninist Party Organization: It was Lenin who invented the practical organizational tactics that allowed a group of Marxists to successfully take over a nation. In this scheme, a tightly knit and highly disciplined party structure is first established, to which members are required to devote their total loyalty - personal loyalties and loyalties to common humanity are not only secondary, but indeed suspect and dangerous. The party organization is superimposed onto the government bureaucracy, military command, legislative bodies, trade unions and other community organizations, so that those in control of the party achieve control of all aspects of society.

Because the party controls the economy, it can then claim to have abolished private ownership of capital and therefore begun to implement a communist society; and because the party controls the important elements of the whole society, it can indeed make an attempt to change all aspects of the society towards its version of

utopia. We thus have the curious phenomenon that academic theory and utopian idealism have, in time and with excellent logic, led to totalitarianism.

But whereas in the Soviet Union, the Party developed into a privileged elite that manages to incorporate, besides bureaucrats and officials, engineers, scientists, agriculture specialists, academicians and other higher elements of society, in China the party discipline is frequently undercut and superseded by a network of personal loyalties established during the days of the revolutionary army. Thus, although Deng Xiaoping was never Party Chairman, President or Prime Minister of China, for ten years he has effectively wielded supreme power because he has placed into senior positions of the Party and Government, a large number of his former subordinates in the Fourth Field Army, of which he was Political Commissar during the Civil War, and other loyal followers acquired from his work as Secretary General. When the 38th Army showed reluctance to crack down on the demonstrators, Yang Shangkun was able to bypass the Defence Ministry and the General Staff and directly call up the 27th Army, commanded by generals personally loyal to him, to move into Peking. Going back a little into the past, during the Cultural Revolution a small clique around Chen Buoda and Jiang Qin, without any top Party or Government positions, was able to launch a movement that nearly destroyed both the Party and the Government, merely by issuing edicts in the name of the semi-retired Mao. During his thirty years of rule, Chiang Kai Shek was given numerous different titles and positions, but his control had always been effected through his network of military officers and other officials established when he was the Principal of Wampoa Military Academy. Of course China is not the only country where such personal loyalties rule supreme over loyalties to organization, ideology or principles. The politics, civil service, commercial companies and even the universities of Japan are permeated with such oyabun-kobun (roughly, patron-client) relations, in which the oyabun provides patronage and career assistance to the kobun in return for the latter's loyal support. The faction-ridden Liberal Democratic Party system provides a well known manifestation of this system and any observer of the Recruit scandal would have noticed many examples where loyalty to the superior easily overrode party discipline or national interest.

In short, what holds forth in China and much of Asia is a deeply entrenched practice, developed from the age of feudalism, of loyalty to a person rather than to more abstract entities. In traditional feudalism the king divides his territory to be ruled by various lords, who consequently owe him allegiance and will support him with their own followers when called to do so in a war; the lords in turn install knights and petty noblemen, who would then lease out their shares of the land to yeoman farmers or have serfs to cultivate it. The relation of master to servant (or lord to samurai) is both economic and military. In its modern form the network of loyalties is maintained but separately from the ownership of land. Whereas in Japan, the oyabun-kobun relations are established largely in the civilian sphere, the fact that the current rulers of China got in through successful wars meant that the most important relations reflect previous military command chains, which made the Chinese system nearer to traditional feudalism.

Once we start looking at the situation in this light, it becomes much easier to understand many aspects of China. For example, every government in China, regardless of its initial ideology, tended to become corrupt very quickly. For, under feudalistic thinking an official appointed to govern a territory would regard it virtually as his personal property, and would see nothing particularly wrong in lining his own pockets with wealth extracted from his office. A good official is not necessarily the honest Confucian who upholds justice and rejects bribery, or the hermit Taoist who stays away from the palace and refuses appointments in order to remain clean and honest, however much admiration such figures may receive in the literature; but someone who deploys such wealth beneficially, by sharing it with his subordinates and his superiors, and making sure that his territory is well maintained and prosperous. For example, a good official would use his personal wealth to purchase grain in times of poor harvest to feed his people, or spend it for public works. But it must follow that in good times he is entitled to build up his wealth using his office, provided of course that he does not become too greedy or too seriously pervert the course of justice.

Given a strong and competent central government, the behaviour of these local officials may be closely monitored and unsatisfactory ones may be replaced. When the central government becomes weak through neglect, incompetence, external wars, or natural disasters, local administration tends to become very chaotic and corrupt, and an ambitious official, especially one that has control over both military and financial affairs of a region, can easily build up a private kingdom. The history of China is replete with such warlord periods interspersing with periods of unity.

Commentators have often complained that China has not achieved rule of law. In fact, under feudalistic thinking this is impossible, since it requires a subordinate to disobey if a superior gives an order that is contrary to the law; in other words, he needs to have a higher loyalty to an abstract principle than to a person.

To the Chinese people, laws are made by men, and can be unmade by them. While some lip service is paid to such abstract concepts as "an emperor must rule with the mandate of heaven", it is seldom implemented in practice, but only used as a last resort to justify rebellion when things become really desperate.

It is also not possible to achieve democracy when people think feudalistically, since a democratic system separates official positions from the persons holding them, and seeks to fill the positions with persons that meet popular approval. Such a concept is obviously contrary to the feudalistic view of office being a personal property given to an official by his superior. Indeed, most Chinese find it curious that no American President that lost an election would ever call in the army to arrest the winner and hence retain office. The idea that the generals and soldiers would disobey any such commands because of their belief in democratic principles is not really comprehended.

One should point out however that it is equally wrong for Americans to believe that, because the 38th Army refused to crush the demonstrators, its soldiers must support democracy. A simpler and more personal explanation is that, most of the officers and men of this army are from the Peking region, and they were unwilling to shoot their friends and relatives in the Tiananmen Square. The soldiers are simply following their usual Chinese way of thinking, namely to be loyal to those with whom there is a personal connection.

To show how deeply entrenched feudalistic thinking is in the Chinese culture, one can point out a number of curious behaviours of Hong Kong and overseas Chinese and the demonstrators themselves. First, following the crackdown, it was widely rumoured that Deng was already dead and Yang had usurped his power in order to bring in the army. This was nothing more than the syndrome of "the emperor is wise and divine, but his ministers are evil." In so readily accepting such rumours, the Hong Kong and overseas Chinese have shown their own true colours. Similarly, those people who believed that the 38th Army would move in to crush the 27th were merely praying for victory of the good warlord over the bad.

Second, the demonstrators centered their most vociferous attacks on Premier Li Peng. Yet, it is known to everyone that Li is no more than the frontman of hardline elders, and could not be described as the main culprit for the undemocratic practices. He is personally not corrupt, though perhaps not all that capable either. It made little sense to single him out for attack, and in doing this, the demonstrators were merely following the very old trick of attacking the boss indirectly through his underlings - the emperor is not to be criticised, only his courtiers. It is also necessary to point out that the same trick was used frequently in the past: for example, before Liu Shaoqi fell, Peng Chen was used as the target. Thus, the demonstrators showed that they were, after all, good students of the same school.

Third, the erection of the Goddess of Liberty very much reminds one of the old practice of putting up a statue of ill defined significance and worshipping it, in the hope of achieving peace and prosperity, just as outside every Chinese home there is a shrine to the God of the Earth which needs to be regularly worshipped, even though no one can ever say what the god looks like and what its powers are. Indeed, the statue put up by the students was highly reminiscent of the goddess Kuan Yin, originally a female reincarnation of Buddha but generally regarded in China as a separate deity, namely the patron of women and giver of mercy. Obviously, few of the demonstrators realized that the original Statue of Liberty in New York carries a message of welcome to refugees and poverty stricken immigrants, and has no direct relation with democracy itself.

In short, whereas the current rulers of China have shown themselves to be less than perfect communists, the protesters have not shown themselves to be very good democrats either, and have been rather muddled in their ideological thinking. Those who ask for freedom frequently want the limitation of certain freedoms, such as excessive profit making by enterprising individuals. Those who ask for democracy seem to have little idea of whom they want to elect and what kind of policies they want the elected officials to implement. They extoll Hu Yaobang, who in his life was neither particularly democratic or liberal, could boast of virtually no significant achievements, and impressed the world only with such pronouncements as "Chinese people should eat less rice and more bread." Like the Goddess, he was only being used as a cult figure of ill defined but anti-establishment significance. Thus, the main features of the conflict do not seem to be those of communism versus democracy; instead, both sides are steeped more or less in the far older culture of feudalism.

Because 80% of the Chinese people are peasants and most of the soliders are from the countryside, while the pro-democracy movement is mainly one of the cities, the ruling regime, by virtue of its feudalistic control over the rural areas and the Army, has prevailed. Further, the very old modes of thinking its opponents themselves displayed do not give one confidence that there is sufficient understanding of democracy, freedom and capitalism for reform to succeed. For China, democratic enlightenment is yet to be.



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Favorite quotes:

- "History repeats, first time as tragedy, second time as farce" - Marx 历史重复, 一次悲剧, 一次闹剧 - 马克思
- "Those who forget their history are condemned to repeat it" - Santayana 忘记历史注定重复历史 - 山塔亚那
- "Those who remember their history are also condemned to repeat it" - Yuen 记得历史也注定重复历史 - 阮宗光
- "Oscar Wilde was wrong about cynics knowing price not value; cynics know value is always less than price" - Yuen

foundation.new-ybsampler.blogspot.com 王尔德说错了; 愤世的人不是知价不知值, 而是知道价高值低 - 阮宗光

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