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SCIENCE, PRAGMATISM AND MODERNISATION

Some Impressions of a Chinese Visit

I VISITED China not long after the meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party which finally announced the long-expected rehabilitation of Liu Shaoqi. This act of formal rehabilitation of one who during the Cultural Revolution had been denounced as 'China's Khrushchev' and as the 'top Party person taking the capitalist road' was without any question a momentous about-turn, a 'reversal of verdicts', which could not fail to have an equally marked impact among the Chinese people whom we encountered. Wherever we went we were given by our hosts (who were mostly cadres) a wholly negative appraisal of the Cultural Revolution, which was often described as a 'total disaster' and a 'castastrophe'. On this score we were offered few crumbs of comfort.

Not surprisingly, this about-turn—both on Chinese admissions and the testimony of long-resident foreigners—had created an acute 'crisis of confidence in Marxism' among the Chinese masses, that is to say, a want of confidence in the political judgement and authority of the Communist Party as the supreme interpreter of Marxism. This crisis of confidence manifested itself in what one felt to be widespread political apathy among the common people, expressed in the form of a general aversion to political questions and discussions, though it was explained to us as being but a 'reaction' against the surfeit of 'politics' suffered by the masses during the Cultural Revolution period at the hands of the Gang of Four. As one of our guides rather pointedly put it, the Chinese people were fed up with politics and—by extension—with 'political tourists'.

On the positive side, this same about-turn seemed to have brought forth among Chinese intellectuals a great sense of unshackling and of freedom, and one sensed that one was witnessing, if not the birth, then at least the springtime of political theory and social science in China. It was against this background that I (and some of my travelling companions) held discussions with several groups of social scientists—mostly political economists—in Beijing and Shanghai. My purpose was to try and gauge the present level and future orientation of theoretical and scientific work in China. Specifically, I wanted to learn something about the discussions and debates among Chinese scholars and intellectuals on political and economic issues, forming the theoretical backdrop to the wide-ranging political reassessments and policy changes currently in progress.

In general, the discussions which we held could be summarised under four heads, and embraced both theoretical and practical questions. The first two concerned the characterisation of the USSR and the problem of 'social-imperialism' on the one hand, and the definition of socialism and the problem of 'revisionism', on the other. The latter two concerned the special features and

problems of 'Chinese-type modernisation', both in its internal and international dimensions, specifically, first, the restructuring of the economy designed to enhance its efficiency and to boost the tempo of its modernisation, and secondly, the increase in and intensification of China's links with the world market economy designed to shorten the period and lighten the burden of economic construction in the era of socialist modernisation. The notes that follow deal mostly with the theoretical part of our discussions.

USSR, social-imperialism and revisionism

Before we went to China there had been reports that some Chinese writers and commentators were beginning to speak of the USSR as being, in some respects, 'socialist'. Did that mean, we wondered, that the USSR was no longer 'social-imperialist'? Did it presage any softening or weakening of Chinese opposition to Soviet hegemonism, even possibly a 'grand reconciliation' between Moscow and Beijing—in short, a strategic shift in China's world-view and foreign policy (as some were predicting, whether in fear or in hope)? On the other hand, what had happened to the previous characterisation of the USSR as a country that was not only 'revisionist', but indeed one in which capitalism had actually been 'restored'?

What had happened to the very concept of revisionism itself, of which so little was heard now? If (as was stated by Ye Jianying in his speech in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Republic) the Cultural Revolution, though it had been quite rightly 'launched with the aim of preventing and combating revisionism', went wrong because (among other reasons) 'no accurate definition was given of revisionism', had such a definition now been found, or was it no longer thought to be a particularly serious or relevant matter?

These were some of the questions with which we assailed our hosts, and in the answers that they gave we could see both the making of a fresh start and the magnitude of the task confronting them (and us). Nothing captured so well the spirit of the new situation, at once difficult and challenging, as the opening words spoken by one of the political economists whom we met at Fudan University in Shanghai: 'While we have long persisted in following the principles of Marxism-Leninism, we are still not very clear about specific problems—for example, what is Marxism, or revisionism, or capitalism.'

It was indeed the case that on the subject of the USSR there were some differences among the Chinese social scientists with whom we spoke. They were all agreed that in international affairs the Soviet Union was a superpower that pursued the path of hegemonism, and there was no dearth of examples to illustrate this. The dis-

agreement, such as it was, only concerned the internal character of the USSR, and there were no clear or agreed positions on the relationship between domestic economy and foreign policy.

Some felt that in terms of the economic system alone the Soviet Union had some socialist features, or was even 'essentially socialist'; in particular, this referred to public ownership of the means of production and economic planning. On the other side, the 'militarisation' of the Soviet economy was commonly cited as a 'capitalist' feature. But for most, neither in its politics, ideology, nor above all in its foreign policy, was the USSR in any real sense socialist. In general my impression was that both the extent of differences among Chinese scholars and the significance of the over-all revision of Chinese views on this subject have been greatly overestimated.

To the related, more difficult question of how could a country be both socialist and imperialist—which with variation concerned not only the USSR but also countries like Cuba and Vietnam—no clear or well-thought-out answers were forthcoming. Those who considered the Soviet Union or its economy to be 'socialist' could give no adequate explanation for its manifest hegemonism, while the others, for whom the latter was the principal aspect of the matter, were still unable to provide a coherent account of it in terms of the seemingly socialist features or 'forms' of Soviet society. The crux of the problem of 'social-imperialism', as I see it, remained unresolved. The argument is not about Soviet hegemonism—which can be plainly seen in its policies and activities all across the globe—but about finding a scientifically concrete theory of Soviet 'social-imperialism', i.e., socialism in words (or 'form') and imperialism in deeds. By and large, I would hazard the opinion that it remains to be found, and in any event has certainly not been found in China yet.

Rather more telling than these conjectures and confusions on the subject of the Soviet Union, I thought, was the ready admission by all those with whom we discussed these matters that in fact they knew remarkably little about the structure and workings of the Soviet system. It was explained to us that for a long time Chinese scholars and researchers had had no 'access' to the Soviet Union, neither freedom to visit that country nor access, even, to the relevant research material. Above all, there had been no incentive to do serious research work on the USSR in an open, unconstrained and objective manner for fear of being suspected of harbouring an unhealthy curiosity about the main citadel of 'modern revisionism'. In the past it was thought sufficient to criticise the Soviet Union rather than to understand it; under the Gang of Four, in particular, there was only criticism but no serious analysis of the subject.

Furthermore, in the background of the deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations, short-term political considerations and exigent requirements of state policy were all too often accorded precedence over scientific considerations, to the serious long-term detriment of scientific work. All in all, thus, there had long been no opportunity for Chinese social scientists to study and investigate the subject of the Soviet Union either at first hand or in depth. (Similar constraints, I presumed, applied to other East European countries, though the situation seemed a good deal better, at least in recent years, in relation to Yugoslavia and Romania and, possibly, Hungary.) Now, they had started to do serious work on the USSR, but it was stressed that the work had barely begun and they had a long way to go before they could hope to provide an adequate theory of 'social-imperialism'. In the meantime, one can only report one's impression that those who are looking for a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, or a 'strategic shift' in their relations, are being wildly premature.

The collateral problem of 'revisionism' seemed to me to have suffered much the same fate as that of 'social-imperialism', and for much the same reasons. In general,

we found it very difficult to get from our Chinese hosts a precise or rigorous definition or analysis of 'revisionism'. It was repeatedly pointed out, of course, that under the Gang of Four all manner of 'socialist things' were indiscriminately mislabelled as revisionist. There was no reason to doubt this but it brought one no closer to defining those phenomena or identifying those things which had been correctly labelled as 'revisionist'. Or were we to presume that there were no such things at all?

It seemed that the same short-term considerations which had bedevilled the problem of social-imperialism had also bedevilled the question of revisionism. Yugoslavia first, and then the Soviet Union, on the basis largely of their foreign policy lines, had come to epitomise 'revisionism'; consequently, every internal feature, first of one and then of the other, came to be labelled as revisionist and its direct opposite willy-nilly held up as 'Marxist-Leninist', without any serious study of scientific analysis being made in either case or in either direction. Hence the 'Marxism-Leninism' of the Gang of Four came to acquire a wholly negative and one-sided profile. Thus what, to begin with, was perceived essentially as a politico-ideological tendency that needed watching and studying and guarding against was, in the heat of the Sino-Soviet dispute rolling over into the Cultural Revolution and being manipulated by the Gang of Four, turned into a political catch-phrase which meant everything, and could therefore mean nothing precise, specific or to the point. Dogmatism, it was averred, had been rife.

Revisionism was, then, a 'condition' or problem for which no serious solution or cure was offered during the Cultural Revolution. Our Chinese hosts admitted that it remained a problem still and must remain one for a long time to come. It was only now that they were beginning to study it scientifically but it was a matter that would require long study and discussion before an answer could be found. However, one could not sense that they were pursuing this task with any unusual urgency or ardour, unlike the unbounded zeal and enthusiasm with which they are addressing themselves to studying the problems and prospects of 'Chinese-type modernisation' (as can be gleaned from the pages of *Beijing Review*, or from the first issue of the important quarterly publication, *Social Sciences in China*). To those still reeling from the shocks of the Cultural Revolution the *terra firma* of practical problems seemed a safer haven than the quicksands of 'pure' theory. It must be added that, for all the criticism heaped on them, we were offered no serious analysis of the phenomenon of the 'Gang of Four'.

Socialisms and China's path of modernisation

Not the least part of our confusion over the question of revisionism was that for its 'opposite'—socialism—too, our Chinese hosts offered no single definition or model. A most remarkably undogmatic and catholic view was taken of this matter, most of those with whom we spoke freely admitting that there were all kinds of socialism in the world—Islamic, African, Arab or whatever, as well as the numerous Marxist varieties—and that there was not, could not be and needed not be, a single conception, model or school of socialism. For if the rehabilitation of Liu Shaoqi marks one kind of reversal, surely that of Tito marks another and possibly a more fundamental one. Tito has recently been acclaimed for having been 'the first to recognise that socialism should not be confined to one model'; indeed, we found much enthusiasm for Yugoslavia's example and experience of economic construction. But above and beyond socialism, Tito was hailed first and foremost as a champion of national independence and of 'non-alignment': he had indeed been the very first one to have stood up to Soviet hegemonism (though that's not what it was called in those days: it was, as it happens, none other than Liu Shaoqi who at the time delivered the judgement of the Chinese Communist Party against Tito).

The eclecticism on this question of socialism, having previously been confined to other 'Marxist' countries, was now readily extended to all sorts of non-Marxist socialism, so that in our discussions the differences not only among Marxist countries but also between them and non-Marxist socialist countries were greatly played down. It was clear that in the context of the three-world theory the present political conjuncture internationally (as well as within China), resting as it did on the single-minded pursuit of an international united front against Soviet hegemonism, strongly favoured the tendency to soften old ideological divisions and lines of demarcation. It wasn't that these ideological differences didn't exist, or didn't matter; rather, they were felt to be a lot less important than the pervasive division between a handful of expansionist countries and the rest (and of course, but one step further along the argument, a country could be non- or even anti-socialist as long as it was anti-hegemonist, e.g., Tory Britain). The important thing was to oppose and struggle against hegemonism, for without the right and the freedom to determine one's own social system or path of development all ideological differences and preferences were threatened with being rendered equally academic and irrelevant. Such, at any rate is the context for China's ever-widening 'opening' towards not only 'Euro-conservatives' but also 'Euro-communists'.

China's own socialism was repeatedly set out in terms of the 'four fundamental principles' as stated by Ye Jianying in his 30th anniversary speech, namely, 'the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought'. The first described the economic system, the next two the political system, and the last the ideology of the New China; to these, 'internationalism' was sometimes cited as an additional feature. China's was a socialism that they wanted neither to import nor to export.

All this was common ground among those with whom we spoke, as was the widespread recognition of 'modernisation' as the necessary counterpart and fulfilment of socialism. But it was emphasised that the precise shape of China's specific path of socialist modernisation still remained to be determined and finalised. Certainly, much the most fruitful part of our discussions concerned this subject, which indeed provides much of the ferment and excitement in China's scientific circles at present. There are any number of schools on every imaginable subject, be it the objectivity of economic laws, the need to restructure the economy and to reform economic management, the law of value and the regulation of planning by market, the place of profits and of incentives in a socialist economy, or whatever. There was much stress on the need for study, investigation and experimentation and on the singular importance of seeking truth from facts and from practice. The finer points of these discussions are too numerous and too technical to go into here, but two general features need pointing.

First, the whole spirit of this venture in pursuit of a 'Chinese-type modernisation' derived from an abhorrence of past dogmas and pet models. As long as the four fundamental principles were left intact, nothing was precluded from discussion or, even, experimentation as a possible means of furthering the goal of modernisation. There was a vigorously expressed willingness to learn from the experience of other countries, capitalist, socialist or whatever, but as long as and only if it conformed with Chinese conditions and needs. It was asserted that there was no question, and could not be, of 'all-out Westernisation'; the memories of 'all-out Sovietisation' were too bitter for that. Blind imitation was out, selective adaptation was in. 'Pragmatism' was rife.

A similar 'pragmatism' was encountered in our discussions on the other, international aspect of the focus on modernisation, namely, the import of foreign capital and technology, though I felt that there was a tendency

to 'bed' what was a fairly sensible and businesslike approach to the problem in an unduly contrived theory of the so-called 'international division of labour'. It was explained that only those things would be imported which were in China's interests, fitted its requirements and were within its means, and particularly on terms that were in no way derogatory to national sovereignty and independence. Self-reliance, one sensed, was a matter less of principle than of necessity, for of course no conceivable amount of foreign help could or would exempt the Chinese people from the long, hard and exacting burden of modernising their economy primarily with their own resources. In short, we were left in no doubt that China's path of modernisation would be scientific in approach and Chinese in content, but that neither China's socialism nor China's independence were negotiable. In summing up these discussions, which shed some light on the theoretical context and spirit in which the search for a specifically Chinese and 'scientific' socialism is being made, I should like to underline their necessarily limited scope and significance—for intellectuals are after all only a very small part of the total picture—and to insist (given the present de-emphasis on the masses) that science while important is by itself not enough.

For the present I reserve my position on the larger issues of whether the current political trend in China is irreversible or the one most conducive to realising the preferred goal of a 'scientific' socialism—and whether indeed the very concept of 'scientific socialism' in the classical Marxist sense is any longer a viable one—for any attempt at answering these questions will want a deal more political analysis both of Marxist theory and of Chinese experience than is possible now. But I have no doubt that the current turn towards science, 'pragmatism' and democracy in China has much broader and deeper international implications and lessons, and calls for much fresh thinking all around. At present, regrettably, much of the foreign 'faith' in China is as un-specific, unscientific and uncritical as is much of the fashionable damnation of China's 'revisionism' abstract, dogmatic and ultimately futile. Not only in China is the emancipating of the mind imperative and long overdue.

JITENDRA MOHAN

REHABILITATION OF LIU SHAOQI

The following is an important People's Daily editorial which appeared on May 16 this year. We have shortened it by about 50 per cent but it can be read in its entirety in Beijing Review of 26 May 1980.

* * *

THE Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, after serious and earnest discussion, unanimously adopted a resolution on the rehabilitation of Comrade Liu Shaoqi and decided to remove the designations 'renegade, traitor and scab' wrongly imposed on him, to cancel the erroneous resolution expelling him from the Party and to clear his name as a great Marxist and proletarian revolutionary.

(1)

In the early period of the Cultural Revolution Comrade Liu Shaoqi was erroneously criticised and struggled against as 'the ringleader of the counter-revolutionary revisionist clique within the Party' and 'the biggest capitalist roader in power'.

The 12th Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Party—during which inner-Party life was abnormal in the extreme so that no serious discussion was possible—made a completely erroneous decision on Comrade Liu Shaoqi. Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and company used the 'investigation material' that they had concocted to deceive the other members of the Central Committee, including its principal leaders, and thus subjected to unprecedented injustice Comrade Liu Shaoqi, who could not attend the meeting.

The Chinese Communists and the Chinese people wanted Comrade Liu Shaoqi rehabilitated. When the criticism of him became public, quite a number of upright Communist Party members and people outside the Party stood up to speak in his defence. The downfall of the gang of four, and especially the

solution of a number of important questions left over from history and questions of merits and demerits or right versus wrong concerning some important leaders, prompted a growing number of Party members and non-Party people to suggest that the case of Comrade Liu Shaoqi be re-examined.

All the questions involved in the case were reinvestigated and checked: what was described as Comrade Liu Shaoqi's 'betrayal after being arrested' in Changsha in 1925, his 'activities as a hidden traitor' in Wuhan and Lushan in 1927, and another 'betrayal after being arrested' in Shenyang in 1929, in fact turned out to be slanders and libels; what was called Comrade Liu Shaoqi's 'persistence in taking the capitalist road' after nationwide liberation and 'scheming to subvert the dictatorship of the proletariat' were distortions and fabrications of history.

The branding of Comrade Liu Shaoqi distorted the history of our Party and country and struck at many Party members and other people. Countless loyal and devoted revolutionary cadres, heroes and model workers were smeared; many specialists, professors and democrats who had long cooperated with the Communist Party were vilified as the 'social basis of Liu Shaoqi's revisionist line'; and even millions of students and other young people then studying assiduously were libelled.

As one of the principal leaders of the Party, Comrade Liu Shaoqi participated throughout in the leadership of the Party Central Committee; he, too, upheld the four basic principles, and made important contributions to the socialist revolution and socialist construction of the country. During this period, although the Party did make some mistakes, as did Comrade Liu Shaoqi, yet these mistakes were by and large corrected by the Party Central Committee through criticism and self-criticism, in accordance with the principle of democratic centralism, and there never was a 'counter-revolutionary revisionist line' represented by Comrade Liu Shaoqi, nor a 'counter-revolutionary revisionist clique', with Comrade Liu Shaoqi as the 'ringleader', nor a 'bourgeois headquarters' headed by him, nor a group of 'inner-Party capitalist roaders in power' with Comrade Liu Shaoqi as the 'biggest capitalist roader'. This is historical truth.

(2)

The unjust judgement and abnormal treatment of Comrade Liu Shaoqi was a grave mistake committed by our Party. When the question arose of the public redressing of the major frame-up of Comrade Liu Shaoqi, it still was a difficult matter to take a decision on and was a serious test.

In the first place, it was not easy for any one person to judge whether the case against Comrade Liu Shaoqi was a frame-up. The process from having doubts about whether the case was valid to judging that it was a complete frame-up had to be based on serious investigation and repeated verification of the material. As to whether there was a 'bourgeois headquarters headed by Liu Shaoqi' or a 'Liu Shaoqi's counter-revolutionary revisionist line', judgement was not so difficult. With the gang of four smashed and the Cultural Revolution ended, it is not difficult for the vast numbers of cadres and the masses who have worked for the past three decades in various fields, especially those who were implicated by these accusations and persecuted and who have now had their names cleared, to come forward and speak up for Comrade Liu Shaoqi.

It was not until all the material on which that resolution had been based was proved false as a consequence of serious and careful reinvestigation and verification by a large number of comrades over a long period of time that the judgement was made that the case had been a frame-up.

Secondly, it was not easy to decide whether to redress the case publicly. The case related to the overall situation of the Cultural Revolution, and the Central Committee had to think over the consequences in considering rehabilitation of Comrade Liu. Criticism of Comrade Liu Shaoqi had been extensive and prolonged during the Cultural Revolution. Many people, young people in particular, were not acquainted with Comrade Liu Shaoqi's history or knew little about it, and it was difficult for them to get to know all the facts about the Cultural Revolution.

In these circumstances, the rehabilitation of Comrade Liu Shaoqi was naturally bound to have repercussions, giving rise to various distortions, rumour-mongering by enemies at home and abroad, and even conjectures among comrades inside and outside the Party who were not familiar with the facts. But Party policy is based on principle and a minor principle must be subordinated to the guiding principle. Our guiding principle is one of seeking truth from facts and correcting mistakes whenever they are found, a principle Comrade Mao Zedong formulated.

Since the case against Comrade Liu Shaoqi was false, it had to be declared false. If the Central Committee knew the case to

be false and kept this secret without redressing it or without doing so publicly for reasons of expediency, then it would betray the very principle it had proclaimed of seeking truth from facts, would deviate from Mao Zedong Thought and would lose the faith placed in it by the whole Party, the entire Chinese people and the whole world.

(3)

For a long time in his life, Comrade Mao Zedong persisted in seeking truth from facts, correcting mistakes whenever discovered and waging a protracted struggle to right wrongs. When he was in the Central Soviet Area, he himself suffered from wrongs and erroneous treatment.

In his speech *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* in 1957, Comrade Mao Zedong put forward the correct policy that 'counter-revolutionaries must be eliminated wherever found, mistakes must be corrected whenever discovered'. Comrade Mao Zedong gave a more detailed explanation in his talk at an enlarged working conference convened by the Party Central Committee in 1962.

In this famous talk, Comrade Mao Zedong, after quoting from the famous Chinese historian Sima Qian, commented: 'At every stage of human history there have always been cases of mis-handling. In class societies such cases are numerous. In a socialist society such things cannot be entirely avoided either. They are unavoidable whether in periods of leadership with a correct or with an incorrect line. There is one distinction, however. Under a correct line, as soon as cases which have been mishandled are discovered, after re-examination the people concerned will be rehabilitated and apologies will be made to them, so that they will enjoy ease of mind and lift up their heads again. But under an incorrect line, this becomes impossible, and the mistakes can be corrected at a suitable occasion only by those who represent the correct line through the method of democratic centralism'.

Comrade Mao Zedong gave a scientific analysis of this historical phenomenon of wronged people. However, this passage lacks something. It deals only with the inevitability of the wrong handling of cases in a socialist society when the correct line is in force, but does not mention the fact that a socialist society guided by the correct line should keep wrongly handled cases and the resulting harm to the minimum and is fully able to do so by strengthening socialist democracy and the socialist legal system.

Thus it is clear that the rehabilitation of all wrong cases is an important question of principle as to whether the banner of Mao Zedong Thought is genuinely raised or not. It should be correctly understood that here, by Mao Zedong Thought, we are referring to its scientific system which is the product of the application of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution, a product of the collective wisdom pooled by Comrade Mao Zedong and his comrades-in-arms from the Party and the revolutionary people and a summing up of the more than half a century of experience gained in the Chinese revolutionary struggle and in the building of a new society, and not a particular sentence or action by any individual on this or that occasion.

Comrade Mao Zedong always held that it was inevitable that a person, no matter who, would to a greater or lesser extent say or do something wrong, and this should be rectified after being examined in the light of practice. In fact, during the Cultural Revolution, Comrade Mao Zedong himself righted many wrongs.

During the rectification campaign in 1942, Comrade Mao Zedong made seeking truth from facts a major slogan, gave it a Marxist definition and had the four huge characters in his calligraphy inscribed above the door of the auditorium of the then Central Party School. It is a fact that Comrade Mao Zedong made the greatest contribution to the victorious development of our Party in this aspect. It is reasonable to take seeking truth from facts as the quintessence and one of the fundamental principles of Mao Zedong Thought.

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