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## **The Difference Between the Chinese and the Indian Situations**

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The Chinese Revolution is one of the outstanding events of the past millennium, a gigantic step in mankind's march towards freedom. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of this event, while we reflect on the background, the nature, and the subsequent course of the Chinese Revolution, we cannot help asking the question: why has the trajectory of development in our own country been so different from that in China? There clearly is no single answer to this question. But an important component of any complex set of answers must be the fact that India was a totally subjugated colony of an imperialist power while China was never fully subjugated in the same manner. It remained a semi-colony. The Japanese attempt to colonise it completely not only did not succeed, but ended up leaving the revolutionary forces in the ascendancy within the Chinese society.

China's not being fully colonised was the result of a certain specific world situation. While trade with China by the European companies had started earlier, the use of military might against her, which is the usual precursor of colonisation, began with the Opium Wars of the 1840s. Precisely around that time however, each of the imperialist powers became preoccupied with a particular crisis of its own. Between 1853 and 1856 Britain and France (together with Ottoman Turkey) were fighting Russia in the devastating Crimean war, which claimed a total of half a million lives, almost equally distributed between the two combating sides. Barely had the Crimean war ended when Britain had to face the 1857 Revolt in India which kept her fully occupied for several years to come. The United States, whose budding imperial ambition was manifested in Commodore Peary's "opening up" of Japan in 1854, became involved in her own devastating Civil War (1861-65) which again claimed half a million lives. France, after the Crimean war, was preoccupied with Louis Bonaparte's project of foisting Maximilian as the Emperor of Mexico (1864-67); this venture ended disastrously for France with the execution of Maximilian, and represented a severe set back for the French colonial drive.

As a result of these crises faced by colonial powers at this particular historical juncture, countries "opened up" at this moment escaped the fate of being fully colonised: Japan proceeded to have her own "Meiji Restoration" (which was an imposition of a domestic bourgeois order from the top), and, even though she had to sign "unequal treaties", she went on to emerge as a major capitalist power in her own right. China, which did not have such an imposition of a domestic bourgeois order from the top and continued with her old feudal set up, also had to sign "unequal treaties" but ended up being a semi-colony. Different colonial powers reached a sort of equilibrium among themselves and carved up China into "spheres of influence" under the nominal suzerainty of the Emperor, instead of any one of them trying to appropriate the whole of China as a colony for itself. We in India therefore have some cause for satisfaction in the fact that our fighters in the 1857 Revolt were responsible to some extent for Japan and China not being reduced to the status of pure colonies (or being partitioned into pure colonies).

While no single imperialist power controlled China, they jointly ruled the country with the help of the feudal landlord class and the comprador bourgeoisie, turning her into a market for their manufactured goods (thus imposing deindustrialisation on her), and a supplier of primary commodities. Imperialist penetration destroyed the basis of China's old order but thwarted the emergence of a vigorous domestic capitalism, leaving her as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial economy.

The primary contradiction in this society was between the imperialist powers with their domestic allies on the one side, and the overwhelming mass of the people of China on the other. Among the different classes opposed to imperialism, however, the weight of the national bourgeoisie was not only small, but even relatively smaller than that of the working class, since the latter also comprised workers employed in enterprises owned by foreign capital. The struggle against the rule by imperialist powers in semi-feudal, semi-colonial China therefore had to take the form of a democratic revolution under the leadership of the working class.

The invasion by Japan was an attempt to convert the whole of China into a direct colony. Japan succeeded in occupying parts of China which thereby came under direct Japanese colonial rule. It gave Chinese society an even more mosaic character, namely that of a colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal society. It brought to the

forefront the task of national liberation from imperialist rule, especially that of Japanese imperialism, and hence the urgency of interlinking the democratic and the national revolutions.

Revolution thus came firmly on the agenda. Liberation from imperialism was the most urgent task before the Chinese people. This could not occur without the mobilisation of the peasantry, which in turn meant an advance of the democratic revolution against the landlords. The urgency of national liberation also meant therefore the urgency of the democratic revolution. The only force capable of providing unflinching leadership in the *national* struggle was precisely the force capable of leading the *democratic* revolution, namely the Chinese Communist Party. The Chiang Kai-shek regime, representing a dictatorship of the landlords and the big bourgeoisie, vacillated in its opposition to the Japanese aggressors, since it feared the democratic revolution through which the peasantry fighting Japanese aggression would liberate itself from landlord oppression. The unique position of the Chinese Communist Party arose therefore from the very objective conditions of China. The Xian incident when an unwilling Chiang-Kai-shek was forced to sign an agreement with the Communists to fight Japanese aggression, to the relief of millions of patriotic Chinese, underscored this unique position of the Chinese Communist Party.

This unique position of the Chinese Communist Party could at all arise however because, in China, armed revolution was already confronting armed counter-revolution, i.e. a red army already existed. Because China did not have a single centralised authority, with whom the big bourgeoisie could have entered into direct negotiations, and which could have made concessions to the big bourgeoisie to keep the level of armed conflict low, while making separate arrangements to decimate the Communists, it was necessary for the big bourgeoisie to seek partnership with the Communists. The Kuomintang had to seek Soviet aid; it accepted Communists as members of its own organisation.

Chiang Kai-shek expelled Communists from responsible posts within the Kuomintang in March 1926. He massacred the Shanghai workers in April 1927. And yet several more years were to pass before Chiang Kai-shek could launch a major attack on the Kiangsi soviet, and it was only in October 1934 that the Kiangsi base was abandoned and the Long March set out for North-Western China. These were years of contention for authority, not just between the forces of Chiang Kai-shek and the Red Army, but between these and several warlords as

well. The big bourgeoisie in China did not receive authority from a centralised colonial state; it had to establish its authority over a large number of powerful and warring feudal lords, who, in their disunity, inherited bits and pieces of the collapsed Manchu empire which had been crumbling for long in semi-feudal and semi-colonial China. It sought to establish this authority for a while in co-operation with the Communists and afterwards in opposition to them. But this very situation permitted the Red Army to exist and operate, some times growing in strength and at other times losing strength. The fact that China was not a centralised colonial state, ruled by one particular colonial power, but a semi-colony marked in its last stages by a furious struggle for authority, permitted the Communist Party to remain in contention and to lead the Chinese Revolution to fulfill both its national and democratic tasks.

In India by contrast British imperialism was firmly and exclusively entrenched. The centralised colonial state, which of course sustained itself through an alliance with the feudal elements, negotiated with the bourgeois leadership of the national movement to ensure that the struggle did not become "too militant", or "get out of hand". The Communists faced repression, and made immense sacrifices for the cause of freedom; but, though allowed to join the Congress, they could not succeed in establishing either a rival, powerful centre of authority or any kind of hegemony over the national movement. And this in turn meant that the democratic revolution in our country remained seriously incomplete.

What underlies the difference in the experience of the two countries therefore is, in a basic sense, the difference in their colonial histories. To be sure one can cite several mistakes of strategy and tactics in the Indian case. But to attribute the divergent experience of the two countries solely to these mistakes would be a serious error and an abandonment of the materialist position. In fact Comrade Mao Zedong himself drew attention to this basic difference between the two countries in some remarks he once made about the Indian Revolution. It is important to remind ourselves of this because the celebration of the Chinese Revolution must not be allowed to become a denigration of our own revolutionary tradition.

### **The Nature of the Chinese Revolution**

The Chinese revolution was unique in human history not just

because of the size of China, or the scale of mass participation it entailed. In addition it was a revolution of an altogether different type, a Peoples' Democratic Revolution. To be sure, at the end of the Second World War, Peoples' Democracies had come up in a number of Eastern European countries, but their emergence was possible because of the presence of the Soviet Red Army. (Even Yugoslavia where the Communist partisans captured power on their own rather than with the help of the Red Army, owed its survival to the fact of Soviet support initially, in the absence of which it might have gone the way of Greece). The Chinese revolution was overwhelmingly a peasant revolution, but it differed from all preceding peasant revolutions in human history in that this peasant revolution had the imprint of working class leadership.

Many have missed the significance of this fact, and have interpreted the Chinese revolution superficially, as merely a peasant revolution, though admittedly under the leadership of the Communist Party. The fact that Party leadership was the mechanism through which *proletarian* leadership was imprinted on the Chinese revolution is underplayed in all such interpretations. But the superficiality of this reading is obvious from two basic facts: first, peasant-based national liberation struggles were successful in many countries, Algeria being a notable example. But in none of these countries except where the Communist Party gave the lead (such as Vietnam), did the subsequent trajectory of development even remotely resemble that of China. Secondly, many, including self-professed Marxists, had thought that when the Chinese Red Army, being essentially a peasant army, would enter the cities, it would encounter the hostility of the proletariat; nothing of the sort however happened. Not only did the Chinese Communist Party embody the proletarian outlook while leading the revolution in the countryside, but the Chinese proletariat accepted the Communist party as its vanguard despite the latter's physical presence being confined mainly to the countryside after the early years. The proletarian leadership of the revolution, or the peoples' democratic character of the revolution (i.e. a democratic revolution led by the proletariat) was therefore indubitable, and constituted a novel and unique phenomenon.

This novel phenomenon however was not just something that happened; it had been conceptualised by the Communist movement long before it was actually realised. The concept of the peoples' democratic revolution is an outstanding innovation of the Communist movement. It is also a complex concept. As a democratic revolution directed against feudalism, colonialism and semi-colonialism, it creates

the conditions for thorough-going bourgeois development. At the same time the leadership of the proletariat over this revolution seeks to ensure that it goes beyond the bourgeois stage to socialism without interruption, i.e. without giving rise to a historical period of bourgeois consolidation. The complexity of this revolution, which has thus the character of both promoting as well as negating bourgeois development, implies that its pursuit is beset by twin dangers arising from twin deviations: on the one hand if promotion of bourgeois development is emphasised to the exclusion of the need to transcend it, then the revolution is threatened by capitalist restoration; on the other hand if the need to negate bourgeois development is overemphasised, then the revolution is threatened with isolation and a shrinking of its base. Charting the course of the revolution between these two deviations, the first a Right deviation and the second a Left deviation, is not easy. Typically there would be zigzags and oscillations; the important thing is to rectify the deviations before they threaten the revolution itself.

The Chinese revolution too has experienced these oscillations and has progressed through these oscillations. To think of only one phase in this oscillating journey as the "true" revolutionary line is to view the matter one-sidedly. A correct (dialectical) approach to the revolution must be based on an understanding of the dialectics of the revolution itself.

Interpretations of the course of the Chinese revolution, however, are almost invariably based on such one-sided readings. This is particularly true these days since imperialism has a vested interest in spreading the canard that China's recent economic success has nothing to do with its revolution but is a result exclusively of its recent phase of policy, the phase of "economic reforms".

### **The Foundations for Economic Prosperity**

China's economic progress since 1949 is among the most significant phenomena of this century, a source of hope for the wretched of the earth that their lot too can improve dramatically within a short span of time. True, China has not been alone among underdeveloped countries in experiencing rapid economic progress, but her case is unique because of her size: her development makes a substantial difference to world poverty.

Imperialism however is interested in delinking this achievement

from China's revolutionary course. Imperialist media are full of remarks such as "China should be celebrating twenty-five years of reforms rather than fifty years of communism".

This entire view is completely wrong: the contrast between a pre-reform period devoid of progress and a post-reform period marked by great achievements is factually incorrect; and the interpretation of the post-reform economic performance is fundamentally flawed.

China overcame poverty (as defined in third world countries such as ours) *before* she embarked on "market reforms". China instituted a *universal* public distribution system, which gave *every* citizen a certain minimum amount of essential commodities, *before* she embarked on "market reforms". China's stupendous achievements in terms of social indicators occurred *before* she embarked on "market reforms". And China, despite having an adverse land-man ratio (far more adverse than India's) managed to record significant increases in food production (both absolute and per capita) through the construction of impressive water management systems under collective ownership, by mobilising locally available surplus labour, *before* she embarked on "market reforms".

Even more important however is the fact that the perception which attributes post-reform high growth to the so-called "virtues of the market", actually misinterprets this growth experience. China's remarkable post-reform growth was made possible either because of the achievements of the pre-reform economic regime or because of the continuation of certain features of that regime.

There are at least four ways in which this happened. First, the achievement of near-universal literacy, and the improvement in the educational and health status of the work-force, which were some of the legacies of the earlier years, were important contributory factors to the dynamism that China has experienced in the more recent period.

Secondly, there can be little doubt that inequalities in China, both inter-regional as well as inter-personal, have increased in the "reform" years, which has been a major problem associated with the "reform" process. Now if these increases in inequalities, which have accompanied high growth, were superimposed on an already highly

skewed income and wealth distribution, then, notwithstanding such high growth rates that China has been achieving, social tensions would have become difficult to manage. The surfacing of these tensions in turn would have made these growth rates impossible to sustain. Thus China was able to sustain her post-reform growth because she started with a relatively egalitarian base, and that was a contribution of the earlier regime.

Thirdly, to call China a neo-liberal "model" is a travesty of the truth. China's success during the reform years has sprung precisely from the fact that she has managed to combine in an altogether novel way the virtues of "centralisation" together with those of "decentralisation", or, putting it differently, the advantages of a command economy alongside the flexibility imparted by the functioning of markets. It has been a command economy at one remove. In periods of runaway inflation, for instance, price controls have been clamped down with ease rather than resorting to drastic deflation with high social costs (as would happen under capitalism), because a large part of the economy continues to be state-owned and hence amenable to intervention by the Party. Likewise foreign exchange management, a potential source of serious problems in any third world capitalist economy, has been handled with greater ease because the old system of Party directive to enterprises continues to be effective. In short, China has had the advantage of being able to supplement the usual instruments of state intervention available in a capitalist market economy with other instruments which it has retained from its pre-reform years. In this sense drawing a sharp contrast between the pre- and post-reform periods is altogether misleading.

Finally, the high agricultural growth witnessed in the early reform years, which provided the bedrock for the reform experiment, was made possible because the regime of collective ownership and management of the irrigation systems was not abandoned. Here again China reaped the advantages of the old collective system in terms of the irrigation works it bequeathed, and continued to reap the benefits of collective ownership of such works, even while breaking up the communes and privatising agricultural operations.

The new regime in other words was erected on the shoulders of the old one, but not by wholly dismantling or destroying the latter. There was, and still is, a peculiar symbiosis between the new and the old which characterises the Chinese economy, which is why lauding



China as a "neo-liberal model" is a travesty of the truth. The current economic regime in China is yet another phase in the unfolding course of the Chinese revolution.

At the same time however the contradictions of the current phase must not be lost sight of. The very fact of high growth under the present arrangement brings about changes in the domestic social structure, in the class-configuration of society, which poses a threat to the revolution. Mention has already been made of the increasing inequalities, both personal and regional. This would tend to throw up powerful forces working towards capitalist restoration. What is more, this changing social structure would also work in the direction of bringing about an atrophy of growth. Over the years for example as agriculture has come under the sway of private ownership the collectively -owned irrigation works, which, as mentioned earlier, were an important contributory factor towards China's rapid advance, have tended to atrophy. In other words the changing class configurations resulting from China's rapid growth tend to upset the very premises underlying the rapidity of that growth.

The second source of threat to the Chinese revolution, and to the rapidity of China's economic advance arises from the pressures emanating from world capitalism. The ascendancy of finance and its globalisation is a crucial feature of the contemporary capitalist world. This has two obvious effects. On the one hand it is responsible (among other causes) for the slowing down of the world economy, since Keynesian demand management which worked so well in the post-war period becomes difficult to undertake in a world of extreme financial fluidity. On the other hand globalised finance capital tries to break down the insulation which particular economies enjoy from its movements. It attempts to suck every country into the vortex of its movements.

Now, the success of the Chinese economy in recent years owed much to two factors: first, it had managed to increase its exports to the world market quite substantially, and secondly, it had kept itself insulated from the movements of speculative international finance. The importance of this second factor was underscored by Comrade Jiang Zemin himself when he said that China managed to avoid the East Asian crisis, because she did not have a convertible currency and had not carried out any significant financial liberalisation (it is owing to these two factors that her economy had remained insulated from international financial flows).

In a situation where the slowing down of the world economy might affect the growth of China's exports adversely, the external pressures, exerted through the IMF and the World Bank, to open up China to global financial flows would mount; the domestic bourgeois elements which have grown in strength during this period of high growth would also add to this pressure. But if China does succumb to this pressure to open her economy to flows of speculative finance capital, then that would have a serious adverse effect on the course of the revolution.

In short, the Chinese people and the Chinese Party have big challenges in front of them. Revolutionaries all over the world must wish the Chinese Party all success in mobilising the people to meet these challenges and carry the revolution forward.