

The Basic Methods and the Limitations of Mao Zedong's Sinicization of Marxist Philosophy

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Abstract

As the seminal figure of the sinicization of Marxist philosophy, Mao Zedong yields valuable experience in the unity of Chinese traditions and Marxist philosophy. In the process of transforming the world views of Marxist Philosophy to the methodologies applicable to the realities of China, problems arise owing to the limitation of the specific period, which includes at least three aspects, the negative impact from the Chinese traditions, the deviation of the grip on realities and lack of accuracy of the understand on dialectics. The deficiencies of Mao Zedong's philosophy should be revised in accordance with the principle of the Marxist practical materialism.

Key words: Mao Zedong; The sinicization of Marxist philosophy; Limitation

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INTRODUCTION

Mao Zedong's philosophy is based on the system of Marxist Philosophy, but his philosophy contains many factors of Chinese traditional culture and thoughts. The realities of China are the foundation of Mao Zedong's philosophy. To solve the social problems, Mao Zedong tries to transform the Marxist world outlook into relatively specific methodologies all the time. In the process, Mao Zedong makes some mistakes because his ideology is impacted negatively by the Chinese traditional

philosophy, and this is directly attributable to the incorrect comprehension on the materialistic dialectics, which is the key to grasp the essence of Marxist philosophy.

1. THE BASIC METHODS OF MAO ZEDONG'S SINICIZATION OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

1.1 Method I: Though the Unity of Marxist Philosophy and Chinese Traditions

The system of Marxist philosophy originates from the modern West, the culture of which features with abstract mode of thinking and highly abstract concepts. When the system of Marxist philosophy has an influence on the realities of China, the sinicization, mainly the process of combining with traditional Chinese culture and revolutionary ideas of Marxist philosophy, is inevitable. Thus, the sinicization of Marxist philosophy, is not only a process of input, but also a process of fusion of Marxist philosophy and traditional Chinese culture. Mao Zedong, who has received typical Chinese traditional education in his teenage and accepted the Marxist philosophy in youth, finishes the perfect fusion of the two kinds of thoughts. The background of education in teenage determines that the Chinese philosophy and way of thinking will dominate Mao Zedong's political ideology and the way of governing. Mao's works have repeatedly argued that only the political ideas on Chinese traditional culture, which should not be denied completely and cut off, could solve the realistic problems of China. The proficiency and emphasis on the two forms of culture distinguish Mao from his contemporaries. Mao Zedong's political report, contravening the pinko dogmatism by Wang Ming on the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China focuses on the issue.

The Marxism regardless of Chinese characteristics is just an abstract and empty philosophy. Therefore, to make Marxism

materialized in China, and to make Marxism can fully reflect Chinese features, that is to say, to apply it according to the characteristics of China, becomes an urgent issue to understand and tackle for the whole Party. (Mao, 1991, pp.533-534)

For Mao Zedong, in the process of the sinicization of Marxist philosophy, the unity of the spirit of Chinese traditional culture and the basic principle of Marxian philosophy, is a deliberate behavior. Mao Zedong combines the realistic problems of China with the universal principles of Marxism according to his personal comprehension, which inevitably influenced by his pure Chinese educational background, on the domestic issues of the time. So, Mao Zedong's sinicization of Marxist philosophy is a process which mixes Chinese traditional culture and Marxist philosophy.

1.2 Method II: Through the Unity of Marxist Philosophy and Chinese Realities

In the work *Against Bookishness*, Mao Zedong emphasizes the unity of Marxism universal truth and Chinese revolutionary realities in order to correct the dogmatism of the Party. And Mao Zedong puts forward an idea that the dogma of Marxism must be combined with the practice situation of China (Mao, 1991, pp.111-112). The idea props up Mao Zedong's long and bitter struggle against pinko dogmatism, of which Wang Ming is regarded as the representative.

Mao Zedong not only says to link the theory of Marxism to the actuality of China, but also does so. He long-term investigation into the countryside makes him master plenty of the first-hand real stuff about real condition of China. The deeply understanding of the realities, history and culture of China provides a good condition of theoretical innovation on Marxist philosophy in light of the specific conditions of China. On this basis, Mao Zedong makes theoretical creations which considered the reality of China.

After Zunyi Meeting, which is regarded as the most important point in the history of the Communist Party of China in January 1935, Mao Zedong looks subjectivism as another obstacle of success of Chinese revolution and emphasizes the particularities of contradiction (Mao, 1986, p.143). In the work *On Practice*, the philosophical concept REALITY is elevated to a height which is crucial to the practice. In this sense, *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* are the important indicators of the formation of Marxist philosophy system with Chinese characteristics. Some foreign scholars highly appreciates *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*, "an excellent model of solving the problems of Marxist philosophy creatively according to the specific conditions of Chinese history and the Chinese people's war of liberation." (Eugene, 1958, p.66) In 1942, Mao Zedong launched the Rectification Movement of Yan'an, a prevalent Marxism theory education developed in a special period of history. The core of the Movement is to completely correct the condition of theory divorcing from practice. Mao Zedong tries to persuade people to really grasp the

essence of Marxism and deeply and scientifically analyze the practical problems of China (Mao, 1991, p.814).

Mao Zedong reflects on the question of how to sinicize Marxism and combine Marxism with the realities of China throughout his life. The above cases are the concrete practices with this line of thinking. With the victory of so-called democratic revolution and the foundation of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong Thought, which is regarded as a successful combination of the universal principles of Marxism and the concrete practice of Chinese revolution is finally established.

1.3 Method III: Through the Transformation From World Outlook to Methodology

For Mao Zedong, Marxism philosophy provides a new view of the world rather than a set of ready-made methods, so the transformation from world outlook to methodology is crucial for its realistic role. Actually, the unity of Marxist philosophy and Chinese traditions and that of Marxist philosophy and Chinese realities are the specific procedures of transforming the world outlook of Marxism into methodology which can be applied to the solving of China's practical issues. The achievement of the transformation, named after Mao Zedong Thought, is regarded as an inheritance and development of the system of Marxism philosophy. Basing on dialectical materialism and historical materialism, Mao Zedong gives a set of solutions which have been proved by effective for revolution of China. In the process of political change in modern China, a series of specific guidelines such as being practical and realistic, mass line, united front, armed struggle, the Party building, are the concrete proposals, as the specification of the universal principles of Marxist philosophy. Mao Zedong has used a metaphor of bridge or boat for concrete method, "no solving the problem of the bridge or boat, crossing a river is nothing but empty talk. Similarly, unless the problem of method is solved, talking about tasks is useless." (Mao, 1991, p.139)

As an example of successful transformation from the philosophy world outlook to realistic methodology, Mao Zedong's creative methodology system reveals a strong dialectical spirit, arising from the deep research of materialist dialectics of Marxism philosophy and being embodied in some specific methods such as *Dividing into Two*, *Connection and Transformation*, *Contradictions Everywhere*, etc..

2. THE LIMITATIONS OF MAO ZEDONG'S SINICIZATION OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

2.1 Limitation I: Negative Impacts From Chinese Traditional Philosophy

For Mao Zedong's philosophy, the negative impacts from Chinese traditional philosophy are can not be ignored. In Chinese traditional philosophy, essence and dross are of

coexistence. Mao Zedong, as a giant deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, has a preference for personal heroism which results in his excessive emphasis on volition that falls into the idealism in method finally. The contradiction between the principle of materialism which Mao Zedong declares to insist on and the tendency of idealism puzzles many researchers. Mao Zedong's some remarks at his youth can embody the idealism tendency. "Will, no doubt is the pioneer of the career life." "Moral philosophy is especially important in the era of open." "Religion can be absent while faith can not be little." "Why obey the God instead of yourself? You are divine." "Expand your perception and you will be as big as the universe." Materialism philosophy dominates the process of the sinicization of Marxist philosophy, but the philosophy of idealism closely related to Chinese traditional culture never fades.

2.2 Limitation II: The Deviation of the Grasp on the Reality

The deviation of the grasp on the REALITY exists in the process of sinicization. Seeking truth from the realities is a basic working method advocated by Mao Zedong. But the so-called REALITY in Mao Zedong's system of political philosophy are actually always some specific or isolated events, such as subjective behaviors, absolute objectivism thoughts and behaviors of individual heroism. Mao Zedong's partial understanding on REALITIES leads to the insufficiency of systematization, so that the principle of seeking truth from the realities is more like a political means than a philosophical theory. The situation results in the defects which lead the sinicization of Marxist philosophy into a predicament, a deviation from the basic essence of Marxism. What's more, the realities from cognition and that practice have not been distinguished clearly by Mao Zedong, and this leaves room for anybody to guess.

2.3 Limitation III: The Incorrect Comprehension on the Materialistic Dialectics

At the age of Mao Zedong, the translation and interpretation of Marxist classical literature influenced greatly by the Soviet political ideology, and some Chinese versions are not directly translated from original of German, but Russian edition, a kind of secondary sources. As a theoretical foundation, materialist dialectics have never been elaborated accurately. There is a distant from Mao Zedong's understanding of the dialectics to Marxism original meaning of that. The materialist dialectics in Marxism philosophy is based on the thinking logic of understanding problems from practice, while that in Mao Zedong's philosophy is the mode of thinking of one dividing into two, which can not cover all the aspects of the problems. One dividing into two, as an oversimplification of the dialectics of Marxist philosophy, leads to serious consequences for the practical work.

3. THE PATH OF IMPROVEMENT IN SINICIZATION OF MARXIST HILOSOPHY

3.1 The Path of Improvement I: To Adjust the Relationship Between Marxist Philosophy and Chinese Traditional Culture

How to deal the relationship between Marxist philosophy and Chinese traditional culture is an inevitable problem in the process of sinicization of Marxist philosophy. As Western modern philosophy, Marxist philosophy is created in the environment which is totally different from that of China. No matter what thinking logic or philosophy theory, the disagreement between Marxist philosophy and Chinese traditional culture is difficultly to resolve. As a system of new materialism recognized by most people, Marx's philosophy is a transcendence of modern western philosophy. The way of understanding from practice is an entirely unfamiliar concept of Chinese philosophy that it is rooted in Chinese history and reality. Mao Zedong ties to solve the problems in his unique way and makes some mistakes. On the basis of existing achievements by Mao Zedong, the critically inherited principles should be adopted to remove the negative influence of the way and logic of thinking originates from Chinese traditional philosophy. For instance, the voluntarism approved of by Mao Zedong is totally different from the principle of comprehending the world from practice in Marxist philosophy, although the latter attach importance to the subject's practice, which seemingly equals to the voluntarism of Chinese traditional culture. The persistence in the thinking way of understanding from practice is the precondition of removing the idealism ingredient of Chinese philosophy effectively and retaining the reasonable elements of Chinese philosophy. On this basis, it will become possible to realize the sinicization of Marxist philosophy in the Chinese cultural soil.

3.2 The Path of Improvement II: To Understand the Actuality From Practice

Mao Zedong attaches great importance to the working mode of proceeding from actual conditions. He has admonished the Party that enriching the experience in actual struggle is first of all (Mao, 1996, p.124). "According to the views of Marxism, proceed from actual conditions and summarize experience. Only in this way can our Party obtain impetus and make our work better." "proceed from actual conditions is the basic premise of finding out the problems." (Ibid., p.90) It's well known from the above comments that the actuality or reality for Mao Zedong is more about objective conditions and than subjective experience. In Marxism's practical philosophy, practice of the subject is the angle of thinking, the starting point and the foothold, and the inherent nature and the law of the subject practice are the approach and method of understanding the relevant philosophical questions. While in Mao Zedong's philosophy, the REALITY places

emphasis on following the objective laws and lacks the studies of subject. Actually, the PRACTICE includes not only object's practice but also subject's practice, which can be further divided into practice of thinking and that of the body. The PRACTICE just concerns substance will inevitably fall into the naive materialism. The understanding of actuality from practice should notice the reality of subject's practice besides that of object's practice. Only the reality including two sides, the reality of subject's practice and the reality of object's practice corresponds with the theoretical nature, understanding from practice, of Marxism's practical philosophy.

3.3 The Path of Improvement III: To Think Basing on Understanding From Practice

For Mao Zedong, the deviation of the grasp on dialectics perhaps originates primarily from his thinking mode, which deviates from the innate content of the fundamental principle, understanding from practice, of Marxist philosophy. Understanding from practice, with which Marxist philosophy transcends the old philosophy, overcomes the shortcoming of idealistic empiricism and avoids the ossification of naive materialism. Marxism assimilates the rationalities of both idealism and materialism and forms a dialectics-centered complete system of philosophy. One dividing into two, Mao Zedong's reading on dialectics in Chinese way, brings about the absence of practice of subject. Then the absence of practice of the subject makes the comprehending of dialectics become metaphysics. Mao Zedong values the significance of will, but the will, tending to idealism without relating to practice, is of more pure spirit of moral than the subject of practice. The dialectics, as a thinking mode of understanding the relevant philosophical questions on the basis of internal nature of subject's practice, is essentially practical dialectics. In the process of the sinicization of Marxism, understanding from practice, as a mode and logic of thinking, still has the vital role of ensuring the success of China's reform and opening-up and comprehensive modernization construction.

SUMMARY

The relationship between Chinese traditional culture and Marxist philosophy is an unavoidable problem in the process of the sinicization of Marxist philosophy. There is an insurmountably huge gap between the Chinese philosophy and Marxist philosophy, a system of modern western philosophy. It is very difficult to cross the boundary between Marxist philosophy and Chinese philosophy, especially in context and thinking logic. The attempts of overcoming the difficulties by Mao Zedong finally comes into being a unique way of combination and causes some deviations. The only will theory which seems

to be very similar to the understanding from the practices and can be seen everywhere in Mao Zedong's philosophy must be removed in the sinicization of Marxist Philosophy. Understanding from the practices, one of the core spirits of Marxism, attaches importance to the practice of subject, and this misleads people to regard the theory of PRACTICE OF SUBJECT as the Will Theory of Chinese traditional culture.

Starting from the actual and present facts, as a manner of working advocated by Mao Zedong, is repeatedly discussed in his works. "The first thing is to rich his experience from the actual fighting." (Mao, 1996, p.124) "Practically drawing some experiences according to the Marxist points of view will give our Party a great impetus, and will make us do better than the past." "Proceeding from actual conditions is the necessary precondition of identifying problems." (Ibid.)

In the system of Marxist philosophy, practice of the subject is the starting point and the foothold, and the mode of thinking of the intrinsic nature of practice subject is the method of understanding the relevant philosophical questions. But in Mao Zedong's philosophical system, the so-called REALITY refers to more objective factors such as law and matter than subjective experiences. The absence of perspective of the subject makes Mao Zedong's philosophy look more like naive materialism. The deviation from the dialectics of Marxism originates from Mao Zedong's immanent mode of thinking which hasn't really understood the connotation of "understanding from the practice". And the absence of "the practice of subject" leads to a reading in Chinese way, one dividing into two, about dialectics of Marxism. Actually, Mao Zedong replaces "the practice of subject" with "will", a Chinese philosophical concept full of implication of pure spirit of moral.

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