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Chinese Political Rhetoric and Ideology:
Tension and Pretension

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Israel Paredes

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies

Croft Institute for International Studies
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College
The University of Mississippi
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Abstract:

This changing nature of the Chinese government's ideology leads one to believe that its core beliefs are not dogmatic, despite the foundation for their ideology being rooted in specific societal and economic theories. Starting with Mao Zedong to modern day, the Chinese government officials will continue to support the original tenets (and, no doubt, future presidents' additions to the tenets). However, the interpretation of their ideology over time is fluid and is used to support policies and actions during a political cycle. Chinese political leaders are unlikely to disagree with a past leaders, and will rather use their own interpretation of their predecessors' ideologies and rhetoric to move China forward.

This thesis proposes that during a Chinese leader's time in office, their government rhetoric, more specifically political speeches, can be contradictory regarding policies and previous beliefs of past leaders. The content of speeches given by different Chinese government officials often contradict each other. At separate times, the speakers for the Chinese government maintain their support of the original tenets of Marxism, socialism, and later Maoism, but add their own theories for China's progress, showing evolution of these tenets away from their original intended meaning.

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Important Names, Dates, and Ideas

Mao Zedong: Chapter 1

In power from 1950 – 1976, created Mao Zedong Thought, “Seeking truth from facts”, and was original adopter of Marxism into China. (Began the idea of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”)

Hua Guofeng: Chapter 1

In power from 1976 - 1981, in power immediately after Mao Zedong, but was pushed out of power by a coalition of party leaders, Copied Mao Zedong, but did not do much himself.

Deng Xiaoping: Chapter 2

In power from 1978 – 1989, created Deng Xiaoping Theory, opened China in 1978 and began trade liberalization for China. (Made the idea of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” a core Chinese tenet from Mao Zedong Thought)

Jiang Zemin: Chapter 2

In power from 1989 – 2002, created the Three Represents, and China joined the WTO during his presidency.

Long Yongtu: Chapter 3

Vice Minister and Chief Representative for Trade Negotiations of the MOFTEC from 1997 – 2003, supporter of the multilateral trading of China and general trade liberalization.

Hu Jintao: Chapter 3

In power from 2002 - 2012, created the Scientific Outlook on Development and subtly changed Chinese rhetoric through his “harmonic society” toward a more capitalist outlook.

Xi Jinping: Chapter 3 & 4

In power from 2012 - to Modern Day, created Xi Jinping thought, in power during COVID-19 and helmed the belt and road initiative and new FIL.

Introduction:

On January 20, 2023, in a speech to the diplomatic corps, H.E. Qin Gang, the current Minister of Foreign affairs for China stated:

“The year 2023 marks the beginning of the full implementation of the guiding principles laid out at the 20th CPC National Congress. The Chinese people are embarking on a new journey with full confidence to build China into a modern socialist country in all respects.”¹

Qin Gan’s speech was given at an international convention to ambassadors and diplomats from all over the world, and it is providing a view on the direction China is taking moving forward.

What does a “modern socialist country” mean to China? What did originally mean versus how it is interpreted in modern day? Is there even a clear answer to either of those questions?

This thesis proposes that during a Chinese leader’s time in office, their government rhetoric, more specifically political speeches, can be contradictory regarding policies and previous beliefs of past leaders. The content of speeches given by different Chinese government officials often contradict each other. At separate times, the speakers for the Chinese government maintain their support of the original tenets of Marxism, socialism, and later Maoism, but add their own theories for China’s progress, showing evolution of these tenets away from their original intended meaning.

Currently, most Western scholars would classify China’s economy as a socialist “mixed market economy” and would argue that they have transitioned from their original “centrally planned economy.”² China remains adamant in defining its ideology in Marxist and Socialist

¹ Qin, Gang “Chinese New Year Message to the Diplomatic Corps” transcript of a speech delivered to the Diplomatic Corps , January 20, 2023.

² Chenggang Xu, “The Fundamental Institutions of China's Reforms and Development,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 49, no. 4 (January 2011): pp. 1076-1151, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.49.4.1076>. ; Weber, Isabella; Qi Hao.

roots, however, despite the West defining China as a form of market economy. Karl Marx himself believed that the market economy would tend to cause the “dehumanization” and “degradation” of workers, often reaching the point of “alienation.”³ Socialism also relies in part on the elimination of social hierarchy in the workplace that results from market economies.⁴ This thesis suggests that the Chinese definitions of Marxism, socialism and communism might be more flexible than the commonly accepted Western definitions, since in relation to their origins in economics, the Chinese government is clearly not following these definitions.

This evolution of the Chinese government’s ideology leads one to believe that its core beliefs are not dogmatic, despite the foundation for their ideology being rooted in specific societal and economic theories. While they will continue to support the original tenets (and, no doubt, future presidents’ additions to the tenets), the interpretation over time is fluid and is used to support whatever is necessary during a political cycle. Chinese political leaders are unlikely to disagree with a past leaders, and will rather use their own interpretation of their predecessors’ ideologies and rhetoric to move China forward.

Chapter 1 offers working definitions for the key terms of Marxism, socialism, and communism, and provides a brief historical overview of the development of China’s political and economic system immediately preceding Deng Xiaoping. These words are directly linked to Chinese leaders’ policies and speeches and tie the different leaders together.

“The state-constituted market economy: A conceptual framework for China’s state–market relations,” (working paper, University of Massachusetts Amherst, December 2021), <https://peri.umass.edu/economists/isabella/item/1561-the-state-constituted-market-economy-a-conceptual-framework-for-china-s-state-market-relations>

³ E. G. WEST, “The Political Economy of Alienation: Karl Marx and Adam Smith 1,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 21, no. 1 (1969): pp. 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.oep.a041109>.

⁴ Horvat, Branko (2000). "Social ownership". In Michie, Jonathan (ed.). *Reader's Guide to the Social Sciences*, (Vol.1 pp. 1515-1516). London and New York: Routledge.

The following two chapters analyze Chinese leaders' rhetoric chronologically, starting with Deng Xiaoping, using their own words, economic data, legal documents, and secondary sources. Broken into separate chapters, before and after the turn of the century, these two chapters will compare Chinese leaders' speeches with their own policies and actions throughout their respective presidencies. Due to the references to past presidents' ideology within each respective leaders' rhetoric, these two chapters will also compare these leaders' ideologies with each other.

The conclusion of this thesis will summarize the findings, highlighting the contradictions and evolutions of Chinese political ideology. These findings help understand the fluid political landscape of modern China and raise questions as to whether this changing fluid political ideology is enough to face the challenges China faces in the modern world, whether economic stagnation or economic, political, and social tensions arising from COVID-19 policies.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing Chinese Politics:

Definitions: What words and why

Chinese ideology and rhetoric prominently feature the terms socialism, Marxism, communism, and Maoism, so to understand Chinese rhetoric, an understanding of these terms is essential. It is important to keep in mind that definitions of these concepts are often debated and ambiguous, however, so first the commonly accepted definitions for these terms will be explained followed by the differences with the Chinese definitions.

Socialism

Socialism as a theory has many different interpretations depending on what area of study, region, and time period it was defined in, but as it began rooted in economics, an economic interpretation along with a modern ideological interpretation are both necessary. Lawrence H. White argues that the “defining features of a socialist economy” according to Ludwig von Mises and Oskar Lange⁵ were “the abolition of private property in the means of production (labor, land, raw materials, machines and factory buildings).” Effectively, no stream of benefits from a property can be privatized.

A more ideological definition by Branko Horvat is:

“Just as private ownership defines capitalism, social ownership defines socialism... First, every individual is entitled to an equal ownership share that earns an aliquot part of the total social dividend. Individuals in nonbusiness sectors are included, because they are also indispensable to social life, and are members of the same society. Second, in order to

⁵ Economists that were best known for their studying and analyzing of socialist and capitalist systems.

eliminate social hierarchy in the workplace, enterprises are run by those employed, and not by the representatives of private or state capital.”⁶

According to Horvat, socialism serves to create social ownership in a society where everyone is equalized, and the workers own the means of production.

Marxism

Socialism’s relationship with Marxism is not necessarily connected. In 1951, when the Socialist International⁷ was formed they agreed that:

“Socialism is an international movement which does not demand a rigid uniformity of approach. Whether socialists build their faith on Marxist or other methods of analyzing society, whether they are inspired by religious or humanitarian principles, they all strive for the same goal—a system of social justice, better living, freedom, and world peace”⁸

Marxism, as compared to socialism, can be simply defined as an economic and political theory that observes class relations with materialism, but Richard D. Wolff and Stephen A. Resnick’s definition of Marxism offers a little more in-depth analysis:

“In Marxian theory, the logic runs from an analysis of social relationships to the resulting patterns on individual behavior. The emphasis is on class as one economic relationship within the broader society. This reflects Marxism's view that the class division of society into exploiters versus exploited—those who obtain goods and services produced by others versus those who must produce for others—is unjust and has an undesirable influence upon every aspect of that broader society. Marxian economic theory also is intertwined with a philosophic position: that the individualism and free markets favored by the neoclassicals serve to hide and perpetuate class injustice.”⁹

⁶ Horvat, Branko (2000). "Social ownership". In Michie, Jonathan (ed.). *Reader's Guide to the Social Sciences*, (Vol.1 pp. 1515-1516). London and New York: Routledge. .

⁷ “The Socialist international is an association of political parties and Organizations which seek to establish democratic socialism.” – Article 1 of the “Statutes of the Socialist International.” It was formed in Frankfurt Germany in 1951 as a successor to the Labour and Socialist International, by different socialist labor and trade unions from London as a response to World-War II giving some social groups support in order to spread democratic socialism.

⁸ John C Cort, “Can Socialism be Distinguished from Marxism?,” *CrossCurrents* 29, no. 4 (1979): pp. 423-434.

⁹ Wolff, Richard; Resnick, Stephen (1987). *Economics: Marxian versus Neoclassical*. (p. 9) The Johns Hopkins University Press.

In short, Marxism for the purposes of this thesis is an ideology oriented against private ownership and free markets to protect those who would have been exploited otherwise.

Socialism and Marxism can often align with each other. However, socialism does not necessarily need to be born from Marxism and is very broad in its definition. Marxism, on the other hand, comes from the very specific ideas of materialism, exploitation, and class inequality that Karl Marx had.

Communism

Friedrich Engels defined communism as follows:

“Finally, when all capital, all production and all exchange is concentrated in the hands of the nation, then private property is abolished, money is superfluous, production is increased, and man is changed so much that even the last remnants of the old form of society can disappear.”¹⁰

Communism is the system in which the theory of Marxism takes place. In fact, Michael Burawoy argues that “[t]he three pillars of Marxism – objectivity, engagement, and imagination... lay the foundations of the Communist Manifesto...”¹¹ Communism exists to destroy the old capitalist society to create a stateless society that produces at its maximum possibility without any private ownership leaving the means of production within the workers.¹²

Chinese definitions

Using the commonly used definitions of Marxism, socialism, and communism could be misleading in the context of an analysis of Chinese politics and rhetoric, as the Chinese have their own views on Marxist, socialist, and communist policies. As such, these terms must be

¹⁰ Engels, Friedrich (2005) [1847]. "What will be the course of this revolution?" Section 18 in *Principles of Communism*. Translated by Sweezy, Paul.

¹¹ Michael Burawoy, "Marxism after Communism," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 2 (April 2000): pp. 151-174.

¹² This is the original idea of Communism Taken from Marxism, since then Soviet Communism and Eurocommunism have their own slight differences and individuality rooted in this definition.

defined through a Chinese lens as well. It is important to note that the translations of the foundational texts on communism, Marxism and socialism that Mao originally read could have added to the ambiguity in terminology. With respect to the analysis provided in this thesis, the translations provide for speeches by Deng Xiaoping and earlier leaders could also add to the ambiguity due to variations in translations.¹³ Mao Zedong's understanding of Marxism aligned closely with Marxist ideology but emphasized practicality with Marxist ideology:

“One is its [Marxism's] class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice, emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice.”¹⁴

This idea of practicality with ideology of socialism would seem to lead to Mao Zedong's famous “seeking truth from facts.” Mao Zedong believed that Marxism must also be adapted to fit the needs of a country with its core values and goals kept in mind.

In 1984 at a Central Committee plenum Chinese President Deng Xiaoping further explained the unclear distinction between socialism and Marxism as well as noting on communism:

“What is socialism and what is Marxism? We were not quite clear about this in the past. Marxism attaches utmost importance to developing the productive forces. We have said that socialism is the primary stage of communism and that at the advanced stage the principle of from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs will be applied. This calls for highly developed productive forces and an overwhelming abundance of material wealth ... Socialism means eliminating poverty. Pauperism is not socialism, still less communism.”¹⁵

¹³ The post-Deng Xiaoping speeches analyzed in this thesis are taken from the official Chinese Communist Party websites, so translation errors should be rarer.

¹⁴ Zedong, Mao, “On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing” transcript of speech delivered in a lecture at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College in Yen-an, China, July 1937

¹⁵ Deng, Xiaoping, “Building a Socialism with a Specifically Chinese Character” transcript of speech delivered at the Central Committee plenum, June 30, 1984 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1984/36.htm>

Deng Xiaoping does not explicitly define any of these terms, but through the usage of these terms in Deng Xiaoping's rhetoric, one can derive some implicit meaning. For example, Deng does not define communism but acknowledges its difference from Eurocommunism in a speech in 1980. He states "similarly, the correctness of Eurocommunism should not be judged by outsiders... it should be judged by the European parties and the peoples themselves..." implying that each view of communism may be unique to their nation.¹⁶

In the same speech Deng Xiaoping also makes a distinction between Chinese and Soviet Communism. He said, "The Chinese revolution was carried out not by adopting the model of the Russian October Revolution but by proceeding from the realities in China."¹⁷ The Chinese Communist Revolution succeeded through "integrating the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of China,"¹⁸ an example of "seeking truth from facts."¹⁹ Even in 1980 there was an ambiguity and difference in the usage of Marxism by Eurocommunists, Chinese Communists, and Soviets.

Deng Xiaoping believed Socialism is just the "primary stage" in reaching "the great goal of communism,"²⁰ and in this 1978 speech, he admitted that the distinction between Marxism and socialism were not clear in the past. Through his "definitions" of Marxism and socialism, it was clear for Deng Xiaoping that increasing the productive forces of China was necessary to

¹⁶ Deng, Xiaoping, "An Important Principle for Handling Relations Between Fraternal Parties" transcript of speech with some senior officials under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China., May 31, 1980, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1980/97.htm>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ The "facts" in this case being Marxist-Leninism, and the "truth" as always is the using of those facts within the current realities of China.

²⁰ Deng, Xiaoping, "Speech At the Opening Ceremony of the National Conference On Science" transcript of speech delivered at the National Conference on Science, March 18, 1978 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1978/30.htm>

reach the “advanced stage” of socialism. In the same speech Deng Xiaoping argues for welcoming of “foreign investment and advanced techniques” to accrue more capital and develop China. This contrasts with western socialist and Marxist ideology by encouraging the global market to enter China, as well as supporting a basic level of privatization. Moreover, Deng was aware that the prospect of foreign investment could undermine their socialism but responded by stating “foreign investment will doubtless serve as a major supplement in the building of socialism in our country”.²¹ It appears that to Deng it was a necessary evil to allow capital to grow to strengthen socialism within China.

Nonetheless, in the same speech Deng Xiaoping remained adamant that “... it is crucial for us to adhere to Marxism and socialism”, and he also centered two other concepts that remain throughout Chinese government rhetoric, “... to seek truth from facts...” and “...building socialism with Chinese characteristics...” Seeking truth from facts according to Deng Xiaoping means to “...adhere to Marxism and to integrate it with Chinese realities...” However, future Chinese government rhetoric, as this thesis will explore, broadens that idea resulting in the older ideology being adapted for modern China. As for building socialism with Chinese characteristics, that remained undefined by Deng Xiaoping.

This thesis will argue that the idea of using “with Chinese characteristics” remains in Chinese rhetoric to qualify a decision specific to the era contemporaneous with each leader. These Chinese leaders are effectively moving the goalposts of the definition of Marxism, socialism, and communism by “adapting” them to the current Chinese realities. This can often

²¹ Deng, Xiaoping, “Building a Socialism with a Specifically Chinese Character” transcript of speech delivered at the Central Committee plenum, June 30, 1984 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1984/36.htm>

contradict the western held notion of socialism (or Marxism) but also gives insight to the evolution of these ideologies in China.

Maoism, sometimes referred to as Mao Zedong Thought, fits neatly around all these theories. Maoism is most simply defined as “Chinese Marxism-Leninism, Chinese Bolshevism, and Chinese Communism.”²² In the words of Deng Xiaoping, Maoism is “... an ideology that integrates the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of China’s revolution and development.”²³ The heart of Maoism can be put into the four words that Mao Zedong emphasized: “seeking truth from facts.”²⁴ While Marxism, socialism, and communism all have definitions outside of China that hold their own very specific values, Maoism exists as a glue to connect all of them. Maoism is the verbal representation of the fluidity of Chinese political ideology. Due to Mao Zedong’s “seeking truth from facts,” Maoism can always be maintained because of how much introspection that statement asks for. Not only does Maoism represent a symbol of flexibility within Chinese political belief, but this understanding of both the Chinese and Western definitions of socialism, Marxism, and communism is relevant to see how flexible or even contradictory Chinese political thought can be.

²² Thomas Kampen, “Wang Jiaxiang, Mao Zedong and the ‘Triumph of Mao Zedong-Thought’ (1935–1945),” *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 4 (1989): pp. 705-727, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00010179>.

²³ Deng, Xiaoping, “Speech Delivered At An Enlarged Working Conference of the Party Central Committee” transcript of speech delivered at an enlarged working conference of the Party Central Committee., February 6, 1962, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1962/52.htm>

²⁴ This can mean that through Maoism, ideas strongly rooted in Marxism like historical materialism would either be disregarded or supported dependent on the “Chinese realities” at the time.

Historical Context: China in Revolution under Mao

Before reaching the Deng Xiaoping era politics in Chapter 2, a very brief overview of the time preceding him will help to show the political shift during his presidency as well as some contrast to the original tenets of communist China.

China suffered great losses and humiliation by western powers and Japan during the 19th century, which led to an overthrow of the Manchurian dynasty, and eventual Chinese rule by warlords.²⁵ Due to the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Marxism was popularized in China, and the Chinese Communist Party was created in 1921.²⁶ However, Chinese nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek opposed communism, and by the late 1920s, a civil war between the two groups erupted. By 1950 Mao Zedong, using a peasant rebellion and guerrilla warfare, defeated Chiang Kai-Shek and the nationalists, solidifying the Chinese Communist Party rule.²⁷

Toward the end of the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong had separated the party from only using Marxism as a guiding ideology and adopted Mao Zedong Thought. Mao concluded that “Marxism needed to be adapted to China’s specific conditions...”²⁸ In 1958 Mao Zedong began his “great leap forward” policy, the implementation of which “disrupted the rural economy grievously” and causing enormous suffering through the ensuing famine in 1961. This “great leap forward” began a downward spiral of the Chinese economy until the eventual reform and

²⁵ John E. Wills, “MAO ZEDONG,” in *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 335-359. ; S. K. Bhutani, “China under Mao Zedong,” *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 3, no. 1 (June 1994): pp. 35-38.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

opening of China by Deng Xiaoping.²⁹ The failure of the “great leap forward” led to criticism of Mao Zedong and support of other ideologies, particularly Soviet Communism. Moreover, this failure would divide the Chinese Communist Party between supporters of Mao Zedong Thought and everyone else. In 1965 this dissent culminated in the “Cultural Revolution”, in which Mao “...removed the existing structures of power, removed the existing leaders of the state and the party, educate[d] the younger generation in revolutionary values embodied in his Thought...”³⁰ The Cultural Revolution forcibly maintained Mao Zedong Thought in China by removing dissenters and forcing them into re-education camps. Chapter 2 examines China after the rise of Deng Xiaoping and preceding 2001, analyzing the speeches of Deng Xiaoping and how they presented the Chinese Communist Party’s evolving ideology.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Before 2001 (China Joining the WTO)

Using the definitions and historical context from Chapter 1, we can now begin to analyze Chinese political speeches and compare them to their original ideology. We can compare the branching ideologies arising from these political speeches with each other. This analysis will help deepen the understanding of the nuanced Chinese political system and help see its changing and conflicting nature. Chapters 2 and 3 provide an analysis of Chinese political thought since the 1980s, tracing the transformations of political and economic thought. This section begins with an analysis of several speeches by Deng Xiaoping before chronologically leading through his successors in Chinese government until modern day, Xi Jinping.

Until the end of the Cultural Revolution, China was in a “period of relative isolation,”³¹ and Mao’s successor Hua Guofeng “proved to be a brief interregnum” until 1978 when Deng Xiaoping came to power.³² During his leadership from 1978 to 1989, Deng Xiaoping began the shift from Maoist economic policies by using Mao’s own “seeking truth from facts,” the interpretation of an ideology during a current era. Due to Deng Xiaoping being focused on the development of Chinese economy and its industrialization, he argued for Chinese globalization and an opening of China to foreign investment:

“At present, it is necessary to develop the economy in many ways. For example, we can utilize foreign funds and technology, and overseas Chinese and foreign citizens of Chinese origin should be allowed to establish factories in China. In order to absorb foreign capital, we may either use compensatory trade or establish Sino-foreign joint ventures, beginning with enterprises where the turnover of capital is quick... We should

³¹ Bob Adamson, “Modernization under Deng Xiaoping,” in *China's English a History of English in Chinese Education* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), pp. 129-168.

³² Ibid.

allow former capitalist industrialists and businessmen to play a role, using those who are well-trained and appointing capable individuals as cadres.”³³

Under Deng Xiaoping, the first foreign investment law, the 1979 Joint Venture Law, was signed, and from 1979 to 1984 the growth of foreign ventures “increased almost exponentially, rising to 640 in 1984 alone.”³⁴ Not only did Deng Xiaoping begin the promotion of foreign investment through joint ventures, but he also allowed former capitalists to return to the Chinese economy to provide assistance, stating that “they should be allowed to set up factories or invest in tourism in order to earn foreign capital.”³⁵ In contrast to Maoist Marxist ideology, but consistent with his vision of opening China to foreign investment and developing its economy, Deng Xiaoping began supporting industrialization, globalization, and the creation of more enterprises, private or public, to increase Chinese capital. Additionally, Deng Xiaoping stated that “I assure you that, in any case, we should continue to give enterprises more decision-making power ... in the past, we exercised a too centralized management of the economy; this impeded economic development.”³⁶ Here, as well as promoting enterprises, Deng Xiaoping was arguing for a basic form of privatization by allowing these enterprises more autonomy and decentralizing the financial sector. This is of course, in direct contrast to the definitions of Marxism and economic socialism by allowing profit from privatization.

³³ Deng, Xiaoping, “We Should Make Use of Foreign Funds and Let Former Capitalist Industrialists and Businessmen Play Their Role In Developing the Economy” transcript of speech delivered a talk with Hu Juewen, Hu Zi’ang, Rong Yiren and other leaders of industrial and commercial circles, January 17, 1979, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1979/58.htm>

³⁴ Paul W Beamish and Hui Y Wang, “Investing in China via Joint Ventures,” *Management International Review* 29, no. 1 (1989): pp. 57-64.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Deng, Xiaoping, “Some Comments On Economic Work” transcript of speech delivered at a forum of the first secretaries of the provincial, municipal and autonomous regional committees of the Communist Party of China., October 4, 1979, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1979/82.htm>

Table 1:

Period	Economic Objective
Pre-1978	Planned economy based on the "law of exchange value"
1979-October 1984	Planned economy supplemented by market adjustments
October 1984-October 1987	Planned commodity economy
October 1987-June 1989	Economy with state-regulated market and market-regulated enterprises
June 1989-October 1992	Economy organically integrating a planned economy and market regulation
October 1992-	Socialist market economy

Source: Chen, Te-sheng. "China's Economic Development after Deng: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges."

American Journal of Chinese Studies 6, no. 1 (April 1999)³⁷: 55–72.

Te-sheng Chen in Table 1 illustrates the path Deng Xiaoping was planning on taking to reach a "socialist" market economy. One year prior to China's "planned commodity economy" in Table 1, China officially inaugurated its bid for membership in the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade, the GATT.³⁸ The GATT would eventually, in 1995, become the World Trade Organization, both being organizations designed to lower tariffs and to support trade liberalization.

In 1987, one year after China inaugurated its bid for the GATT, the American fast food chain, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), opened its first restaurant in Beijing.³⁹ The first McDonald's opened in Beijing in 1992, and by 1999, McDonald's had opened 235 restaurants in China.⁴⁰ Due to the attractive emerging Chinese market resulting from decisions by leadership

³⁷ This source dates from soon after Deng's presidency and is used to illustrate how China's economy had evolved until that point.

³⁸ Hongyi Harry Lai, "Behind China's World Trade Organization Agreement with the USA," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): pp. 237-255, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590120037054>.

³⁹ Qiaowei Shen and Ping Xiao, "McDonald's and KFC in China: Competitors or Companions?," *Marketing Science* 33, no. 2 (2014): pp. 287-307, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2013.0824>.

⁴⁰ James L. Watson, "China's Big Mac Attack," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2000): p. 120, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049734>.

concerning globalization and trade liberalization, both McDonald's and KFC invested in the Chinese market.⁴¹ It seems Deng Xiaoping was setting in motion using capitalism to build a “socialist” market economy by 1992 after he relinquished power, and his successors would continue to work towards achieving his goal. While a discussion of the effects that the collapse of the Soviet Union had on Chinese economic and political policies is beyond the scope of this thesis,⁴² it is worth noting that the accelerated opening of China's economy to foreign investment post-1989 was undoubtedly influenced by that collapse.⁴³

In 1997 President Jiang Zemin, Deng Xiaoping's successor, furthered Xiaoping's economic theory. Throughout his leadership from 1989 to 2002, Jiang Zemin added Deng Xiaoping's economic theory to the Chinese political canon by arguing that three decisions were necessary for the improvement of China:

“First, to seize the opportunity to accelerate development; second, to clarify that the goal of China's economic system reform is to establish a socialist market economic system; third, to establish the guiding position of Deng Xiaoping's theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the whole Party.”⁴⁴

Just like Marxist and Maoist thought were core ideologies in pushing socialism with Chinese characteristics, Jiang Zemin added Deng Xiaoping's economic theory to that progression.⁴⁵ Jiang Zemin maintained the development of the “...modern enterprise system...”

⁴¹ While this could be coincidence, I think it is important to see the strong correlation from the opening of China's markets.

⁴² Even in modern day Xi Jinping still uses Soviet failures as lessons in modern day, blaming the US for their fall and for reinforcing xenophobic ideology against the west.; Palmer, James. “What China Didn't Learn from the Collapse of the Soviet Union.” *Foreign Policy*, December 24, 2016. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/24/what-china-didnt-learn-from-the-collapse-of-the-soviet-union/>.

⁴³ Christopher Marsh, “Learning from Your Comrade's Mistakes: the Impact of the Soviet Past on China's Future,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, no. 3 (2003): pp. 259-272, [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X\(03\)00038-2](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(03)00038-2).

⁴⁴ Jiang, Zemin, “Push the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics into the 21st century”, transcript of speech delivered at the Fourteenth Central Committee, September 12, 1997.

⁴⁵ Deng and Jiang Zemin learned from the struggles of both Mao Zedong and the Soviet Union. Jiang Zemin continued implementing Deng's political theory in practice.

but spoke more explicitly on “... the reform of state-owned enterprises...”⁴⁶ Jiang Zemin stated that “... keeping public ownership in the dominant position ... is a basic economic system that we must always adhere to in the primary stage of socialism ... the nonpublic sector is an important component of our socialist market economy, and we should continue to encourage and guide their sound development”. This suggests that Jiang Zemin, like Deng Xiaoping, began to drift away from the standard definition of Marxism but remained in line with the Chinese definition of development and production. In fact, Jiang Zemin argued that Deng Xiaoping’s economic theory “profoundly reveals the essence of socialism and raises the understanding of socialism to a higher level [...] [a] new scientific level”, and that it persists on “observing the world from the broad perspective of Marxism.”⁴⁷ Jiang Zemin asserted that Deng Xiaoping allowed for contextualization of what socialism and Marxism are, and that they, in action, are dependent on what is happening at the time and in the world. This contextualization is understandably efficient in helping with a changing political landscape, but often contradictory to the Chinese government’s original beliefs.

Shown in Figure 1, Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping stood behind their economic policies, and began the industrialization through increasing privatization and joint ventures with foreign enterprises that led to the rapid increase in growth of GDP in China. Pre-1978 China had only seen an annual growth of 6 percent a year, but post-1978 China grew at a rate of 9 percent to a peak of 13 percent. Furthermore, per capita income had quadrupled in the 15 years following the 1978 economic reforms.⁴⁸ This clear shift to economy-focused growth through industrialization shows a departure from the original tenets that Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin

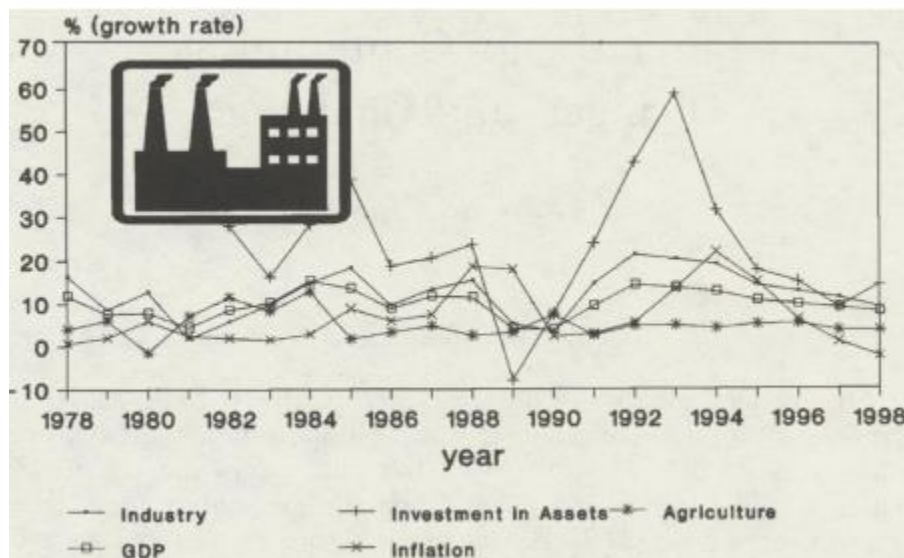
⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ International Monetary Fund, “Why Is China Growing so Fast?,” *Economic Issues*, 1997, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781557756411.051>.

both argue are the core of Chinese ideology. While industrialization does not directly contradict socialist or Marxist ideology, the expansion of the private sector due to this industrialization and expansion of the already growing market go against the original core tenets of socialism and Marxism. The exploitative nature of these economic policies in the eyes of Marxism and socialism through privatization and the free market seem to be ignored in favor of economic development. This shift in policy accompanied with action again calls into question the stringency of the Chinese political doctrine.

Figure 1: Economic Growth Trends in China, 1978-1998



Source: Chen, Te-sheng. "China's Economic Development after Deng: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges."

American Journal of Chinese Studies 6, no. 1 (April 1999)⁴⁹: 55–72.

At the 80th anniversary of the founding of the CPC on July 1st, 2001, Jiang Zemin added his own core tenet, the "Three Represents" which are that China "must always represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced

⁴⁹ The purpose of this figure is to show the effects specific to the era under Deng Xiaoping shown within the period itself.

culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.”⁵⁰

This offers a three-pronged approach in which the Chinese government advances productive forces, maintains Chinese culture, and listens to the interests of the people of China.

In this same speech, however, Jiang Zemin maintained that “Marxism is the fundamental guiding principle for the consolidation of the Party and the development of the country.” It is important to note that this speech was delivered to the Chinese people in relation to the topic of the current Chinese government. Jiang Zemin acknowledges the changing Chinese view of Marxism:

“The theory on labor and labor value in a capitalist society advanced by Marxist classical writers brings to light the operational features of the capitalist mode of production and its basic contradictions at that time. At present, we are putting in place a socialist market economy. But the conditions we are faced with are quite different from those the founders of Marxism were faced with and studied. In light of the new conditions, we should make a thorough study of the theory on labor and labor value in a socialist society with a view to achieving a better understanding of this theory.”

Rather than discrediting a previous ideology, Jiang Zemin qualifies it with the modern era and argues that context matters. This “putting in place” of a “socialist market” shows a transition begun by Deng Xiaoping establishing factories by using capitalist industrialists and developing more enterprises in China, contrasting the original Marxist Chinese policies. Moreover, he believes “Marxism is not a dogma.”⁵¹ In fact Jiang Zemin believes “in light of the new conditions” the labor theory in socialism is still not fully understood. Just like Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin puts emphasis on the fluidity of their own tenets.

In 2001, the same year as this speech, China joined the World Trade Organization, the WTO, which according to Jiang Zemin in a separate 2001 speech took “ten years of hard work”

⁵⁰ Jiang, Zemin, transcript of speech delivered at the Meeting Celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of CPC, July 1, 2001, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2001/Jul/15486.htm>

⁵¹ Ibid.

and “will herald a new stage for China’s opening up.”⁵² Some observers of the WTO accession have argued that China’s accession represents the most radical services reform by a country negotiated in the WTO to 2001.⁵³ This hard work included introducing four rounds of tariff reductions between the years of 1996 and 1999 “lowering its [China’s] tariff rate from 43% to 17%.”⁵⁴ China promised to further reduce tariffs to the average level of other developing countries. These lowering of tariff rates and attempts to globalize show the action behind the rhetoric of trade liberalization. Jiang Zemin believed trade liberalization was beneficial to the world economy:

“Against the backdrop of growing economic globalization, trade liberalization has attracted increasing attention. To put economic globalization and trade liberalization in their right perspective is of overarching importance to a healthy development of the global economy. They are generally conducive to world economic development.”⁵⁵

Jiang Zemin finalizing China’s WTO accession was a monumental step for the Chinese economy. By 2012 China had surpassed the US as the biggest trading nation (\$3.87 trillion in 2012), and exports in China went from US \$1.3 billion in January 1984 to US \$207.7 billion in December 2013.⁵⁶

⁵² Jiang, Zemin, transcript of speech delivered at APEC CEO Summit, October 18, 2001, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezw/eng/zt/zgdwzc/t150278.htm>

⁵³ Thomas Rumbaugh and Nicolas Blancher, “China: International Trade and WTO Accession,” (working paper International Monetary Fund, 2004), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2004/wp0436.pdf>

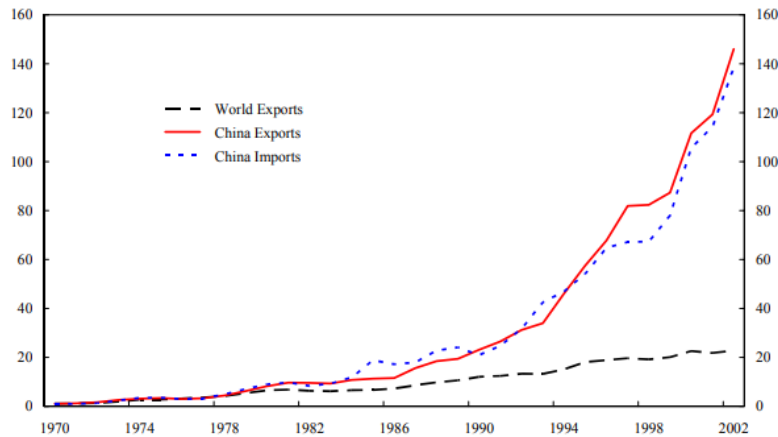
⁵⁴ Hongyi Harry Lai, “Behind China’s World Trade Organization Agreement with the USA,” *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): pp. 237-255, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590120037054>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Romi Jain, “China’s Compliance with the WTO: A Critical Examination,” *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 29, no. 1/2 (2016): pp. 57-84.

Figure: 2 Growth in Trade, 1970–2002

(Index, 1970=1)

Sources: IMF, *Direction of Trade Statistics*

Through Figure 2 we can see the correlation between China’s intentions, rhetoric, and policies and their actual physical imports and exports. The opening of China in 1978, the beginning of Chinese effort to join the GATT (later WTO) in 1986, and China’s accession to the WTO in 2001 all demonstrate visible increases in the opening of the China’s export market in line with the leaders’ rhetoric of the time. Chinese leaders not only said they would open China, but their growth (according to the IMF) supports their words.⁵⁷

Not only did Jiang Zemin argue that China is a “correct Marxist political party”,⁵⁸ but he also was working towards joining the GATT/WTO, an organization centering trade liberalization, and personally supported trade liberalization. In relation the original definition of Marxism, trade liberalization makes Jiang Zemin’s “correct Marxist political party” statement

⁵⁷ However, one could argue that actual implementation is the most important part of joining the WTO. The WTO is fully prepared to remove any of its members that break the rules of the organization, and China, just like any other member, is being monitored to make sure the implementation of its tariffs and policies are in compliance with the WTO’s rules. Thomas Rumbaugh and Nicolas Blancher, “China: International Trade and WTO Accession,”

⁵⁸ Jiang, Zemin, transcript of speech delivered at the Meeting Celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of CPC, July 1, 2001, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2001/Jul/15486.htm>

contradictory. However, the Chinese “correct Marxist political party” was now joining the WTO, a global trade liberalization organization, in order to increase capital for the future of China’s market economy. This direction China was heading heavily supports capitalist economic systems, a direct contradiction with its “Marxist” beliefs. The following chapter examines how this has continued and developed post-WTO accession.

Chapter 3: Post-2001 to Modern Day

After China's WTO accession, which furthered the prominence of trade liberalization in China, Long Yongtu, the Vice Minister of foreign trade and economic cooperation of the PRC at the time, agreed with Jiang Zemin's sentiment towards trade liberalization.⁵⁹ In a speech in 2005, Long Yongtu stated:

“Their (US businesspeople) contribution has made China what it is today. What is more important is the ideas you have given us to build a market economy, and we have followed your advice. I still remember the advice I got all these years from my American colleagues, including the senior colleagues from the US government. You told us that if you want to do a good job in creating a market economy, you have to advocate the spirit of entrepreneurship. You have to develop the private sector vigorously. You should give strong incentives to the people to make them work harder. You have to make painful decisions sometimes to restructure your economy, including phasing out those uncompetitive sectors of industry.”⁶⁰

Not only did he agree with Jiang Zemin regarding trade liberalization, but he was arguing that China is moving towards a market economy that resembles the US's economy, including the development of the private sector, and a focus on entrepreneurship. This again is in direct contradiction to Marxism and economic socialism. That said, it is important to keep in mind that this was from a speech given to an international audience at the fourth annual Stavros S. Niarchos lecture at the Institute for International Economics, not a speech for the Chinese population, unlike the decennial speeches of the founding of the CPC.

⁵⁹ “That is why I believe that China's economic development and its rise provide a huge market for the rest of the world. Providing the biggest market for the whole world could be China's biggest contribution this century.” Long, Yongtu, “China and the World Economy” transcript of speech delivered at Fourth Annual Stavros S. Niarchos Lecture at the Institute for International Economics, May 23, 2005, <https://www.pjie.com/commentary/speeches-papers/china-and-world-economy>

⁶⁰ Long, Yongtu, “China and the World Economy” transcript of speech delivered at Fourth Annual Stavros S. Niarchos Lecture at the Institute for International Economics, May 23, 2005, <https://www.pjie.com/commentary/speeches-papers/china-and-world-economy>

In 2011 at the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CPC, then President Hu Jintao, in office from 2002-2012, shared the same sentiment:

“We Chinese Communists believe that the basic tenets of Marxism are an irrefutable truth and that Marxism must be constantly enriched and developed as practice changes, and we never take Marxism as an empty, rigid, and stereotyped dogma. For Marxism, practice is the source of its theory, the basis for its development, and the criterion for testing its truth.”⁶¹

Hu Jintao maintained that Marxism is not a dogma, and that context matters for Marxist implementation. The Chinese government’s argument remained that Chinese Communism at its root is developed through Marxism. In the same speech Hu Jintao stated that China “established a socialist market economy and constantly improved it, made China fully open, and made world-renowned progress in the socialist modernization drive.” Also, Hu Jintao argued that “Mao Zedong Thought... represents the application and development of Marxism-Leninism in China.” As was discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, at its core, Marxism existed to attack private ownership and free markets to stop exploitation of the masses, and Mao Zedong Thought generally does align with this idea. While arguing that Marxism is not a dogma is supported,⁶² however, arguing that contemporary Chinese communists uphold the original tenets of Marxism is not supported. At its core, Marxism is opposed to free markets and privatization, and China was heading towards a “socialist market economy” with more private enterprises.

In this same speech, Hu Jintao’s left yet another addition to the Chinese political canon: the “Scientific Outlook on Development.” He believed that development was essential in China

⁶¹ Hu, Jintao, transcript of speech delivered At Chinese Communist Party 90th Anniversary Gathering, Xinhua, July 1, 2011, <https://china.usc.edu/hu-jintao-speech-chinese-communist-party-90th-anniversary-gathering-july-1-2011>

⁶² “In the communist countries, economic growth across the period and the emergence of deep divisions among these countries have likewise prompted much rethinking of Marxism” Wolff, Richard; Resnick, Stephen (1987). *Economics: Marxian versus Neoclassical*. (p. 30) The Johns Hopkins University Press.

and most importantly in contemporary China was “scientific development.” Hu Jintao additionally argued:

“The other theoretical achievement is the system of theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This is a scientific theoretical system consisting of Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development and other major strategic thoughts.”⁶³

Socialism with Chinese characteristics now holds Jiang Zemin, Deng Xiaoping, and Hu Jintao’s political theories within it. The Scientific Outlook on Development continued the evolution of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” by emphasizing “scientific development,” “putting people first,” and “harmonious society.”⁶⁴ More specifically, the harmonious socialist society that Hu advocates for features “democracy, the rule of law, equity, justice, sincerity, amity, and vitality.”⁶⁵ However, scholar Guoxin Xing argues that through Hu Jintao’s harmonious society “in a subtle way, the party has replaced socialist egalitarian principles of ‘fairness and equality’ with liberal capitalist values of ‘social equity and justice’,” and that “unlike Mao, who literally deprived everyone of all private property through land reform and nationalization to realize social equality, Hu’s discourses suggest that the party has acquiesced to the transformation of the Chinese economy into a capitalist one.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, Xing concludes that “the leadership (during Hu Jintao’s presidency) has followed a post-Marxist logic, with political subjects as a discursive formation, thus dismissing the class essentialism and detaching the class nature from the economic base.”⁶⁷ Hu Jintao effectively again moved further away from the original Marxist ideologies, and advocated under the guise of “scientific development” and “socialism with

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Guoxin Xing, “Hu Jintao's Political Thinking and Legitimacy Building: A Post-Marxist Perspective,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 4 (2009): pp. 213-226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927670903355196>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Chinese characteristics” for developing China’s market economy and changing the public’s ideology to conform with it. Hu Jintao was further attempting to change the public’s perception of what “socialism with Chinese characteristics” meant to advance his policies of market reform, building on each previous leaders’ ideology.

In 2015, President Xi Jinping, current president of China since 2012, continued to further this market reform and addressed the American public in a speech. He set out some of his goals for China’s economy, stating that:

“We (China) will stick to the direction of market economy reform and continue to introduce bold and result-oriented reform measures concerning the market, taxation, finance, investment and financing, pricing, opening up, and people’s livelihood... policies that attract foreign investment will not change, nor will its pledge to protect legitimate rights and interests of foreign investors in China, and to improve its services for foreign companies operating in China.”⁶⁸

Xi Jinping agreed with his predecessors on trade liberalization, but also stressed the importance of foreign investment in China. Six years later in 2021, at the 100th anniversary of the CPC, Xi Jinping, just like the presidents before, referenced his own addition to the Chinese political canon. He stated:

“On the journey ahead, we must continue to uphold Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development, and fully implement the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”⁶⁹

His statement continues the path wherein all previous leaders are allowed to be ideologically correct while giving current leaders the ability to change the ideology in ways that are beneficial to their own goals. This new Xi Jinping thought was implemented in 2017 at the 19th party

⁶⁸ Xi, Jinping, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Addresses the American Public” transcript of speech delivered at Seattle, WA , September 22, 2015, <https://www.ncuscr.org/event/chinese-president-xi-jinping-addresses-american-public/>

⁶⁹ Xi, Jinping, “CCP’s 100th anniversary” transcript of speech delivered at Beijing, China , July 1st, 2021

congress. It emphasizes a “[f]our-pronged comprehensive strategy: building a moderately prosperous society, deepening reform, governing the nation according to law, and tightening party discipline.”⁷⁰ These serve the purpose of furthering the building of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Since Xi recently removed presidential term limits, he holds considerably more power than previous presidents.⁷¹ This four-pronged approach seems to be a guise to allow Xi control over “economic development, social cohesion, law, and governance,”⁷² so while Xi Jinping may say he will uphold all these political doctrines, the only doctrine that really matters is his Xi Jinping thought.

This can be seen in the policies put in place under his presidency. In 2013, Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative.⁷³ This policy plans to connect China’s underdeveloped regions to Europe through Central Asia. In 2019, Xi Jinping amended the Law on Equity Joint Ventures and all other Joint Ventures under the new Foreign Investment Law to loosen restrictions on foreign ownership of corporations, allowing certain financial sectors (securities, futures, and life insurance) to be full open from a previous 51% to a present 100% foreign ownership.⁷⁴ Both efforts are designed to invite more foreign investment as well as to expand China’s global reach politically and economically. Xi Jinping is yet another president with a fluid understanding of China’s “Marxist” ideology. Not only is he expanding the global influence of China’s economy, but he is also further opening the private sector to foreign investors. Xi

⁷⁰ Garrick, John, and Yan Chang Bennett. “Xi Jinping Thought.” *China Perspectives* 2018, no. 1-2 (2018): 99–105. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7872>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Cai, Peter. “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative.” Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2017.

⁷⁴ The Previous FIL law was under multiple different laws, the Chinese- Foreign Equity Joint Venture Law, the Chinese- Foreign Cooperative Joint Venture Law and the Wholly Foreign Owned Enterprise Law.

Jinping is creating stream of profits and benefits from private property, which almost verbatim goes against the tenets of Marxism and socialism.

In the introduction to this thesis, a 2023 quote by H. E. Qin Gang was given in which he mentioned China moving towards becoming a “modern socialist country in all respects” using the new guiding principles set forth by Xi Jinping in the 20th CPC National Congress. However, what did H. E. Qin Gang mean by saying that? While building China into “a modern socialist country in all respects” seems like a very precise statement, what “socialist” means in this context is ambiguous. However, we can look at that 20th CPC National speech in October of 2022 by Xi Jinping to help illuminate what H.E. Qing Gang meant.

“With the courage to make theoretical explorations and innovations, our Party has, from an entirely new perspective, deepened its understanding of the laws that underlie governance by a communist party, the development of socialism, and the evolution of human society. It has achieved major theoretical innovations, which are encapsulated in the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The main elements of this theory are summarized in the 10 affirmations, the 14 commitments, and the 13 areas of achievement that were articulated at the 19th National Congress and the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Party Central Committee, all of which we must adhere to over the long term and continue to enrich and develop.”⁷⁵

In the more than 30 times that Xi Jinping said “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” during the 20th CPC National Congress, this quote was the only time in which a definition was given explaining what he meant. However, not only did Xi Jinping not define it, despite stating that it “has become more mature and well-defined,”⁷⁶ but he also simply referred back to the 19th CPC national congress for its definition.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Xi, Jinping, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects” transcript of a report delivered to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China at Beijing, China, October 16, 2022.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ It remains somewhat ambiguous on what he is actually defining, but it is probable that because in the 20th CPC national congress Xi Jinping said, “*this* theory provides the fundamental guidance for advancing the cause of our party,” and not “*these* theories,” he was referring to the development of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” which encompasses the further “new ideas”, “new thinking” and “new strategies” (emphasis added).

In the 19th CPC national congress, the 13 areas of achievement only elaborate on the success using “Socialism with Chinese characteristics.”⁷⁸ The 10 affirmations encapsulate the main points of the speech. It includes “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” but does not summarize the idea. The 14 commitments are the closest “summarization” to “Socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Xi Jinping in the 19th CPC national congress in fact argues that the 14 commitments “form the basic policy that underpins our endeavors to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the new era.”⁷⁹ This contradicts his statement in the 20th plenum arguing that the 10 points and 13 areas of achievement also summarize this theory. The 14 commitments hold the only tangible definitions, however:

1. Ensuring Party leadership over all work
2. Committing to a people centered approach
3. Continuing to a comprehensively deepened reform
4. Adopting a new vision for development
5. Seeing that the people run the country
6. Ensuring every dimension of governance is law-based
7. Upholding core socialist values
8. Ensuring and improving living standards through development
9. Ensuring harmony between human and nature
10. Pursuing a holistic approach to national security
11. Upholding absolute Party leadership over the people’s armed forces
12. Upholding the principle of “one country, two systems” and promoting national reunification
13. Promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind
14. Exercising full and rigorous governance over the Party⁸⁰

While these 14 points explicitly state what Xi Jinping is “underpinning” when saying “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”, one of these points in particular causes some additional confusion. Number 7 is “upholding core socialist values”, and Xi explains it means to “...uphold Marxism,

⁷⁸ Xi, Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” transcript of report delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017,

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

firm up and further build the ideal of communism and shared ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and nurture and practice core socialist values...”⁸¹ Xi Jinping, while explaining “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” in these 14 points, states that it not only involves upholding Marxism and “core socialist values”, but also upholds the ambiguous “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” If this is not circular reasoning, by arguing that the definition of socialism is upholding socialism, then Xi Jinping is arguing that there are in fact core socialist values that China upholds. This then would imply some dogmatic form of socialism China is aligning with, which remains undefined. If this is the western idea of socialism, then China seems to be in contradiction with it through Xi Jinping’s economic growth policies.

Even with Xi Jinping explaining his guidelines along with the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, much is left ambiguous. Furthermore, Xi Jinping is referring to policies during his presidency with these “series of new ideas, new thinking, and new strategies,”⁸² which involve expanding foreign investment and globalization of the Chinese markets. According to Xi Jinping himself, China also has the largest manufacturing sector in the world along with the largest foreign exchange reserves. Furthermore, China is working to build “a globally-oriented network of high-standard free trade areas and accelerated the development of pilot free trade zones and the Hainan Free Trade Port.”⁸³ Is this an adaptation to Marxism through the “Chinese context”, or is it simply not adhering to the foundation of Marxist values?

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Xi, Jinping, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects” transcript of a report delivered to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China at Beijing, China, October 16, 2022.

⁸³ Ibid.

Modern Chinese political ideology now has six different ideologies each from a previous leader in Chinese history. Each of these presidents maintained that they were guided by Marxism throughout, while qualifying it with an addition of their own theory. None of these presidents explicitly stated why their actions would not align with what they say is their ideology, but it is easy to see that in going against traditional Marxist ideology, China's economic growth has exploded. It appears that these leaders are merely using the façade of these political ideologies (Marxism, Maoism, socialism, and communism) to continue the legacy of the founding of Communist China with its roots in Karl Marx and Mao Zedong. To not discredit a previous leader, these shifting ideologies just keep being added to the Chinese political canon, despite the new qualifications contradicting the originally accepted core tenets of Marxism. This demonstrates the evolution of Chinese political ideology, which has slowly led to the trade liberalization and enterprise privatization of China. While Marxism is a broad ideology and capable of changing, in China, Marxism has morphed into something losing its original meaning. Marxism inherently exists as an antithesis to capitalism, with a goal of ending the alienation of the proletariat by abolishing private property. Xi Jinping directly goes against that idea by creating and reinforcing systems of private property and liberalizing trade. Presented with this overwhelming evidence, it seems that for Chinese leadership to claim that China is following the core tenets of Marxism is a pretense.

Chapter 4: Why does this matter?

China’s status as an economic world superpower is unlikely to change anytime soon.

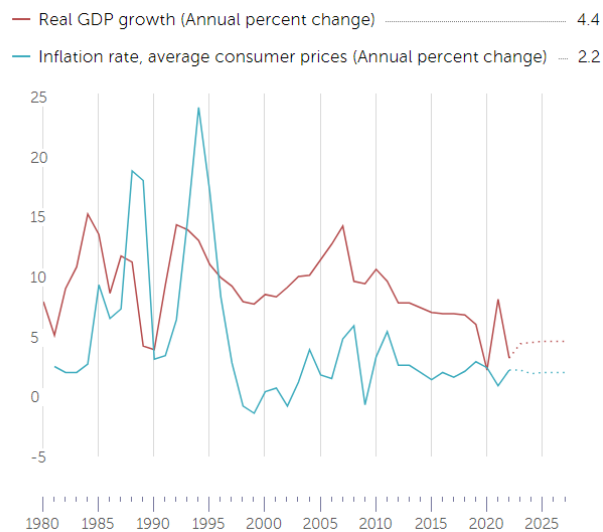
Figures 2 and 3 show that China’s economy is projected to continue to grow in the coming years.

Figure 3: China GDP per capita 1980-2027



Source: International Financial Statistics. (2023). GDP per capita, current prices: China 1980-2027 [Data set]. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org>

Figure 4: China Real GDP growth vs Inflation rate



Source: International Financial Statistics. (2023). China Real GDP growth vs Inflation rate: China 1980-2027 [Data set]. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org>

Due to China's economic prominence, it is beneficial to understand China's fluid political ideology so as to better understand its actions and future policies.⁸⁴

Contrary to its projected growth, currently (2023) China is experiencing some economic stagnation and political turmoil due to COVID-19. During 2020, China's GDP only grew by 2.3 percent, one of their worst years in recent history for economic growth.⁸⁵ China's method for containment for COVID-19 was through intense "lockdowns, wide-spread testing, and vaccination" exemplifying their "Zero-COVID policy."⁸⁶ Understanding China's definition of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" better helps us understand how China is rebounding from their stagnation due to COVID-19. China already began reopening its economy by March 2020, but due to the overall fall in demand in international trade,⁸⁷ China mainly focused on domestic economic activities in early 2020, the most relevant being private sector growth in contrast to its state-owned enterprises. Private enterprises increased production by 7 percent while State-owned enterprises were at 0.5 percent growth, and joint venture companies⁸⁸ grew by 4 percent.⁸⁹

Due to China's fluid political ideology and the idea of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," China can just adapt its political ideology as necessary to support its economy.

⁸⁴ As this thesis shows we can also understand their political ideology through their actions and policies This works bidirectionally.

⁸⁵ Alessia Amighini and Paolo Magri, *China after Covid-19: Economic Revival and Challenges to the World* (Milano: ISPI ; Ledizioni, 2021).

⁸⁶ Pitman B. Potter, "China and Covid-19 : Alienation and Its Discontents," ScholarSpace (Honolulu, HI : East-West Center, January 1, 2022), <https://hl-128-171-57-22.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/items/f5a52dfb-8c00-45ae-a818-10df2048269d>.

⁸⁷ This partial reopening coincided with other countries beginning to lockdown, so international trade was declining in general.

⁸⁸ Joint venture companies in this case could be foreign companies with Chinese Companies or private Chinese companies with the Chinese state.

⁸⁹ Alessia Amighini and Paolo Magri, *China after Covid-19: Economic Revival and Challenges to the World* (Milano: ISPI ; Ledizioni, 2021).

In this specific instance, China went against the commonly held Marxist idea of destroying privatization and by contrast increased the growth of privatization far more than growth of its own state-owned enterprises. When the economic incentives of more capitalist practices present themselves to a struggling China, these new “Chinese characteristics” help adapt socialism to China’s chosen economic practices.

Xi Jinping also used the guise of “socialism” to reinforce his authoritarian policies in 2021 due to COVID-19. Xi ensured that the strength of the CCP would be reinforced by COVID-19 due to the “social contract” between the people becoming even more crucial.⁹⁰ This “social contract,” according to Xi, requires the people to “trade rights for fast economic development.”⁹¹ Just like when Mao stated that “[d]espite the party’s newfound centrality... China’s purchasing power has grown considerably, contributing to stronger relations between state and society,”⁹² Xi Jinping argues that when “the party leads everything,” economic development gains momentum.⁹³ Xi Jinping is now not only arguing that authoritarian power is necessary for this “social contract” in a “socialist” nation, but he is also arguing that he should be allowed to proceed in any way he deems necessary for economic development, which leads to practices like privatization.⁹⁴

Xi Jinping is just the most recent leader in a lineage of modern Chinese presidents who have used their own variations on state ideology to help argue for whatever policy they want implemented through the use of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “Mao Zedong

⁹⁰ Alessia Amighini and Paolo Magri, *China after Covid-19: Economic Revival and Challenges to the World* (Milano: ISPI ; Ledizioni, 2021).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ This is not to say Xi Jinping is the only leader to use socialism as binding force for authoritarianism, but rather Xi Jinping with his own “socialism” is using the same logic as Mao Zedong in bolstering power through ideology even if it no longer looks like what Mao wanted.

Thought.” Getting closer to understanding what President Xi Jinping really means when he mentions the advancement of China allows one to better understand contemporary Chinese political ideology. This understanding could help us predict what China’s future policies may have in store for us. In one interpretation, the Chinese definition and evolution of socialism, Marxism, and communism through Maoism might simply reflect different approaches and conceptual understandings from the Western perspective on those terms. If, however, we take the Marxist and socialist definitions for what they originally meant, the pretense of Marxism and socialism that China is running under is in tension with its policies and its rhetoric. This ideological drift caused by this tension seems as if it will only be getting bigger as modern Chinese leaders adopt more capitalist leaning policies. China as a country is a unique case. China seems to not follow socialism, but also restricts their capitalist policies. Attempting to describe their political ideology proves to be difficult and elusive. There may not even be a word yet to accurately describe their system, and as China’s political and economic ideology continues to advance, so will the difficulty in describing their ideology.

Conclusion

Taking the evolution of the terms of socialism, Marxism, and Communism through the lens of Maoism into account, one can begin to understand what both H.E. Qin Gang and Xi Jinping meant when they argued that China is on the way to become a “modern socialist country in all respects.” Starting with Deng Xiaoping’s economic shift after the failure of Maoist policies (The Great Leap Forward), the idea of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been evolving with every president. Mao Zedong began the usage of the core tenets of Marxism and socialism within his own Mao Zedong Thought and enforced the idea of “seeking truth from facts” which adapted ideology to the problems each leader may face. These “seeking truth from facts” would create the ideology of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” and under president Deng Xiaoping “socialism with Chinese characteristics” would be used as a piece of evidence to support the privatization and opening up of China. This may seem to go against another core tenet Mao Zedong introduced, Marxism, but with the ambiguity of “Chinese characteristics”, Deng was allowed to be contrast one of China’s core tenets continuing the already ambiguous ideology Mao started with Mao Zedong Thought.

Jiang Zemin only then continued the economic shift that Deng Xiaoping started and also added to the growing Chinese political canon with his own “Three Represents”, “developing China’s productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of people in China.” This furthered the economic development begun by Deng Xiaoping through joining the WTO and focusing on economic globalization and trade liberalization. Jiang Zemin’s presidency represented yet another departure from the anti-trade liberalization of the commonly accepted Marxist values by adapting through “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Hu Jintao would then take Jiang Zemin's beliefs on the fluid nature of Marxism and build upon them. He maintained that "Marxism is not a dogma" and used that belief to implement his own theory, "The Scientific Outlook on Development." Through this new addition Hu Jintao not only emphasized the development and opening of the market economy, but now also subtly changed the political rhetoric to align more with capitalist economic ideology.

Following this evolution of what "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and what Chinese "Marxism" is, we arrive at the most recent president, Xi Jinping. While he promises 2023 is beginning of China moving towards a "modern socialist country in all respects," his policies reflect the fluid representation of "socialist". In 2013, Xi Jinping began the Belt and Road Initiative, connecting China's underdeveloped regions to Europe through Asia allowing looser restrictions on trade between the countries involved. In 2019 Xi Jinping increased the incentive for foreign investment in China, loosening restrictions on privatization with foreign investors with the new Foreign Investment Law. In 2020 during the COVID-19 Pandemic, China began reopening to lessen the economic stagnation by specifically allowing private enterprises to grow more than any other venture, and China is currently working to build a network of free trade zones like the Hainan Free Trade Port. Loosening trade restrictions does not necessarily contrast with every definition of socialism, but privatization seems to directly goes against the tenets of socialism and Marxism. Again, this either shows the evolution of Chinese socialism and Marxism, or it seems that China is operating under a pretense of these ideologies.

Regardless of what the reality may be, Chinese political ideology, namely their beliefs in socialism, Marxism, and Communism, differ than what is commonly accepted. They continue to be in support of privatization and free trade beginning with Deng Xiaoping lasting until modern day with Xi Jinping. Under the pretense of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" Chinese

political ideology seems to be forever in flux. Socialism itself is defined differently amongst different scholars, and these “Chinese characteristics” only add to the ambiguity. Attempting to understand where this ideology lies will help see the why in Chinese political ideology, and it will also help us see how China will navigate the current political landscape.

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