

The innovation of Marxism in China

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CHINA'S RISE TO BECOME THE LARGEST economic and trading nation is well known - but one systemic fact is usually overlooked: Chinese globalization is completely without the military accompaniment practiced by the leading capitalist state, the USA, with its more than 800 military bases on all continents in 80 countries, combined with global military presences, maneuvers, (proxy) wars, regime changes and US-led alliances such as NATO.

Marxism, which was developed in China, is also unknown in the West. However, there is now

a thick book on the subject in English: *Innovative Marxist School in China*. The book is not only intended to make "Marxism with Chinese characteristics" known, but also invites a worldwide exchange. The book is itself a medium for such an exchange: around 50 authors from all continents report on and comment on the developments and current state of Marxism in the People's Republic.

The main focus is on the work of Professor Cheng Enfu and his staff. Cheng Enfu holds leading positions in China's academic world, for example in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS);



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he is also President of the World Association for Political Economy (WAPE): since 2006, it has organized annual international Marxism forums in China, but above all in other countries such as the USA, Brazil, South Africa, Japan, Mexico, India, Russia, France, Canada, Vietnam and once also in Germany (Berlin 2018); the next forum in August 2024 will take place in Athens/Greece.

Early international cooperation

Greek authors Roula Tsakalidou and Alexandros Dagkas report on the beginnings. The US philosopher Erwin Marquit was a member of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA). As a result, he was banned from practicing his profession in the USA and discriminated against because of his Jewish vote. Marquit founded the Marxist Educational Press (MEP) and the journal *Nature, Society and Thought* (NST) outside of the established universities and also outside of the Stalinist rigid CPUSA.

While the small CPUSA condemned developments in the People's Republic of China, which had opened up to the USA in the 1980s, as unsocialist and capitalist, Marquit was invited to the CASS in China together with a number of Greek Marxists. From 1991 onwards, joint conferences were organized, initially with no more than two dozen participants. Among them were the Marxists critical of Stalinism Domenico Losurdo (Italy) and Andras Gedö (Hungary). The conference in Wuhan in 1999 was entitled "Socialism in the 21st Century"; in Beijing in 2000, the title was "Marxist Philosophy in the 21st Century".

In Vietnam - largely destroyed by the USA, but now under socialist rule - the conference "Globalization and the Nation State" took place in 2003 in exchange with the Portuguese Communist Party under Alvaro Cunhal, with Marquit's NST and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. This was followed by conferences in China, organized by NYT with the Academy of Marxism, which Prof. Cheng Enfu had newly founded at CASS.

Laborious exit from previous doctrines

Chinese Marxists not only had to draw the consequences from the experience of the defeated, collapsed Soviet Union and find their way out of the doctrinal edifice of "Stalinism".

They have realized that the development and safeguarding of socialism and the prosperity of the population are only possible with the help of large-scale industrialization. The majority of the peasant masses, completely impoverished by 150 years of colonialism, had to be transferred to industry. Since the early 1980s, Western companies, initially mainly US corporations and US consultants, have been brought to China. Industrialization progressed, but at the same time the great country had the leading anti-communist enemy of the system in its midst, who spread new, typically capitalist injustices.

The initially few Marxists around Marquit and Cheng Enfu began to work on this: One of the findings was that "market economy" and "nation state" need not be opposites of socialism, on the contrary: there can or even must be a "socialist market economy", as a transition. However, contrary to vague talk of globalization, national sovereignty with a strong state is also fundamental. And: the class struggle continues, but under communist leadership, for example against corruption and insider trading, which are part of imported Western capitalism.

Criticism of US-led, imperialist globalization

Confronted with the activities of capitalist corporations from the USA, but also from Europe and the US protectorate of Taiwan, the Chinese Marxists, strengthened in number and with international cooperation, also confronted US neo-imperialism and its sub-imperialists.



The Chinese author Peggy Fuyet summarizes the results: US imperialism has three instruments of power: 1. hard power with a global military presence, NATO, etc.; 2. strong power with transnational corporations/banks, investors, World Bank, WTO, G7, etc.; 3. soft power with media, “culture”, foundations, etc.: They promote selfish individualism and “new values”, thus also weakening and dissolving trade unions and other human rights associations.

Western capitalism uses these instruments to wage all kinds of wars - with the military, trade sanctions, extortionate over-indebtedness, currency manipulation, disinformation, resource theft, regime changes

and via directly and indirectly commissioned third parties. In this way, the imperialists exploit not only their own working population, but even more so those in developing countries. From the EU, this is most directly practiced by France in Africa. In this way, declining imperialism creates extreme super-profits for its dwindling, but also reorganizing and rejuvenating capitalist minorities, becoming even more dangerous and brutal than before. Consequence: good work, development and peace can only be achieved in the struggle against imperialism.

This is why Chinese Marxists are also engaging with “postmodern” Western theories, including tho-

se with left-wing and socialist pretensions, which regard the analysis of imperialism as outdated - for example through “totalitarianism” narratives - and consequently criticize China as the new capitalism. This applies in particular to theorists such as Arendt, Foucault, Habermas, then Harvey, Negri/Hardt, Bobbio, Zizek and the “New Left”. The analyses of Domenico Losurdo, according to the Brazilian authors Diego Pautasso and Tiago Nogara, proved to be an important aid to criticism.

China became great through its own living hard work

The People’s Republic of China did not rise through the exploitation of foreign resources, nor through mass

outsourcing of low-wage supplies from poor countries - nor through Western “development aid”. Both national and international development followed a logic that ran counter to imperialism. China rose through its own hard work, combined with the establishment of its own production chains in an open but sovereign state.

Despite all the technical modernization of the initially simpler industry, living labour is the only source of value. Even the seemingly disembodied and material-free internet, digitalization and AI require an unprecedented amount of material, raw materials, energy for the production and operation of devices, for transatlantic cables and satellites, and also for huge storage farms - and in imperialism also hard physical low-wage work performed by the “invisible” in distant, poor regions.



Workers weld at an automobile manufacturing workshop in Qingzhou City, east China’s Shandong Province. Originally importing Western, capitalist-style industry, China today has the highest proportion of industrial labor among all national economies, especially compared to the United States (Photo: Wang Jilin/Xinhua, 2021).

This opened up the question: what is living labor, and which is necessary, which is unnecessary, which is even harmful?

This is probably the most important part of the book. In particular, the authors Roland Boer (Australia), Alan Freeman (Canada) and the two Frenchmen Jean-Claude Delaunay and Tony Andreani discuss the further development of Marx's theory of value. They refer in particular to the book *The Creation of Value by Living Labor* by Cheng Enfu, Wang Guijin and Zhu Kui.

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China initially imported Western, capitalist-style industry and today has by far the highest proportion of industrial labor of all national economies, especially compared to the USA. At the same time, however, this work has been regulated by the state in a completely different way than under imperialism, and has been and is being transformed in an emancipatory way that emphasizes work and value. This is a long-term process, with contradictions and new inequalities. Cheng & co-authors, for example, criticized temporary exaggerations in the "liberation of the productive forces".

The organization and innovation of industrial work in the direction of socialism necessarily includes work that does not traditionally and directly serve the production of material goods, including agricultural goods, but also their organization, administration, distribution and security. Ac-

ording to Cheng & co-authors, necessary living labor is therefore also performed by managers, researchers, doctors, nurses, drivers, teachers, salespeople, technicians, engineers, bankers, foresters, cultural workers and also those employed by the state, authorities, political parties, the military - as well as private owners. Marx did not know "services" - China has 14 service groups.

The difference to a capitalist state is that all work is evaluated according to its contribution to the common good, for the social product of prosperity. This is because economics, especially in Marxism, is political economy: state and civil organization and also military safeguarding of prosperity for all - if necessary by force as opposed to unnecessary or even harmful work such as private and secret self-enrichment and fraudulent lending.

Perspectives

For a long time, this "emancipatory economy" naturally focused initially on China. But the extremely fragmented, variously exploited and impoverished, but also partly privileged dependent workers in the US-led West with their mostly disoriented but growing dissatisfaction: How can they effectively reorganize themselves, nationally, globally, with the perspective of socialism? Alan Freeman from Canada asks this question. Even the more developed forms of organization of the "invisible" hundreds of millions of exploited people in the global production chains of Western digital, armaments, e-mobility, food and platform companies, particularly in India, is not yet an appropriate topic: there are still great opportunities for international scientific cooperation, including innovations, with a view to the whole world. 🌸