
THE HISTORY AND MEANING OF CHINESE COMMUNISM

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Consider the following excerpt from the reading and the questions listed below:

"The theory of "class" is the foundation of Chinese communism. The theory says that classes exist in society and that between "classes" there are "conflicts", which are resolved through "struggle"."

- Who are the new "classes" in Chinese society today?

"The close relationship [between the party and business] has helped the economic reform movement. The thing to watch out for is whether the intertwining relationship will help to produce greater efficiency, better governance, increased innovation, less corruption and more radical reforms OR NOT."

- What role does China see for foreign business as it continues its economic reform and domestic market development?
- How will China's acceptance and inclusion of foreign business and other influencers change going forward?

Two events provide us with a glimpse into the history and meaning of Chinese communism:

On 1 July, the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrated its 80th Birthday. The CPC is changing and is trying to find the language and the means to (a) align the change with socialist doctrine, and (b) assert party leadership and control.

On the same day, as Hong Kong had its 4th reunification party, the Chief Executive rehabilitated the leaders of the 1967 Riots, which brought to finality, a period of history that the aging leftists felt was justified.

1. Mao Zedong's Prophecy 1976

Not long before he died in 1976, Mao was reported to have said at his last meeting with CPC colleagues that: "I predict that full-scale capitalist restoration may appear in China. I think it will be bad then."

Lets trace the major events in China after Mao's death:

- Gang of Four arrested and tried (1976)

- Deng Xiaoping's Thought (1977) - "it doesn't matter what color the cat is as long as it catches mice". Mao believed it was more important to be "red" than right.
- Rise and Fall of Democracy Wall (1978-1979)
- Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (1980-1989) - "to get rich is glorious" and establishment of the SEZs.
- 4 June, Tiananmen (1989)
- Selling off state-owned enterprises (1997)
- Reunification with capitalist HKSAR (1997)
- Jiang Zemin called for CPC to accept private businessmen as members (2001)

2. The CPC - 1921 to Present

(a) Ideology

The 1st Party Congress attended by 13 people was held in a boat on a lake in Shanghai in 1921. In 1949, the CPC became China's ruling party. By 1953, CPC's stated goal was to achieve "socialism" i.e. total state control of the economy, and "communism" i.e. distribution according to needs. Capitalists were brought increasingly under state control.

The theory of "class" is the foundation of Chinese communism. The theory says that classes exist in society and that between "classes" there are "conflicts", which are resolved through "struggle". The CPC categorized society into 5 Red categories (proletariat) and 7 Black categories (class enemies):

- The Good Guys: poor peasants, workers, revolutionary soldiers, cadres, dependants of revolutionaries
- The Bad Guys : landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, bad elements, rightists, traitors, spies

(b) The Party

The CPC is a parallel machine to that of the government. There are some 65 million members or about 5% of the general population.

The Party Congress, where CPC members meet, elects a Central Committee (CC). The current one has about 200 members and was elected in 1997 at the last gathering. Party Congresses are held every 5 years. The next one will be the 16th and will be held in 2002.

The CC meets a couple of times a year. It elects the Polituro, which currently has 22 full members and 2 alternate members. Whilst the CC approves party and government policies, the Politburo decides them. The 7 members of the Politburo's Standing Committee represents the apex of political power in China.

(c) Ideological "Readjustment" 1997

At the last (15th) Party Congress in 1997, members endorsed privatization plans for China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This was described as a "strategic readjustment".

(d) Further Readjustment 2001 - "Three Represents" Theory (TRT)

Party Secretary, Jiang Zemin, has been promoting his 'THT', which calls for the CPC to represent (i) "the development trend of China's advanced productive forces"; (ii) "orientation of China's advanced culture"; and (iii) "the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people." This is a roundabout way of acknowledging change.

At the CPC's 80th Birthday Party in Beijing on 1 July, Jiang urged the party to accept private business as members who don't fit into the Good Guys class categories. His call reflects an on-going discussion within the CPC about the role of private business within Chinese socialist doctrine vs. the need for the CPC to adapt to the times so that China could become a global power.

Jiang said that China current economic situation presented "circumstances very different from those the founders of Marxism faced" and that material wealth should no longer be an indicator to determine whether someone is a Good Guy or a Bad Guy. He called on Chinese businessmen to be "loyal" to the CPC.

3. The Party and Business

Jiang's birthday speech showed:

(a) Growing importance of the private sector in China (20%+ of China's GDP), which the party cannot ignore.

(b) Harmonizing party policy with practice - businessmen were banned from joining the party soon after 4 June 1989. However, one survey showed that many private businessmen are already CPC members (40%+).

(c) Intertwining of party and business - businessmen join because party members have advantages e.g. better treatment from local officials, easier access to capital/information, wider networking opportunities.

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4. CPC in Hong Kong

Despite the fact that the CPC is the ruling party in China and it has 65 million members, the CPC is taboo in Hong Kong. That is unhelpful as it preserves a fiction. The CPC has always been active in Hong Kong and now that Hong Kong is a part of China, there should be no need for it to be an underground organization. The fact that it remains fiction does not mean it does not exist. If it were acknowledged, it does not mean it has to meddle.

But for now, no one wants to deal with it and Hong Kong continues to pretend the CPC is irrelevant here.

5. Going down memory lane - 1966 & 1967

The award by the SAR government of the Golden Bauhinai Medal, Hong Kong's highest post-colonial gong, to Yeung Kwong (who?), on 1 July sparked a controversy. Some accused the Chief Executive of rewriting history.

The 1966/1967 riots represented a political watershed for Hong Kong. They opened the eyes of the rulers to an urgent need for change. In the succeeding years, Hong Kong began a series of reform on labour rights, social services and education. In those days, Hong Kong was the quintessential sweatshop. Social conditions were abysmal for the majority. The underlying social grievances provided the climate for protest.

The 1967 riots had its origins in the Cultural Revolution on the Mainland. Chinese leftists often referred to "foreign imperialism" as an evil. As China went through the fervor of the Cultural Revolution, leftists in Hong Kong wanted to echo those sentiments by protesting against British colonialism. Activists initially organized labor disputes, which then escalated to work stoppages, and unfortunately violence and bombing, where 51 people died. Whatever initial sympathy there may have been for the leftist or trade union cause evaporated as the violence grew. The public supported government action to resolutely quell the riots.

6. Rehabilitation vs. Rewriting History

We now know that in September 1997, the Chief Executive invited the aging leftists who were leaders of the 1967 riots to tea. In 2001, one of them was awarded the GBM. From China's point of view, the leftists were patriots who could be forgiven for the deaths they caused. After all, revolution is not a tea party. Many of the aging leftists held key positions in the HK Federation of Trade Union, the traditional pro-Beijing union. Look at how many FTU members and affiliates are in LegCo today.

The 1967 riots is the one period in history that from the leftists' point of view needed to be rehabilitated before its heroes passed on - that has now been done.