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Current Government and Economic Tactics

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Abstract

The ascent of China is hard to dispute. The future of global stability and world order will likely be incumbent upon China's actions and involvement in foreign affairs. Although China enjoys economic prowess and global potency today, less than half a century ago, the nation was a poor, starving country failing to industrialize and reeling from destructive internal conflict. China's dramatic transformation is often attributed to its embrace of free market economics through the implementation of town and village enterprises, special economic zones, non-interventionist legislation, and eventually private business. However, the fact that China is still controlled by the communist party, the current economic emphasis on maintaining state-owned enterprises, and the relationship between the Chinese government and people reflect China's desire to achieve a collectivist society. Through a careful examination of economic, political, and historical perspectives, this paper will seek to prove that China is not solely a "capitalist" or "communist" country, but rather a country with a mixed economy that incorporates aspects of capitalism to achieve specific communist goals. Furthermore, the structure of China's economy and government reflect characteristics of Mao Zedong's rule from before the nation's evolution. While China has refashioned on the outside over the past half-century, China's fundamental values appear unchanged since the era of Mao.

Introduction

Over forty years ago, Mao Zedong's death marked the end of an economic catastrophe, and the beginning of China's transformation from a weak, developing nation into the global powerhouse it is today. The widespread belief is that Modern China's economic success has been despite the state, the economic reforms implemented by Mao's successors have enabled China to embrace capitalist values and the principle of a free-market economy. Although the leaders of China's Communist Party (CCP) succeeding Mao have sent China on a capitalist trajectory, famed reformers such as Deng Xiaoping and Zhu Rongji have done so under specific tenets of Maoism. CCP leaders have taken no interest in Western-style democracy, as China secretly remains a totalitarian state with a mixed economy in which capitalism is severely limited. Future party leaders saw that Maoism's ultimate goal to globally exercise Chinese nationalism could be achieved through a change of policy. Although the failure of Mao's policies paved the way for party leaders to reform government and economic regulations, the Chinese still state remains Maoist to some degree, especially in its pursuit to become a predominant global power, its government structure, security, and censorship. The use of Maoist strategies plays a key role in the Chinese state's incessant push for economic stability and total control over its people.

The Principles of Mao Zedong

When Mao Zedong came to power in 1949, China was a weak and divided nation amid a crisis. After the fall of the Qing and the end of the dynastic cycle, China entered into over 30 years of civil war, devastating the nation. Echoing the Italians and Germans after World War I, the Chinese people subjected themselves to authoritarianism in search of an end to their suffering. Mao rose as an autocratic leader, gaining popularity through his promise of a classless state. His ideology and methodology attempted to reunify the weary Chinese population and restore peace and order to a once prosperous and respected nation. Maoism, known by the Chinese people as 毛泽东思想 (Máozédōng sīxiǎng; Mao's thought), called for a full-blown cultural revolution in which the pillars of Chinese civilization had to be torn down and replaced. In retrospect, Mao's rule brought social chaos and economic catastrophe, leaving China in a worse state than before.

Mao had a clear vision: as proclaimed in a meeting with former US president Richard Nixon, Mao believed "the whole world should unite and defeat imperialism, revisionism, and all reactionaries, and

establish socialism." Mao Zedong wanted China to be at the forefront of a global revolution against domestic and international institutions of power. Mao was a nationalist, and his ultimate goal was to spread Chinese values across the world. Mao Zedong's vision coupled with his combative personality account for Maoism's emphasis on extreme nationalism. In order to spread his values and achieve global control, Mao first needed to become a stable and respected leader with absolute power over China. To achieve this, the Chinese state would have to control and manipulate the minds of its people. Maoism utilizes propaganda, school curriculums, and other tactics to influence the Chinese population. Mao's government exploited the Chinese people by limiting freedoms and suppressing ideas that threatened the image and stability of the government. Individuals deemed problematic were punished and re-educated, while individuals who blindly followed Mao and his vision were rewarded. Retaining an unassuming outward appearance was also essential for Mao to effectively exercise Chinese nationalism. Mao's China strove to maintain neutrality with opposing nations but proved willing to demonstrate "combativeness" when challenged.² One peculiar characteristic of Mao's philosophy is the tendency to implement unconventional, or even anti-Maoist strategies to achieve a goal or remedy a problem. For instance, Mao was anti-western and had an obsession with maintaining traditional values, but he planned to simplify the Chinese language to an alphabet in an attempt to increase the literacy rate for the cause of social equality.³ Mao Zedong's willingness to turn his back on his core beliefs to further his agenda reflects his ambition and commitment to his goal. Ultimately, Maoism is a form of authoritarian rule featuring properties of both communism and fascism. While developing his doctrine, Mao Zedong studied the accomplishments of authoritarian leaders that came before him, including Vladimir Lenin, Benito Mussolini, and Joseph Stalin.⁴ Groups outside China have identified as Maoist, most notably the Naxalites of India and the Nepalian rebel forces that attained control of the

¹ 'Mao Zedong Meets Richard Nixon, February 21, 1972, US-China Institute' (*China.usc.edu*, 2020), https://china.usc.edu/mao-zedong-meets-richard-nixon-february-21-1972, (accessed 23 December 2020).

² 'Maoism | Definition, Origins, History, & Facts' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maoism, (accessed 23 December 2020).

³ A. Lebrun 'On Chinese Writing: When Mao Reinvents Writing' (Svbtle, 2020), https://al3x.svbtle.com/on-chinese-writing-when-mao-reinvents-writing, (accessed 23 December 2020).

⁴ C. Huang "Communist' China Has Embraced Capitalism but Remains Leninist' (South China Morning Post, 2020), https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2119839/how-communist-china-has-embraced-capitalism-remains-leninist, (accessed 23 December 2020).

government in 2006. Both of these groups possessed communist beliefs and lead violent separatist movements to spread their values.⁵

Historians struggle to make sense of the chaos and conflict during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a period driven by the developing philosophy of Maoism. In general, Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution is interpreted as his attempt to eliminate his capitalist enemies and move forward with his communist agenda. The goal of this revolution was to reunify the Chinese people, regain control of the divided nation, and weed out Western, capitalist opponents.⁶ The Cultural Revolution was a direct response to the Great Famine Era, known by the Chinese people as the "Great Leap Forward." The "Great Leap Forward" was Mao's economic and social campaign that transformed China's economy from largely agricultural into a full-blown communist economy. In 1958, all private business was abolished in China, and the Chinese people were forced into state-sanctioned communes to work and produce crops for the government. During the great leap, we see Maoism's push for the establishment of socialism, as well as economic and social equality. The Cultural Revolution began in May of 1966, when a series of documents and notifications were issued, claiming that party revisionists were starting to create a dictatorship. Mao claimed that Chinese leadership was attempting to "rid of old evil habits." Maoism brought forth harsh, drastic changes to Chinese tradition and culture in the name of Chinese advancement. At the same time, state-owned agriculture could not produce enough food for the rapidly expanding Chinese population; in turn, a great famine struck the nation, killing millions. Trying to save their failing country, students and workers joined forces in rebellion. The Maoist Chinese authority demonstrated combativeness by promoting and funding violence across China. The disobedient were violently attacked, tortured, and stripped of all human rights. Freedom of speech was eliminated in the classroom and media. The Maoist government took action to control the minds and bodies of students by ordering their "reeducation" in the countryside. Through all of China's death and destruction, China attempted to reflect a positive image to the world, as if nothing alarming or abnormal was occurring within their borders. Mao proclaimed to the world that his

⁵ 'Maoism | Definition, Origins, History, & Facts'

⁶ A. Ramzy 'China's Cultural Revolution Explained (Published 2016)' (Nytimes.com, 2020) https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/world/asia/china-cultural-revolution-explainer.html (accessed 23 December 2020).

⁷ T. Phillips 'The Cultural Revolution: All You Need to Know About China's Political Convulsion' (the Guardian, 2020)

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion (accessed 23 December 2020).

people "loved him." He detained foreign journalists, one by the name of Anthony Grey, who attempted to reveal the truths about China in their writing. The violence and conflict of the revolutionary period ended in over one million deaths and the mass torture of the alleged "separatists" from the Chinese State. Historians tend to struggle with the impacts of Mao's disaster on the mindsets of future Chinese leaders. However, substantial evidence shows some of Mao's successors continued to rule with the goal of global domination. Aspects of Maoism, including limitation of freedoms, manipulation of citizens, and utilization of strategies that conflict with the state's principles, remain present in the Chinese state today.

Maoism in the Chinese Government

After the Cultural Revolution, Chinese leaders developed an obsession with stability, political control, and constant surveillance to prevent future disruptions to society. Instead of terminating old ways to prevent future failure, it seems that over the past 40 years, the Chinese government has utilized seemingly Maoist strategies to maintain stability. Contemporary China has exercised Maoism by creating a secretly totalitarian government structure granting absolute power to a single leader, suppressing freedoms and basic human rights, and implementing security programs to keep everyone in line.

The Chinese government is uniquely designed to grant power to China's Communist Party (CCP), helping the party achieve total control over its population. The structure of the Chinese state allows China's current Chairman, Xi Jinping, to rule with totalitarian authority. While Xi's official government title is Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the People's Republic of China, he also holds the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party of China. With these two titles, Xi heads both the People's Republic, the face of the Chinese state, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the institution that governs China behind the scenes. Within the Party, Xi sits at the core of seven powerful leaders that act as the politburo. These seven leaders often influence Xi, but Xi has complete authority over them and the eighteen other members of the CCP. China's General Secretary can apply his power throughout the six branches surrounding the politburo: The State Council, the Judiciary, the National Party Commission, the

⁸ T. Phillips 'The Cultural Revolution...'

⁹ A. Ramzy 'China's Cultural Revolution...'

¹⁰ South Post, 'How the Chinese Government Works | SCMP' (Multimedia.scmp.com, 2020) https://multimedia.scmp.com/widgets/china/govt-explainer/index.html (accessed 23 December 2020).

Military, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC), and the Supervision Committee. 11 Xi's power over the six branches affords him command over the military, and jurisdiction over the State Council, which serves as the executive government. This is not unusual or alarming; in fact, the president of the United States holds this kind of authority. However, Maoism is visible in the Secretary General's political control over the other four sectors. China's justice system is skewed to protect the ideals of the CCP; it has no rules to prevent cruel punishment or unfair sentences. The Chinese court system's 99.9 percent conviction rate demonstrates that trials are not free, fair, just, and equitable. Mao, a combative leader, made sure to weed out opponents and make examples of people who had done wrong. For instance, teachers that refused to follow Mao's protocol were beaten, humiliated, and driven to suicide. 12 This attribute from Mao's China is still in existence today. China's NPC, a legislative sector featuring 2300 delegates, is designed to create the illusion that the Party's laws are checked and voted on by representatives from across the nation. In reality, this branch has never vetoed one of the Party's laws, and the election of delegates is completely rigged. The Chinese state attempts to portray fairness and democracy, just as Mao attempted to keep a clean, external appearance during the Cultural Revolution era. China's CPPCC, also referred to as China's "House of Lords", has a purpose similar to that of the NPC. The CPPCC exists as a platform to keep old, retired government officials occupied so the party can continue to control and exploit them. Lastly, the Supervision Committee branch awards Xi Jinping and his politburo special power over all public institutions and employees. This jurisdiction has proved especially important in the party's efforts to achieve stability by suppressing freedom and eliminating threatening ideology.

With the help of modern technology, the CCP has developed systems to control the bodies and minds of the Chinese population from birth to death. This has been accomplished through advanced security monitoring, censoring free speech, standardized education of youth, and the emergence of a social credit system. Under Xi Jinping, the Chinese state has featured a great emphasis on security. Government spending on public security is as high as 92 percent in specific areas, compared to a high of 24 percent in certain regions of the United States. As Chinese technology continues to advance, so does government spending on security. The CCP monitors every Chinese citizen through a massive

¹¹ BBC News 'How China is Ruled' (News.bbc.co.uk, 2020)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/china_politics/government/html/1.stm (accessed 23 December 2020).

¹² T. Phillips, 'The Cultural Revolution...'

surveillance system called Skynet. Skynet combines phone and text tracking with 170 million security cameras across the country to keep a tab open on each citizen.¹³ Although this form of surveillance is an invasion of privacy and instills fear in many Chinese citizens, it assures a low crime rate. China ranks among the countries with the lowest crime rates, with a crime index rating of 36.7; this is significantly lower than the United States' rating of 46.73. Although it raises a moral question, Skynet helps achieve the goal of guaranteed peace and order. Achieving this goal was an important step in Mao's quest for stability and eventual global influence. The Chinese State also uses technology to eliminate views that are harmful to the CCP's reputation.¹⁴ A primary goal of the CCP is to suppress the freedoms of speech, press, and beliefs, keeping views unified. This is why the CCP requires the mandatory download of apps with the purchase of smartphones to cleanse all smartphones' potentially "subversive material". In China, state-owned media is not only heavily promoted, but it is also the only media fully and consistently accessible. All private media is heavily censored by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT). The SAPPRFT only allows certain accounts of instances and opinions to be available in the media; the accounts displayed attempt to only positively depict China. The censorship of media allows the Chinese government to use a political weapon in a Maoist fashion. For instance, when running a search for "Tiananmen Square" on Baidu, China's censored search browser, the only thing that comes up is a series of Yahoo best answers that compare the Tiananmen Square incident to the "Boston Massacre," claiming a mere five people were killed in total. On the contrary, a Google search will immediately bring the user to CNN and BBC world news articles that list death tolls as high as ten thousand. Mao emphasized terminating controversial viewpoints to maintain an unblemished appearance during his cultural revolution. Achieving a likeminded population is key to achieving power and respect across the world, and is an important tenet of Maoism. Mandatory apps and organizations like SAPPRFT demonstrate this Maoist presence in China today. In the same way that news and information are distorted in Chinese media, Chinese history, and current affairs are altered in China's education system. The CCP-controlled education system teaches youth to love the CCP, to hate Japan, and to refer to the "Great Famine" as the "Great Leap Forward". The CCP does not only have total control over education but also over all religious affairs in China. Churches in China

¹³ C. Chappell, 'Is China Still Communist' [online video], China Uncensored, 1 Jan 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6g_VcRUxfY (accessed 3 January 2021). ¹⁴ M. Clarke 'China's Hidden Totalitarianism' (The National Interest, 2020) https://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-hidden-totalitarianism-29992 (accessed 23 December 2020).

often feature pictures of Mao alongside their holy crosses. Mao is still regarded divinely, and so is much of his philosophy. Lastly, Maoist control over every Chinese citizen is ever present in China's social credit system. This ranking system assigns a social score to each Chinese citizen; the score is available for all employers and officials to see. Infractions to one's social score include bad driving, smoking in prohibited zones, sharing controversial ideas online, or even buying too many video games. Low scores often prevent workers from earning good jobs and even restrict people from buying train tickets, plane tickets, or even booking hotel rooms. The social credit system reinforces Mao's saying that "keeping trust is glorious and breaking trust is disgraceful." disgraceful."

Maoism in the Chinese Economy

The catastrophic economic and social conditions left behind by Mao Zedong put pressure on China's next leader, Deng Xiaoping, to take action and implement drastic changes. Popular narratives highlight Deng as a "revolutionary". He is remembered as a forward-minded leader "eager to adopt capitalist methods to stimulate economic growth and restore confidence in the party. Although popular opinion states that the Chinese state wanted to exterminate old ways and attempt to emulate a Westernized, capitalist nation, the methodical nature of the reforms along with the limits of capitalism in present-day China reveals this may not be the case.

Contrary to popular opinion, China's economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping did not directly result in economic growth or begin to fully integrate capitalism into Chinese society. Deng's reforms were put in place to reduce Mao's damage by working to eliminate famine and poverty. Permitting the reintegration of somewhat private businesses would allow people to become less dependent on failing State-owned enterprises (SOE). While Mao was in power, China adopted a planned economy, and all private business was eliminated. This was especially problematic because private business was prohibited just as China began

¹⁵ C. Chappell, 'Is China Still Communist?'

¹⁶ A. Ma, "China Has Started Ranking Citizens with a Creepy 'Social Credit' System – Here's What You Can Do Wrong, and the Embarrassing, Demeaning Ways They Can Punish You," *Business Insider* October 29, 2018,

https://www.businessinsider.com/china-social-credit-system-punishments-and-rewards-explained-2018-4 (accessed 3 January 2021)

¹⁷ F. Holmes, 'How China Went from Communist to Capitalist' Business Insider, 2020, https://www.businessinsider.com/how-china-went-from-communist-to-capitalist-2015-10 (accessed 23 December 2020).

to industrialize; as a result, industrialization was thwarted by the planned economy. Deng Xiaoping's solution was to incorporate very limited capitalism through the reintroduction of semi-private businesses in the form of TVEs (town and village enterprises). TVEs had no attachment to China's Communist Party but operated with collective ownership under the name of a town or village. Throughout the 1980s, TVEs came to coexist with SOEs and make up a substantial portion of China's economy. These initial steps helped reduce China's internal struggles and helped revive the ravaged nation. Deng Xiaoping also hoped to repair China's relationship with the rest of the world. Like Mao, Deng cared immensely about China's image and shared Mao's vision of attaining global power and recognition for China. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping set up four special economic zones (SEZ) to attract foreign business. These initial SEZs, set up along China's southeast coast, created the opportunity for foreign investors to trade freely without government intervention. These areas permitted market-driven economics and allowed for an accessible, profitable trade. 18 While Deng began to implement the SEZs, he also facilitated a historic accord between the Chinese government and America. This agreement reversed the decades of bad blood between China and the USA and positively impacted China's outward appearance. The implementation of town and village enterprises coupled with Deng's work to attract foreign investors ensured a brighter future for a previously devastated nation. Deng Xiaoping's reforms also fueled economic growth for years to come. Under Deng, agricultural output increased by 8.2 percent each year and average income increased by 6.6 percent, while food prices and the poverty rate were cut in half. However, with all this positive economic development, China under Deng Xiaoping saw only glimpses of heavily restricted capitalism in specific areas. As China developed a more mixed economy and progressed into the economic superpower it is today, the CCP continued to limit capitalism and shape the economy to accommodate socialism in a Maoist fashion.

China's gradual economic transformation took a big leap when Zhu Rongji, a Communist party leader during the 1990s, initiated a series of reforms viewed to be much more "radical" than those of Deng Xiaoping. Thu's reforms called for the liquidation of thousands of weak, struggling SOEs. Other SOEs were privatized or restructured.

¹⁸ L. Mack 'Special Economic Zones in China', ThoughtCo, 2020, https://www.thoughtco.com/chinas-special-economic-zones-sez-687417 (accessed 23 December 2020).

¹⁹ H. Fan, 'The Long March to The Mixed Economy in China | East Asia Forum,' East Asia Forum, 2020, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/02/09/the-long-march-to-the-mixed-economy-in-china/ (accessed 24 December 2020).

Zhu Rongii's reformation nearly ignited the transformation of China's economy into a free-market economy, but the CCP took measures to ensure the changing economy would continue to follow the principles of Mao. Although the number of SOEs decreased drastically, the few that remain have grown large in size. Three main SOEs dominate the Chinese economy and together employ nearly one million people: PetroChina, Sinopec, and CNOOC. These companies are not nearly as efficient as private companies, and their return on investment (ROI) is not even comparable, yet they are still more profitable than private businesses in China because the government gives SOEs monopoly privileges and priority to work on larger projects.²⁰ PetroChina, Sinopec, and CNOOC help the CCP to control major industries including mining, energy, and transportation at the expense of innovative, progressive private companies. Not only do private companies in China have to compete with giant, government-run SOEs, but they also face many restrictions and limitations. While anyone can start a business in China, the truth is that most will not be able to succeed. Uncompromising rules and regulations make it nearly impossible for entrepreneurs without government connections to navigate obstacles and survive in the competitive Chinese economic front. For example, the CCP requires all companies with fifteen or more employees to have a CCP secretary on staff. Excluding a few exceptions, successful small and medium-sized businesses in China are closely linked with the local government, while the large companies and corporations are either state-owned (SOEs) or are connected with the Chinese state.²¹ China's communist party prevents the success of businesses that are not connected with the government so they can maintain control and manipulate the economy by choosing which companies will have the potential to prosper. Tencent, a private Chinese messaging and gaming company, suffered losses when it failed to comply with the ideals of the CCP. When the CCP stopped approving Tencent's new video games, the company faced a 200 billion dollar drop in its market capitalization. This closely resembles Mao's control over China's economy during his rule. Although free market and private business exist in present-day China, the government retains total control over the economy. Whether a business is state-owned or manipulated by the state, Mao's principle of economic control survives in China today. The Chinese state also handles international trade and foreign investments under the influence

²⁰ K. Amadeo, It's Good That China's Growth Is Slowing. Really.' The Balance, 2020, https://www.thebalance.com/china-s-economic-growth-cause-pros-cons-future-3305478 (accessed 24 December 2020).

²¹ 'Is China A Capitalist or Communist Country?' Future Learn, 2020, https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/politics-of-economics/0/steps/30823 accessed 24 December 2020.

of Maoism. The CCP demonstrates combativeness in its foreign trade strategy. For example, the communist party manipulates China's currency, the RMB, keeping it artificially low. This makes it harder for foreign businesses to compete in the Chinese market. China also requires special venture share partnerships with all foreign companies; these venture shares allow China to exploit foreign companies for their profits.

Conclusion

Aided by quick and efficient technological advancement, China is transforming into one of the world's most powerful economic forces. Although China is no longer working towards a classless state, the Chinese state is still set on achieving Mao's ultimate goal of international domination, global power, and respect. This starts with keeping China's internal affairs under control and achieving a like-minded Chinese population. Entrepreneurial values and Western consumerism in China mask the reality that most private businesses cannot succeed. Jack Ma and Robin Li, two very successful Chinese entrepreneurs, inspire people all over as they preach that anyone with passion and determination can succeed in China.²² The disclosed truth is both Ma and Li have had close ties with the CCP; neither would be where they are today without having had the Party's approval and support. If either were to lose the support of the Party, they would likely face severe consequences and see the destruction of their businesses. This facade does not only keep the Chinese population oblivious to the State's hidden limits on capitalism but also helps bolster China's respectable outward appearance. On the inside, the CCP continues to suppress those who do not think and believe by party standards. A horrific genocide of the Uyghur Chinese ethnic group is currently in full effect.²³ Over the years, their rights continue to diminish. Every day, Uyghurs in China are being sent to "reeducation" camps as the Chinese government pushes to eradicate their supposed "extremist" views. The torture of this ethnic group echoes the torture of enemies of the state under Mao's Regime. Chinese history is repeating itself. The Maoist remnants of modern China in government, everyday life, and economic activity are real, and must not be overlooked.

 ²² C. Clifford, 'Alibaba Billionaire Jack Ma: 'Almost Everybody Can Be Successful If You Really Try Hard' CNBC, 2020 https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/04/alibabas-jack-ma-almost-everyone-can-be-successful.html (accessed 24 December 2020).
 ²³ M. Clarke 'China's Hidden Totalitarianism'

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