

DAO: CHINA'S STYLE OF SOCIALISM

JAMES ALDRIN W. AGCAOILI

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to find the importance of Daoism in the creation of the ideology of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. The study will start with a background of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Daoism; then move on to explaining the relationship between Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and some principles of Daoism; which will lead the writer to analyze on how China was able to come up with its own way of Socialism. Furthermore, this paper will identify specific aspects of China's Socialism that is in line with Daoism. Lastly, the writer intends to argue the importance of Daoism as the baseline of China's Socialism.

Keywords: *Daoism, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Yin and Yang*

Dao: China's Style of Socialism

Praised as the cause behind China's prominence, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics has been China's political ideology ever since the opening of China during Deng Xiaoping's era. This political

ideology combines two contradicting ideologies: the ideology of socialism and the ideology of capitalism. In line with this, Daoism, one of the oldest philosophies in China, deals with the relationship of the opposites, wherein the balance between these opposites is crucial. With this, the purpose of this research is to find the importance of Daoism in the creation of the ideology of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

Background of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

During the era of Mao Zedong, China was a close traditional communist country that was poor and weak. It is a time when China was transitioning from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state to a socialist state. After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping's idea slowly emerged. Deng Xiaoping first paved a new direction for the Communist Party after Mao, by letting farmers and villagers sell their produce on the market. Deng supported free markets, foreign investments, and private ownership, which was not allowed during Mao's era. Although, Deng was criticized by some to be leaning on capitalism, he defended this idea to be a new form of socialism which he called, "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (Deng, 1984a). According to Deng (1984a), this new form of socialism will not undermine nor reject Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong's Thought, but will instead adapt socialism with the existing conditions in China (e.g. poverty). He also asserted that the reason for China's backwardness was due to its closed-door policy in an

open industrialized world, which became a hindrance to China's development. This turned out to be true since China was poor, and that development might not have happened if China had not opened its doors to the world. When China adapted this system, investors came in and took advantage of the cheap labor in China; with this, China slowly awakens from its deep sleep as it emerges to world power.

Deng Xiaoping made a breakthrough to China's development when he introduced the idea of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. According to Liu (2007), Socialism with Chinese Characteristics can be divided into four categories: (1) historical beginning, (2) economic mode, (3) development road, and (4) two-system relationship.

For its historical beginning, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is a type of socialism of an underdeveloped country that emerged in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Marxist theory explains that for socialism to arise there must be a well-developed capitalism before it. However, China was not a capitalist state before the establishment of the Communist Party of China but was a backward semi-feudal and semi-colonial state. Given this state, socialism without a well-developed capitalism before it, will face huge problems. China without the capitalist background must face the problems of industrialization, commercialization, and modernization which traditional socialism (Marxist) in itself cannot do. Therefore, China's socialist system is different from the

traditional Marxist socialism because of difference of development of China and the ideal Marxist socialist state (Liu, 2007).

The second category is the economic mode of Chinese socialism. According to Liu (2007), in Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, China combined public ownership with market economy. In the traditional socialist ideology, public ownership and market economy have long been against each other. Since a pure planned economy will not sustain development and setting public ownership against market economy will not be very productive, China combined both of them and established a socialist market economy. This concept of combination by China paved way to reaching its dreams to be rich together while maintaining social equality. However, combining these two opposite concepts had also created some conflict. So, what China did was rather than eliminating one with the other, they dealt with the conflicts by regulating both economic systems. In accordance to that, China adjusted public ownership to the regulation of market economy; while, they regulated the market economy in accordance to the essence of public ownership. This means that both should work together to be able to show development. As Liu (2007) said:

when the two aspects are contradictory to each other, the problem should not be dealt with by letting one side to be subordinated to the other side. On the contrary, the two sides should adapt, regulate and cooperate mutually—their combination should be realized through mutual help.

The third category is the development road of Chinese Socialism. Socialism with Chinese characteristics developed by uniting the opening of China to the outside world with the concepts of self-independence, equality, and mutual benefit. Before the opening of China, self-reliance became a basic guideline for China. China depended on itself and its capabilities to be able to develop and grow. However, according to Liu (2007), self-dependence does not mean that they would not open to the world; but, the concepts of self-reliance, self-independence, and opening to the world are “unanimous in essence.” It is because these concepts have the same aim to make China great and for it to reach its aspirations. Furthermore, China with its guideline of self-independence and self-reliance, will always strive for peaceful unity with the world while not taking initiative to plunder other countries.

The last category is the two-system relationship of Socialism and Capitalism in Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. In a traditional Marxist Socialist state, there is a big problem for states to handle Capitalism. On the other hand, due to the reforms and opening of China during Deng’s time, China was able to establish a peaceful co-existence between capitalism and socialism. Socialism with Chinese characteristics learned to utilize the benefit of capitalism towards development. However, this does not undermine or reject the socialist ideology, but rather combines it together to make a stable development towards success. For example, China today can be seen to have state-owned enterprises which reflect the socialist ideas; however, China utilizes foreign investments to accelerate the speed of

modernization while regulating them (Liu, 2007). With this, one can see that having the current Socialism with Chinese Characteristic was the only way for China to develop. With a socialist ideology at the foundation of the state and flexibility of Chinese leaders to answer some difficulties China is facing, it is inevitable to say that this concept will propel China towards global power.

The Philosophy of Daoism and the Concept of Yin and Yang

Daoism is a philosophy in China that has been in the country for thousands of years. In understanding Daoism, this paper will show three phases that must be understood: (1) Yang Zhu's Philosophy, (2) Lao Zi's Philosophy, and (3) Concept of Yin and Yang.

Yang Zhu was a Daoist hermit and was one of the earliest Daoists in China. Because Yang Zhu was a hermit, there is no actual direct reference or book to consecutively describe Yang Zhu's idea, but other writers and philosophers have written his ideas in their respective books. Yang Zhu's philosophy focuses in valuing one's life and protecting one's life. His focus was on avoiding harm on one's life (Fung, 1952). Therefore, Yang Zhu's philosophy can be summarized in two words: "Yang Sheng" (养生) and "Gui Ji" (贵己). For the first philosophy, *Yang Sheng* literally means to care for life or preserving one's life. Three ideas encompass the philosophy of *Yang Sheng* in *Huainanzi* (淮南子): (1) Keep one's nature intact or "全性", (2) Protecting one's authenticity or "保真", and (3) Never allow oneself to be tied to material things or "不以累形" (Zhao, 2014). The

idea of *Yang Sheng* then leads to the idea of *Guiji* (贵己). *Gui Ji* literally means valuing oneself. The idea of *Gui Ji* is to treasure one's physical body and allowing it to live a natural and happy way. Yang Zhu believed that life is precious, and we only have one chance to live it, so therefore, we must not allow it to be placed in danger. In the psychological level, Yang Zhu believed that a person's need for survival and pleasure is needed in understanding the *Ji* (己) or self. Therefore, to please one's physical body, to satisfy one's essential bodily and mental desires, and to keep one's emotions and feelings in a happy and wellbeing condition, are also essential for Yang Zhu's concept of *Guiji*. For Yang Zhu, to find individual's internal self or one's own nature is necessary. As a living being, everybody has one's own sense, one's own thinking mode, and one's own special physical form, and all these are connected to one's internal nature (Zhao, 2014).

The second phase of Daoism is Lao Zi's philosophy. The first idea of Lao Zi in his book *Dao De Jing* is the idea of the Dao. Dao (道) is the great principle where all things are brought into being. It is an all-embracing principle where all things are produced. The action of Dao is the action of all things, and at the same time, Dao enables all things to be all things. Further, according to Lao Zi, Dao is both being and non-being. It is a being because it is what brought the whole universe into being, at the same time, it is non-being it is not an object. Therefore, we can understand that Non-Being refers to its essence and Being refers to its function (Fung, 1952). The idea of the

Dao is that it is the natural way. The second idea of Lao Zi is the idea of De (德). De is the Dao dwelling in the objects. It simply means De is what objects obtain from Dao and become what they are (Fung, 1952).

Furthermore, Lao Zi's philosophy also shows what every person must do to be able to live and live according to the way of the Dao. One of the important philosophies on how to live is always doing the opposite, as reversing is the movement of the Dao (Fung, 1948). In the Dao De Jing, Lao Zi wrote: "Therefore, the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place (Legge, 1891)." Further Lao Zi wrote:

The sage is free from self-display, and therefore he shines; from self-assertion, and therefore he is distinguished; from self-boasting, and therefore his merit is acknowledged; from self-complacency, and therefore he acquires superiority. It is because he does not contend therefore no one in the world can contend with him. (Legge, 1891)

From the passages of the Dao De Jing, one must start with the opposite to achieve their goal. Just as one wants to achieve something, one must start with the opposite; and if one wants to retain something, he must admit its opposite. Another philosophy on how to live by Lao Zi is knowing when to stop. In the Dao De Jing, Lao Zi wrote: "Greater cost comes with greater craving. Greater loss comes

with greater accumulation. He who knows what he needs will attract no dishonor. He who knows when to stop will come to no grief. Such people can have a lasting life (Legge, 1891).” This means that too much of something will give you something harmful rather than good. Doing something too much is worse than doing nothing at all. With this, Lao Zi applies the philosophy of Yang Zhu which is self-preservation (Fung, 1948).

The third phase to be understood is the concept of Yin and Yang. Although the Yin and Yang School was not started by the Daoists, it is an important concept for the development of Daoism. According to Cartwright (2018), the yin and yang principle is explaining that everything exists as inseparable and contrary opposites. Yin corresponds to darkness, passive, and feminine; on the other hand, Yang corresponds to light, active, and masculinity. In every Yin there is a Yang and, in every Yang, there is a Yin, which means that they are interdependent to each other as one cannot exist without the other. Further, Yin and Yang are two opposites that complement each other, and in achieving harmony, there must be correct balance between the two.

Daoism's Influence in China's Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

As shown in China's own style of Socialism, China follows a pragmatic approach in providing solutions to the problem faced when using a dogmatic approach of Socialism alone. A background

of Deng Xiaoping shows that he was influenced by Daoism. Deng grew up in a nurturing family, wherein his father was a leader of the Religion of Five Sons, a religion based on a blend of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism whose goal is to improve the behavior of people (Pye, 1993). Here, it can be concurred that Deng Xiaoping was influenced by Daoism because of his father. With this, Deng, with Daoism's influence, has made use of the proper balancing of both Stalinist socialism and Western social capitalism into China's political setting hence, coining the term, "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." With this idea in mind, one can see that Deng and his own way of socialism reflects some of the philosophy of Daoism and the concept of Yin and Yang.

As mentioned by Romar (2018), "Daoism is a communal philosophy as is socialism and communism." Socialism with Chinese Characteristics made use of these two opposite ideas: socialism and capitalism, constituting the idea of the Yin and Yang. With this, China during the reform, tried to harmonize the two contrasting ideas by accepting and understanding that the ideas of capitalism and socialism can go side by side to benefit and adapt to the environment of China. Before the idea of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Deng and his fellow reformers had a problem on how to lift China from poverty. With this, Deng sought the idea of continuing the modernization started by Mao and at the same time apply the use of Western capitalism to uplift the poor from poverty. As Deng (1984b) has said:

As more wealth is created for the state, personal income and collective benefits should also be increased somewhat. As far as the relatively small number of advanced people is concerned, it won't matter too much if we neglect the principle of more pay for more work and fail to stress individual material benefits. But when it comes to the masses, that approach can only be used for a short time -- it won't work in the long run. Revolutionary spirit is a treasure beyond price. Without it there would be no revolutionary action. But revolution takes place on the basis of the need for material benefit. It would be idealism to emphasize the spirit of sacrifice to the neglect of material benefit.

With the influence of Daoism, Deng started to open Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to experiment on applying market-economy in a socialist setting by allowing foreign investors to enter China, but at the same time the government can control the movement of these foreign investors (Romar, 2018). Further development of this is creating a socialist market economy, wherein the two opposite ideas of public ownership and market economy, though two conflicting ideas, are made to adjust and regulating both economic systems. This shows the influence of Lao Zi wherein he says that in order to achieve one's goal, one must admit some characteristics of the opposite. Further, China's Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, applies the idea of Lao Zi of knowing when to stop. In solving China's problem

of poverty, China did not completely add all of the ideas of capitalism to their political ideology, but China only admitted some of the principles of capitalism to their already existing socialism. Furthermore, China did not fully use only socialism to run their country but left some out like the state-owned enterprises. With this, China's pragmatic approach to things shows that they understand that other ideologies like capitalism provides guidance for China to develop. As with the influence of Daoism, China adopts the ideas that are helpful to their development, while the weaknesses of the ideas should be set aside as this will hinder development. Therefore, China knows that they must not fully adopt a dogmatic idea, but rather know when to stop adopting and only adopt what is needed or helpful to their local setting.

With this, China, with the influence of Daoism, was able to apply *Yang Sheng* and *Gui Ji*. China used the concepts of doing the opposite by admitting capitalism to fight off poverty and also balancing socialism with market economy through managing market shares and foreign access. Harmonizing the two concepts helps China not to fall because of poverty, while at the same time China balancing this with socialism helps in protecting their sovereignty. Furthermore, China limiting what they will adopt helps them see what is not right for their country and what is; therefore, screening the weaknesses of each ideas to avoid downfall. Therefore, it can be inferred that Daoism is important to the establishment of China's

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as most of the important philosophies are adopted in this ideology.

Conclusion

In summary, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is the ideology of China that helped them reach their place in the global arena today. Started by Deng Xiaoping, this ideology mixes the ideas of socialism and capitalism to cater to the needs of China's environment. However, looking at this ideology, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics can be seen to be greatly influenced by the philosophies of Daoism. From Yang Zhu's idea of *Yang Sheng* and *Gui Ji*, Lao Zi's philosophy on how to live, and the concepts of Yin and Yang, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics was adopted by China to preserve their country and develop to what they are now today.

References

- Cartwright, M. (2018, October 27). Yin and Yang. Retrieved from https://www.ancient.eu/Yin_and_Yang/
- Deng, X. (1984a, June 30). Excerpt from a talk with the Japanese delegation to the second session of the Council of Sino-Japanese Non-Governmental Persons. *People's Daily*. Retrieved from <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1220.html>

- Deng, X. (1984b). *Selected works of Deng Xiaoping Vol. 2* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.1/page/n33>
- Fung, Y. (1952). *History of Chinese philosophy vol.1* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.7259/page/n171>
- Fung, Y. (1948). *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.260423/page/n83>
- Legge, J. (1891). *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu. Retrieved from <https://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/taote.htm>
- Liu, J. (2007, October). What is socialism with Chinese Characteristics? [Docx]. Paris: Congrès Marx International V.
- Pye, L. W. (1993). An introductory profile: Deng Xiaoping and China's political culture. *The China Quarterly*, 135, 412-443. doi:10.1017/s0305741000013850
- Romar, E. J. (2018). Daoism as the philosophic foundation of Chinese economic reform: A conjecture. *Emerging Science Journal*, 2(4). doi:10.28991/esj-2018-01144
- Zhao, Y. (2014, March). Yang Zhu's "Guiji" Yangsheng and its modern relevance. *Philosophy Study* 4(3), 173-188. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/05a7/92c02aceb9cf656623cf1740e9a0a38f9fac.pdf>