

A Comparative Analysis of Sun Yat Sen Philosophy and Mao Zedong Thought

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Abstract

The years old feudal rule in China came to end by the virtue of the revolution of 1911. The incapability of the 'son of heaven (the emperor)', to protect the sovereignty of China from outsiders, the chain of unequal treaties and the brutal rule, led to the end of the old feudalistic dynasty. The emperor was forced to abdicate the throne on February 12, 1912 and republican form of government was established.

The young and old, educated and uneducated were united together with a consensual aim of showing the backdoor to the barbarian (Manchurian) dynasty inspired by the 'three principle of people- proposed by Dr Sun Yat Sen (also referred as 'the father of Republic of China'), the forerunner of Chinese revolution.

Although, the 1911 Revolution marked the end of feudalism, China could neither evolve into a stable and clean political system nor could it establish social equality in Chinese society. Corrupt and unequal system led to emergence of multiple thoughts in China among which most prevalent and later the idea that guided Chinese revolution was Communism. Mao Zedong, a classical Marxist was the pioneer of Chinese communism. Mao Zedong thought in its initial phase was influenced by the Hunan report of 1927 which is considered as the turning point in the history of CPC (Communist Party of China).

These two thoughts which are considered the blueprints that guided the transformation of China need to be analyzed.

Sun Yat Sen

Any revolution needs certain elements for it to be successful- a revolutionary idea and a revolutionary leader who can lead the masses; Dr Sun had both these elements¹. He revered how the barbarians² accepted and changed to the changing times whereas China 'the epitome of all other civilizations' was still living in the past. Thus, influenced by western ideology, he undertook task of transformation of China from a feudal society to a modern society influenced by the western thoughts but still sticking to its traditional roots. Accordingly, he sinified the thought which had the aspects of both west and traditional China, therefore proposing the political doctrine of the three principles of people. Dr Sun's revolutionary doctrine, the three principles of people (san min zhuyi) was a program designed by sun for the Salvation of China³.

Three Principles Of People

Dr Sun Yat Sen (1866-1925) put forward the doctrine of three principles of people for the first time in the declaration of Tong Meng Hui in 1905. Sun drew instances from the western political thought in the European countries and framed his doctrine. Sun attached particular importance to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address, "government of the people, by the people and for the people" for the formulation of his three principles. Nevertheless, he was also influenced from the national spirit and moral strength of the traditional Chinese culture. In his autobiography published in 1923, Sun portrayed his thought's formation as- "Among the various revolutionary ideas I hold, some are adapted from traditional Chinese thought; others are appropriated from theories and practices developed in Europe and still others' ire original insights grown out of my own critical reflections."⁴ Sun's failure to setup a democracy during the 1911 revolution, furthermore during the alliance of KMT with CPC (First united front) in 1922, he formally defined his three principles as a party ideology. In 1924 sun gave a series of 16 lectures delivered from 27 January to 24 August, in which he outlined his basic idea of Chinese revolution under principles of nationalism, democracy and

¹Ling Yu-long, (Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's Doctrine and Impact on the Modern World, *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–11.)

²all civilizations except Chinese/Han

³Ibid.

⁴Kuo Fu Ch'uan Chi, (The Collected Works of Sun Yat-Sen, revised edition Taipei: Chung-Kuo Kuomintang Central Executive Committee, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 181).

people's livelihood. The sequence of these principles was not accidental and the order seems to represent a set of priorities to be followed in building the Chinese state.⁵

Nationalism

Sun Yatsen was of the thought that if the Chinese race is to survive, it must adopt nationalism. "... If we now want to save China, if we wish to see the Chinese race survive forever, we must preach Nationalism."⁶

Initially the aim of the principle of nationalism was to oust the foreigners (including Qing) that had forcefully occupied China. However, with course of time, he incorporated another aspect that is unity and integrity in it as China was racially diverse nation. He wanted that all the inhabitants of China, irrespective of their racial affinity, should think themselves in terms of being Chinese rather than as Mongols, Manchus, Tartars or Tibetans. Stimulating Chinese patriotism and Liberation of China by the hands of the Chinese people was the main aim of this principle. As pointed out by Gottfried Karl Kindermann, Sun's nationalism transcended the limitations of self-centeredness and can be labeled a positive nationalism. The principle of nationalism is a theory of society, society being foundation of state where people are its constituents and beneficiaries.⁷ According to sun, first the society was to be restructured on familial patterns and then the individuals were to be educated in the doctrine of nationalism.

In making China a leading society (nation), Sun proposed three ideas namely:

- a) Returning to ancient Chinese morality
- b) Returning to ancient Chinese learning
- c) Adoption of western science, which could complete the regeneration process of China. (Linebarger 2012)

Sun articulated how China must learn from the mistakes of the west and not repeating them. China was to herself decide of what was right instead of blindly following the west. In 1923, Sun wrote that "nationalist thought is a heritage bequeathed to us by our ancestors which need not be imported from outside".

⁵Bedeski, Robert E. "The Concept of the State: Sun Yat-Sen and Mao Tse-Tung." *The China Quarterly*, no. 70, 1977, pp. 339.

⁶d'Elia translation, cited, p. 70

⁷ Ibid.

Democracy

Sun wanted to establish in China a government which would ensure popular control through electoral processes. He also emphasized that complete control should be exercised over government by four rights of democracy, which are universal suffrage, initiative, referendum and recall. Subsequently, these rights should be embodied in the constitution, which in turn would be based on the five divisions of power such as the legislative, executive, judiciary, the examination, and the control. Examination was made into a different department because it was a traditional institution in China but now officials were to be selected on their merit and capability.

Sun saw power as distinct from ability, believing that the one who has the power does not necessarily have the ability. Individual liberty must be sacrificed for the sake of a free nation. To Sun Yassin, the liberty of the nation and the power of the people were virtually identical. If the Chinese race gained its freedom, that freedom, exercised in an orderly manner, could mean only democracy.

People's Livelihood

The principle of people's livelihood also known as the principle of socialism refers to distributive justice- how economic benefits were to be divided equally within society.⁸ Sun laid emphasis on two things, such as equal distribution of land and the regulation or control of capital. China was predominantly an agrarian economy with the monopoly to landownership concentrated into the hands of some rich landlords. Sun wanted equal distribution of land for the ones who actually tilled the land. The process of redistribution had to be peaceful i.e., the landlords whose land was to be given for distribution were to be compensated accordingly. Sun was against the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of few (like landowners, merchants and capitalists) as there was the fear of class war or revolution. Sun developed a land policy in which there would be:

- a) Self-assessment of land value and reporting the same to the government.
- b) Imposition of land tax on the basis of reported value by the government.
- c) All the unaccounted increments of land value must go to the government, while any increase due to investments shall go to the owner.

⁸Bedeski, Robert E. "The Concept of the State: Sun Yat-Sen and Mao Tse-Tung." *The China Quarterly*, no. 70, 1977, pp. 339

- d) The revenue from taxation and unearned income was to be used for financing government enterprises.

Sun believed in the further development of agriculture and industry which would serve as key elements for nation building and further economic development.

China was highly influenced by Sun Yat Sen's philosophy of three principles. However, Sun died before actually implementing it while leaders like Mao Zedong claimed to carry the true essence of Sun's legacy.

Mao Zedong

Mao Zedong (1893-1796) being highly influenced by Marxist theory of class struggle and social transformation, changed the earlier character of communist movements and replacing the proletariat with peasant. As Mao said-"An agrarian revolution had to be carried out to eliminate the feudal exploitation of the peasant class by the landlord class."⁹Hence taking into account this theory, he concocted that the way for China to emerge socially and economically more powerful, the revolution (socialist revolution) had to be vested in the hands of the oppressed classes. Furthermore the oppressed classes i.e. peasants constituted almost 90% of Chinese population. The peasants of Hunan revolted in 1926 and this revolt has been reported by China in 1927. In his report explained how was setting itself free from the clutches of national bourgeoisie acknowledging needs of peasants.

Hunan report by Mao Zedong

Mao noted the growing political consciousness among the peasantry and believed that the only group in the countryside that has always put the bitterest fight is the poor peasants. Throughout the period of underground organization and that of open organization, it was they who fought, who organized, and who did the revolutionary work. (Mohanty 1978)

Peasants in Hunan province of China revolted against economical exploitation and patriarchy which was imposed by rich lawless landlords. Whoever came in the way of their destroying those 'local bullies'¹⁰ were to be done away with too. Everyone who opposed this setting up of new democratic order by the peasants was to be considered counterrevolutionary. Mao was

⁹ Serving the people with dialects, Peking: foreign language press,1972, pp. 19-25

¹⁰ As reported by Mao.

always of the belief that enemy had to be annihilated than to be negotiated with. Proper limits have to be exceeded in order to right a wrong, or else the wrong cannot be righted.¹¹ Thus he was also supportive of all the unlawful means employed by the peasant association to shut down the voices of the landlords. Reckoning it as 'it's necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area; otherwise, we could never suppress the activities of the counterrevolutionaries in the countryside or overthrow the authority of the gentry.'¹²

Peasants had organized themselves under the peasant associations. What's more, the places where the peasant associations were powerful, gambling, banditry and opium smoking had altogether vanished. Peasant schools were being built; roads constructed by the peasant associations.

Destroying the political authority was the foremost aim to destroying other systems of authority on the basis of which the life of the peasants was controlled i.e.

- a) The state system (political authority)
- b) The clan system (clan authority)
- c) The supernatural authority (religious authority)

Also there existed another system of authority exclusively for women i.e. 'the authority of husband'. Overthrowing this feudal patriarchal system is what the peasant has accomplished with political authority as reported by Mao. Subsequently all other system begins to totter on the basis of which feudal structures stand. But is politics the only controlling force? Even though it was first time that peasants had come in such force, challenging and destroying the class structures that had went on for centuries and yet it failed? The reason might be same as discussed by Jean Chesneaux- 'The peasant movement aimed to break the political and moral domination of the ruling class, as a preliminary to the destruction of feudal economic structure.'

Peasant associations were in control of all of the major affairs so as to attack the 'evil gentry' in every possible way they could. The foremost aim was smashing the political prestige of the landlord class; hence the economic struggle was kept secondary.

¹¹Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan, March 1927

¹²Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan, March 1927

Mao believed in the communist way of democracy where the power had to be vested in the hands of peasants. Hunan report guided Mao for the 'so called rule of peasants' and creating a socially equal society.

Approaches

Taking sun's three principles as basis for comparison, following points can be noted-

a) Nationalism: Unification of the racially diverse nation for the overthrow of the imperialistic powers was the main aim of the principle of nationalism, countering the factors like blood-ties, language, religion and customs of various people. Sun wanted the consolidation of the deep-rooted sentiment prevailing in the family and clan into a powerful national spirit. Subsequently disregarding the feeling of localism and factionalism. Sun emphasized on going back to the traditional Chinese roots, Chinese morality of filial piety, contrary to what was happening in Hunan. Peasants in Hunan had organized themselves against the landlord class, inflicting blows to the gentry class which were against the unifying spirit of nationalism.

b) Democracy: Sun wanted the complete control over government and division of power among different heads such as the legislative, executive, judiciary, the examination, and the control. Sun had divided people in confusion frame as leaders, those who would interpret the leaders and those who would follow. So the peasants were to be put into which category of people? As mentioned earlier, Sun saw power different from ability; those who had power don't necessarily have the power. He pointed out that people although had the sovereign power (in the form of recall) they didn't have the ability to run the administrative machinery. Contrary to which, In Hunan, the peasant associations had taken complete power; even going as far as executing some of the worst ones as mentioned in the Hunan report.

c) People's livelihood: Sun's principle of people's livelihood was aimed at providing social and economic equality to all. Peasantry in Hunan did inflict some major blows to the authority system guiding the life of peasantry in China as mentioned earlier but economically, the peasants were still poor and landless. Social and political suppression of the landlords in Hunan could be seen but there were huge private landholders which this principle was firmly against.

Conclusion

Revolution leads to transformation, but that transformation needs the alignment with theory and practice which was not the case with the two blueprints. There was a huge disjunct between theory and practice. Sun Yat Sen suggested using his Principles to establish ultimate peace, freedom, and equality in the country. He devoted all efforts throughout his whole lifetime until his dying for a strong and prosperous China and the well-being of its people (Sen 1919). Sun wanted peaceful transition of power to government whereas Mao believed in the violent overthrow of the classes (peasant and landlord class). Mao's idea of class alliance came from grassroots' level i.e., emerging from peasants but Sun's was from above to below i.e., government/state. Sun wanted the alliance of the peasants for revolution, but Mao believed in active participation of peasant in revolutionary struggle. Mao liberated China by first being inspired by rural revolution and then by leading one and Sun created a framework by which the revolutionary masses were bound together i.e., the spirit of nationalism.

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