Internationalism and Cosmopolitanism: A Re-study on the Reasons for Chinese Intellectuals' Acceptance of Marxism

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Abstract. The paper puts forward the important reason why Chinese intellectuals accepted Marxism. After the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union exported revolution to China on the international principle. Both the internationalism and the cosmopolitanism of Chinese traditional culture embraced the same purpose for the benefit of all mankind. The consistency of supreme goals raised the strong interest of Chinese intellectuals in Russian revolution. In the words of internationalism, solving China's problems was included into the structure of world problems. It was really attractive for Chinese people who had suffered failures in the anti-imperialist struggle. The world significance of Russian Revolution was generally praised by Chinese advanced intellectuals, which manifested the important reason why they accepted Marxism.

Introduction

Why would the Chinese advanced intellectuals regard Marxism - a foreign culture - as the only way to save the nation and would learn from Russia after the May Fourth Movement? This issue has been concerned by scholars for many years. Some stressed the internal reason of Chinese society, such as the growth if working class group and the influence of the New Culture Movement; some highlighted the influences from external world, such as the outbreak of the First World War and the impact of the October Revolution and so on. According to the historical dialectics, the internal cause is the basis and the external factor is the condition; the latter comes into play through the former. Then, how do these two factors interact and play their roles? By a search on the major newspapers and magazines of this period, we can clearly find that Chinese intellectuals showed great interests in the “international” color of the Russian Revolution and Marxism working for the well-being of all mankind. This interest is affected by two factors: on the one hand, Soviet output revolutions into China in the spirit of Internationalism; on the other hand, the “cosmopolitanism” of traditional culture is rooted in Chinese people. The strong resonance between the two factors made early intellectuals follow Marxism.

Russian Internationalism-Based "World Revolution" And Its Influences

In accordance with Marxism, the liberation of proletariat is the “international” career while the communist revolution needs global efforts. “This revolution should not only take place in one country but also in any civilized countries, at least happening in the
UK, USA, France and Germany simultaneously.”[1] Once the revolution breaks out, the capitalist world which has been globalized will collapse like Dominos. Therefore, Marx proposed the internationalism principle that works to gather all the proletarians of the world. Although Lenin made a breakthrough that revolutions occurred in many countries at the same time and realized the first victory of socialist revolution in Russia, he still persisted in the important internationalism. He firmly believed that the ultimate victory couldn't be achieved before the world revolution began. That being said, Russia was confronted with the biggest problem that international revolution must be awakened. That means the convention from the only national revolution to the world revolution.[2] He even states emphatically that either other countries which have relatively developed capitalism broke the revolution at once, or we have to perish.[3] Therefore, Lenin promoted the establishment of Comintern which helped the working class party in European countries to promote the world revolution. Since Lenin overestimated the development level of labor movement in European countries and underestimated the vitality of capitalism, most of these efforts came to nothing. However, Lenin discovered new opportunities from national liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries that have made much impact in imperialist power. He started to realize the relationship between imperialism and colonies. He even believed that the development of labor movement in capitalist countries failed to keep pace with Russia because European bourgeois cultivated many labour aristocracies with extra profits deprived of the colonies. Hence, Lenin decided to promote the national liberation movements of colonial and backward countries so as to shake the material foundation that imperialism depends on. He put forward the new slogan of internationalism that “works to gather all the proletarians of the world.” This enriched and developed the internationalism of Marxism. Based on this principle, Lenin and the Comintern began to set their sights on the East, especially China with a population of four million. They developed the strategy of national liberation movements and began the work arrangement for the output of revolution to China.

In 1919, Bultmann, the old Party member of Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), came to Tianjin and met with Li Dazhao. In April 1920, G.N. Vojtinsky, et al. detached by Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) arrived in China and met with the Li Dazhao, Chen Tu-hsiu and other advanced intellectuals. They introduced the situation of Russian October Revolution and what followed. Besides, they discussed Chinese social transformation issues with those Chinese intellectuals. With the help of G.N. Vojtinsky, Shanghai began to establish the Communist Party. The Communist International Executive Committee decided to establish the Communist International Far-east secretariat in 1921. In order to speed up the process of work in China, in August, Maring who was the secretary of Communist International Executive Committee and National and Colonial Issue Committee was appointed as the Communist International representative in China. In April 1921, Maring set out for China and got in touch with Li Da and Li Hanjun. He proposed to convene the National Party Congress to declare the establishment of the Party as soon as possible.

“The Russian October Revolution of 1917 sent Marxism-Leninism to us.” This popular saying of Mao Zedong vividly illustrated that Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) base on internationalism has made good results on the output of revolution in China. Such result was achieved because Chinese academic field has prepared the most suitable developmental environment for the idea of Marxism.
The Resonance Between “Cosmopolitanism” of Traditional Culture And Internationalism

There is a deep “world” sentiment and “cosmopolitanism” feeling in traditional Chinese culture. Affected by this, Chinese people take the world as the highest purpose in terms of politics, which is the so-called “to cultivate the moral self, regulate the family, maintain the state rightly and make all peaceful.” State and family are just two stages to achieve the highest purpose. In view of the Chinese traditional culture, the highest political goal is not merely for the interests of people in a certain region, but for the interests of all mankind. This happens to coincide with the internationality of Communism.

The trend of nationalism began to pop due to the national crisis in modern China and the introduction of western nationalism. The outbreak of WWI exposed the drawbacks of western civilization. Chinese academics field universally condemned the standpoint of nationalism in western culture. They regarded the national expansion as the major cause of war and advocated to return to the traditional culture. Cosmopolitanism became popular. Zhang Dongsun, Liang Qichao, Cai Yuanpei, anarchists and even the warlord Chen Jiongming all believe that the elimination of national boundaries is the only prescription to prevent the world war. [4] After the first World War, Russia being the first socialist country declared to destroy all the suffering in human society and endeavored to make benefits for humanity. This empathized with the “world” sentiment which is widely existed in Chinese intellectuals. Chinese advanced intellectuals have a strong interest in the international color of socialism. These people began to interpret the Soviet revolution and Marxism with the words of internationalism. They generally praised the world significance of the Soviet revolution and its contribution to the whole humanity. [5] At that time, people often write that socialism means the humanism and cosmopolitanism.

In 1920, Mao Zedong who is one of the Xinmin Institute founders talked about his understanding of Socialism in a letter: “most of our friends have a tendency to cosmopolitanism. We learned that most people own the disdainful attitude towards patriotism; most people loath things which only seek the private interests of countries and ignore all man's happiness; most people believe that he or she is a member of human race and are reluctant to belong to any country, any family, or any religion that is more complicated and makes people become its slave. This Cosmopolitanism is the doctrine of universal compatriots which is willing to benefit all mankind. That is also called socialism. All socialism are international, which require to get rid of any patriotic color.” [6] These words revealed some information: not only Mao Zedong himself considers socialism is cosmopolitanism; in his view, the majority of the people in Xinmin Institute members are inclined to cosmopolitanism. Li Dazhao also claimed in his article that we don't thank the Soviet government for their statement that return rights of China grabbed in the tsarist Russia; “we admire them just because they can show the spirit of humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism when the world is controlled by the powerful countries.” [7]

In the early stage, Chinese intellectuals in general are influenced by the western theory of Evolution. According to the idea of the survival of the fittest, the hope of anti-imperialist struggle victory is frail. At the moment, the international ideology called for the gathering of oppressed class to fight against the imperialism. This is an exciting news for those Chinese people who have suffered repeated failures in the war against aggression and are eager to find a way out. No wonder Li Dazhao wrote: “the Chinese working people suddenly heard the voice of October Revolution, such as
‘Overthrow the world capitalism’ and ‘Subvert the world imperialism’. These voices in our ears are very painful, serious and meaningful than anything else.’[8]

“Making all peaceful” reflects the responsibility for all mankind and such psychology is originally easy to resonate internationalism, especially when China's problems to be solved have been included into the structure of world problems. There is no doubt that internationalism is very appealing to the Chinese people who fell into an impasse. It is obvious that such attraction is the important reason of many people to accept the Marxism and choose the road of socialism.

Conclusions

Based on the above two reasons, early Chinese Communists easily accepted the theory of Lenin that called on the union of proletariat and the oppressed nations to fight against the imperialism and they regarded the Chinese revolution as part of the proletarian socialist revolution. Besides, they ascribed the problem of China to the aggression of imperialist and the oppression of international capital. Naturally, they took the attacking target towards the international capitalism explicitly. They make sure that China will truly become independent and people will be free again if international capital system is overturned. The Second National Congress of the Communist Party of China described the current world situation. “The world imperialists attack the proletariat across the world so as to restore their economy.” The suffering of Chinese people is caused by “the international capital imperialism” and “this cruel situation can never be destroyed unless the capitalist world organization is completely eradicated.” They call for “the association of proletarian to fight against this attack.”[9] This is, of course, affected by the revolution output by Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), which also revealed the attraction of internationalism under the sentiments of “making all peaceful”.

References