

On the Separation of Early Marxists from Anarchism

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Abstract: On the eve of the May 4th movement, early Marxists such as Duxiu Chen, Zedong Mao, Daiying Yun, Heseng Cai and Da Li did not fully contact and deeply understand the theory and basic principles of Marx's scientific socialism. They were unable to surpass anarchic communism and Utopian socialism and directly believe in Marx's scientific socialism. But in the complex international and domestic environment, they could distinguish anarchism with the spirit of practice in traditional Chinese culture, and finally became the believer and disseminator of Marxism, which is worthy of affirmation by later generations.

1. Introduction

Before the May 4th movement, bourgeois reformers, bourgeois revolutionaries, anarchists and social reformers introduced socialist theories into China. Most of them described socialist theories as humanitarianism and “prescriptions” for the treatment of injustice. The main types of ideology included Darwin's evolution theory, Rousseau's theory of natural rights, Bakunin and Kropotkin's anarchism, Lassalle's opportunism, Marx's scientific socialism, as well as the Utopian socialism put forward by Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. In the face of various thought patterns, receivers must discriminate them.

Zedong Mao's recollection reflects the inevitable process of young generation's acceptance and screening of all kinds of thoughts. “In recent years, China's general trend has been changing. Innovation and revolution theories are diversified. From ideology and literature to politics, religion and art, there is a general idea of changing the old pattern. Even the issue whether we still need the state, the family, the marriage and the private property becomes a question urgently need to be studied. What's more, the war in Europe aroused the Russian Revolution. The tide spread from the west to the East. Scholars of the National Peking University welcomed it at first, and then young people from all over the country responded to it.”^[1] It can be seen that early Marxists could not accurately distinguish socialism, Marxism and anarchism at the beginning.

2. Why Early Marxists Could Not Accurately Distinguish Non-Marxism Theories At the Beginning

2.1 The Distinction between Marxism and Anarchism Needs a Process

Marxism has to fight every step in its way of life. Even Leninism was formed after a long struggle with Bernstein revisionism, Russian economics, minorities, the Second International speculators and Kautsky. According to Arif Dirlik, “anarchism and socialism did not get a clear distinction until 1913 to 1914; anarchism and Marxism did not get a distinction until 1920s.”^[2]

Zedong Mao began to contact the socialist thought during the Revolution of 1911. On the eve of the 1911 Revolution, Mao just went to the capital of the province and entered the Changsha First Normal University from the Dongshan Higher Elementary School in Xiangxiang county. He read the article “discussing socialism” in *Xiangjiang Daily*. In the article, social reformers mixed thoughts in traditional Chinese culture, such as the Mohist thought of “universal love”, the Taoism thought of “above worldly considerations” and the Confucian thought of “great harmony” with the social ideal of equality and harmony in the modern West. Mao had read classical Chinese novels like *The Story of Fei Yue*, *The Water Margin*, *The Sui and Tang and Dynasties*, *Three Kingdoms* and *Journey to the West* in his youth, and was deeply influenced by the ideas of “equalizing”,

“serving the country with loyalty” as well as “ideal heaven” in these books. The socialism theory happens to have the same view with these ideas. Therefore, the young Zedong Mao was interested in social reformism. He said in a conversation with Edgar Snow, “among newspapers advocating revolution there was the *Xiangjiang Daily*, which discussed socialism. It was from there that I first learned the term of socialism. I also talked with other students and soldiers about socialism, which was really just reformism. I also read some pamphlets on socialism and its principles written by Kanghu Jiang. I wrote to several classmates to discuss this issue with enthusiasm.”^[3] Therefore, it is normal that Zedong Mao could not distinguish “socialism” from Kanghu Jiang's “anarchism”^[4] in 1911.

2.2 Various Doctrines Have Similar Connotations

At the beginning, early Marxists could not realize the essential difference between “exterminating the state” advocated by Marxism and “exterminating the state” advocated by anarchism. Many people believe that “early Marxists almost had a common understanding: Marxism was no different from anarchism in ideals; the difference was that Marxists had methods to achieve this goal, while anarchism was just a fantasy”.^[5] Zhongxia Deng thought, “the ultimate goals of communism and anarchism are the same. Communism includes the benefits of anarchism, while anarchism does not include the benefits of communism. Communism has the purpose, the steps, the means and the methods. On the contrary, anarchism has nothing but the most beautiful ideal purpose, which it regards as a pearl on the palm, a pattern painting in the picture and an embroidered garment.”^[6] On one hand, Da Li advocated that after abolishing the capitalist system, we should not enter the anarchic society directly, but should enter the transitional stage of the socialist society in which the state and currency were preserved. On the other hand, he recognized that the abolition of currency “is certainly feasible when the real anarchic communist society is realized”,^[7] and expressed the same idea that Marxism and anarchism shared the final goal.

2.3 Anarchism Was Partially Approved by Early Marxists

Duxiu Chen believed that Shengbai Qu did not advocate the absolute freedom and did not believe in “the Chinese anarchism. He opposes the individual anarchism, the nihilism and the non-resistance doctrine; he behaves like a pure youth, rather than the class of ‘inferior anarchists’”.^[8] Zedong Mao first came to Beijing from August 1918 to March 1919. He visited Duxiu Chen, Dazhao Li, Shi Hu and others, and also contacted Shengbai Qu. Qu believed in the anarchic communism of Kropotkin, opposed the individual anarchism which advocated the absolute freedom of individuals, and opposed the Russian “nihilist party” who blindly resorted to assassination. His opinion shared similarities with Zedong Mao's position: achieving the great unity of the people to carry out the “admonition movement” and “bloodless revolution” to the powerholder.^[9]

3. Early Marxists Distinguished Anarchism through the Spirit of Practice in Traditional Chinese Culture

The early Marxists' criticism of anarchism provides a model for later generations to guard against the historical nihilism and value nihilism derived from anarchism.

Zedong Mao realized the problems of anarchism because he always paid attention to practice and objected to dogmatism. According to Benjamin I. Schwartz, “when Mao began his political career, his ideological world could only be understood in specific historical conditions.”^[10] Not all ideas with theoretical logic can be transformed into the solution to China's practical problems. In 1920, he concluded, “in my opinion, all of absolute liberalism, anarchism and democratism are good in theory, but unfeasible in practice.”^[11]

Daiying Yun, like Zedong Mao, paid attention to practice, which promoted him to change from a typical anarchist to a Marxist. Daiying Yun said in a letter to Guangqi Wang in 1919, “I believe that as long as I force myself, rather than others to practice the truth of freedom, equality, fraternity, labor and mutual assistance, people around me will be moved and the society will be changed

naturally.”^[12] In the process of practicing anarchism, he realized the problems of anarchism and gradually turned to Marxism. According to Zhe Lu, “Daiying Yun and others attached great importance to practice and always tried their best to practice the plan they conceived. These programs, of course, could not be realized under the social conditions at that time. Therefore, these small groups constantly divided. After the repeated struggles in practice, some people gradually got rid of the shackles of anarchism and Utopian socialism, and went on the road of revolutionary Marxism step by step.”^[13]

Daiying Yun insisted firmly that, “a new thinker who earnestly practices what he advocates is better than 10000 Confucian scholars who can only speak beautiful words. Practice is the only way towards win.”^[14] The traditional Chinese philosophies of the unity between words and deeds and the unity between knowledge and practice can help people to understand the nature of Utopia thoughts and enlighten them to think independently. They are also very consistent with the Marxist point of view of the unity between theory and practice. In June 1922, Yun advocated to use “the strength gathered by the masses”. “We should study the truth of historical materialism, arouse people who are most oppressed by the economic life, and arouse people who show sympathy for them, so that they can unite and fight against the plundered class”. He advocated that “we should study the historical materialism to find out necessary conditions for historical evolution, and write the new history”.^[15] He chose revolution rather than the social improvement.

However, Daiying Yun did not agree with anarchic individualism. He advocated the socialism of mutual assistance and coexistence. He hopes to turn the world into a socialist heaven by living together. “The future of the world should not be attributed to anarchism of individualism, but to socialism of coexistence and mutual assistance”.^[16]

Hesen Cai thought, the Communist Party of China also needed long time of struggle to form its thought, just like the Russian Social Democratic Party. During his stay in France, Cai comprehensively examined various doctrines, and then abandoned the Utopian socialism in which everyone could work and study. He judged that anarchism would not work in China. At the Montani conference, Hesen Cai opposed Zisheng Xiao's idea on reformism and believed that the current revolution was to build the Communist Party of China and exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only under the leadership of the proletarian party and the dictatorship of the proletariat can we truly understand the essence of Marxism. He communicated with people with different opinions for many times, trying to transform a group of anarchists into Marxists.

Duxiu Chen criticized anarchic nihilism from the perspective of system culture. “We see the state, politics and law as a tool for improving society. If the tools are not good, we can only repair them; we don't have to abandon them.”^[17] After that, Marxists gradually realized that the essence of anarchism was incorrect, since it denied all the traditions as well as the stricter modern political and economic systems. Da Li held positive attitude to the positive value of traditional systems and various modern systems. According to him, “all political, economic and social organizations and systems are accumulated by the long history of mankind; they are developed and accumulated under the guidance of reasonable judgment. They are deep-rooted for that reason, and can never be extinguished by the opinions and feelings of one or several persons.”^[18]

4. Conclusion

In the early 20th century when the anarchism began, China needed to rebuild a strong and modern system to get rid of the poverty and backwardness of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. However, the extreme nihilistic tendency of anarchism which negated the national consciousness did not meet the realistic needs of nation-building in China at that time. In the pragmatic exploration of early Marxists, anarchism was inevitably abandoned by history and reality.

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