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# An International Journal of Ideas

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# Salvaging Economy!

India, like other countries worldwide, is in the midst of a severe crisis – on the one hand, it is grappling with the human tragedy, and on the other, it is straining every nerve to bring its derailed economy back on track – in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. One is inclined to agree with the experts who have opined that India’s response to these twin crises of healthcare and economy is prone to determine India’s economic future in the short to medium term. In the realm of economy, India’s most critical challenge is to restore strong GDP growth with a view to generate plentiful gainful jobs for those who are already jobless and for those as well who will join the labour force between 2020 and 2030. If current dispensation at the helm is lucky enough to catapult India back to a fast growth trajectory that is certainly bound to envisage vast and expanded broad-based prosperity for 1.38 billion people of India. Nevertheless, inability of this dispensation to restore high growth entails risks ahead that can probably encompass at least a decade of economic stagnation and burgeoning joblessness. Currently, India is at the cusp of a critical juncture of its onwards march towards prosperity, and it is seemingly a high time for the policy-makers to provide further impetus to the pace of reforms. Worsening of the already deteriorating economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 offers an opportunity of restoring the economy to a high trajectory of growth and generate gainful jobs for the people, otherwise missing this opportunity could risk ensuing decades of economic stagnation.

McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) in its recent report on India has made some suggestions that can help boost Indian economy. While espousing for the implementation of a reform agenda in coming couple of years to pave way for the economic growth in the ensuing decade, the MGI report is optimistic of fruitful results. The report suggests that by initiating right measures at this juncture, India can raise productivity and incomes for workers, small, mid-size and large firms in order to “keep India in the ranks of the world’s outperforming emerging economies.” While noting that in order to provide gainful jobs 90 million more workers in quest of nonfarm jobs by 2030, the report suggests that India is called upon to act decisively to resume its high-growth path. It emphasizes that Post-COVID-19 India requires an annual GDP growth of 8.0 to 8.5 per cent in tandem with continued strong productivity growth and faster employment growth than in the past to generate the 12 million gainful nonfarm jobs annually. Lamenting at the deteriorating economic situation in India owing to structural challenges and declining GDP growth rate even prior to the pandemic that has been further compounded in the aftermath of the pandemic, the MGI report calls for urgent remedial measures. It further suggests that while treading on the high-growth path, it is essential to accelerate manufacturing and construction sectors.

According to this report, manufacturing could contribute one-fifth of incremental GDP to 2030, whereas construction sector entails the potential of contributing one in four of labor the incremental nonfarm jobs needed. While emphasizing on the need for labour- and knowledge-intensive services sectors to maintain their past momentum of growth, the report is hopeful that across all sectors, three growth-booster themes spanning 43 frontier businesses entail the potential of generating \$2.5 trillion of economic value and 30 per cent of India’s nonfarm jobs by 2030. Given that India currently has approximately 600 large firms with more than \$500 million in revenue and engendering almost 40% of all exports, MGI report insists that India needs to triple its number of large firms, with more than 1, 000 midsize and 10, 000 small companies to achieve its potential of 70 per cent contribution to GDP. In order to ascend the ladder of scale and global competitiveness, India needs to improve access to capital and easing other business-related obstacles. Reforms in six following sectors – sector specific policies to improve productivity in manufacturing, real estate, agriculture, healthcare and retail; reduction in land costs; flexible labour market; efficient power distribution; privatization of some state-owned enterprises; and improving the ease of doing business – are suggested by the MGI report as key to provide fillip to economy.

— BK

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## China's Intellectual Development in Modern Times

Dr. Dhriti Roy\*

*[Modernity arrived in China, as in other parts of the world, at its own time and pace, against the backdrop of China's very own indigenous social, political and cultural conditions. Yet, modern China, owing to its own distinctive traits, inherited elements from its distant ancient past. This study proceeds from an understanding that modernity is fluid by nature, and in turn determines the evolved character of any particular geo-political, socio-cultural space, with its general populace at any given point of time. The study also underscores the fact that modernity can neither be perceived, nor thus treated, as an insulated concept, both in theory and practice, fixed within specific axes of space and time. The research paper here proposes that contemporary China has been shaped closely by its systems of thought, some indigenous and traditional, while others imported, most of which fundamentally from the time of their origin in late antiquity, through the course of several millennia have metamorphosed through continued responses and reactions to feature as their present selves. The aim of this study is to retrace the trajectory of China's intellectual development through the modern and contemporary times, and the prime objective here remains to be the mapping of conflicts and contradictions that might have risen at certain crucial junctures.]*

With the overthrowing of the three thousand year-long imperial dynastic rule, marked by the collapse of the last ruling Qing dynasty (1644-1911, and the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, modern Chinese society stood at the threshold of a defining moment in the intellectual history of China, wherein the intelligentsia, standing in direct opposition to the twin evils of foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism, responded to their inner call for national salvation, and unanimously decided to overthrow what appeared as decadent remnants of a once rich and prosperous national culture.

Against the political backdrop of the First World War (1914-1918), followed by the success of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and the signing of the humiliating Treaty of Versailles (1919), the Chinese intellectual space was already found reverberating with voices of dissent, demanding a major overhaul of the existing Chinese political, social and cultural machinery. Philosophers like Tu Weiming have attributed the rising fervour of nationalism to the

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unprecedented exogenous forces that were threatening to reduce China to a mere geographic expression, and thus nationalism, in his opinion, emerged as the strongest Chinese revolutionary ideology of the twentieth century. Motivated by the desire to "save the nation" (*jiuguo*), passionate patriotic sentiments were seen to capture the hearts of the working class people, the military, the peasantry, and the merchants alike (Tu 1991; vii).

Political ideals of equality, liberty, fraternity were gradually making inroads into the modern Chinese system of thought, as rapidly as were the political and economic theories of Marxism and Leninism. Intellectuals unanimously agreed upon the urgent need to uproot the age old Chinese traditional Confucian ideological foundation, and to weed out all feudal elements both intimately and distantly related to it. The New Culture Movement of 1915 and the Literary Revolution of 1917 cast the first blow on China's traditional culture by advocating the promotion of vernacular language up against classical Chinese language, demanding an end to the patriarchal family system in favour of individualism and women's liberation, projecting China as a modern nation rather

than a Confucian Middle Kingdom, and highlighting the values of democracy and equality as corner stones for a newly emerging Chinese political and social order.

Following this, within a span of another two years arrived the first large scale intellectual movement of modern China, the May Fourth Movement (*wusi yundong*) of 1919 (4 May). Although emerging out of a political crisis, primarily triggered by the cowardly act of Chinese representatives at the Paris Peace Conference, willing to transfer German rights over Chinese territory in Shandong to Japan, the effects of the mass movement spilled over and touched upon every possible aspect of engagement and negotiation in the national life of modern China, ranging from the socio-cultural realm through the political and economic landscape to the literary domain.

Amidst cries of solidarity, the movement emerged amidst the university students and professors of Peking University, and eventually spread to other cities like Shanghai, Nanjing and Tianjin (Chen, 2011: 13) amongst the common people from all walks of life. It is important to note here that the Chinese intelligentsia (*zhishi jieji*) during this early twentieth century was a rather new born group, comprising of educated elites of considerable social standing, who consciously involved themselves in the political affairs of the country, and envisioned to reorient the existing social order in a way they thought proper.

Not only was there activism in the intellectual scene responsible for effecting a massive social, political and cultural change of unprecedented scale, but it equally contributed to the complex process of state formation in twentieth century China (Rahav, 2015: 2) There has been, till date, intense academic research on the inner dynamics of the making of this movement, resulting in some scholars calling it a mass movement (Vera Schwarcz, 1986), while others resting their case in favour of perceiving it as a popular movement (Joseph T. Chen, 1971).

The chief target of intellectual criticism during the May Fourth Era was Confucianism (*rujia*), the foundational ideological framework upon which rested traditional Chinese civilizational ethics, and one which bore distinctive traits of feudal tendencies, ingrained deep within the Chinese psyche, and virtually visible through the Chinese feudal habits of the mind. In the literary front, writers of the May Fourth era, like Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Mao Dun and Lao she with a vision of

mass mobilization and an objective of mass awakening since the New Culture movement of 1915 and 1917, poured out their literary talent in convincing the masses for the need of a radical transformation through their innovative writings.

In 1942, Mao Zedong, then the emerging leader of the Chinese Communist Revolution in his speech at Yan'an, a revolutionary communist base in central China, was seen and heard of politically motivating the cause of literary creation. This was a time when intellectual capacity was intentionally being equated with political consciousness, when personal creative traits of artists and writers were being forcibly subordinated to the political aims of the Chinese Communist Party, and when Mao Zedong's dicta on art and letters were demanding of artists and writers to take up responsibility and accountability to assure success of the socialist construction through a communist revolution under his leadership.

Sinologist T. A. Hsia, in his *History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957*, maintains that after the Yan'an speech, fault lines did appear within the Chinese Marxist circle (Hsia, year: 311-312) and that not all writers were willing to comply to Mao Zedong's orders. In his opinion, the Yan'an talks became the basis of a harsh literary policy, and that the freedom of intellectuals was curbed like never before. For Merle Goldman, the Chinese Communist Party's attitude towards literature around the Yan'an years was correlated with the parallel development of its power.

### **Era of Ideological Control: 1949-1976**

The new China born in 1949, built upon the success of the Mao Zedong-led communist revolution, was an extraordinary blend of ancient China and contemporary Marxism, a complex feature that occupied the heart of this enigmatic state (Salisbury, 1992: 4). This new China was supposed to be a complete new and advanced version of a communist state, based upon socialist ideals that had purposefully broken its former linkages with anything related to its cultural and political past, and yet unique to the ground reality of the time and space concerned.

A war-torn economy, an unstable social structure, and a yet-to-be set up political framework gave this new China a slow start, despite the grandiose celebration at the Gate of Heavenly Peace at Tiananmen on 1 October, 1949 with the proclamation of the founding of the People's Republic of China

and the cheering of hundreds and thousands of Chinese people, 'Long live the People's Republic' (*wan sui, wan sui*). The series of political strategies that were adopted thereafter, including China's military intervention in the Korean War (1950) and China's annexation of Tibet (1951), or for that matter economic policies, including the land reform and collectivization of agriculture or the later day communization were all the handiwork of one person, the supreme leader of the Communist Party of China and the Head of the Chinese State, Chairman Mao Zedong.

There was hardly any discernible sign of unanimous participation of party members in political discussion and deliberation, and even much less of a chance of disobedience and dissent by intellectuals with regard to the policies that were being undertaken. What appeared to be the first possible occasion for intellectual engagement in the post liberation period, revolving around Mao Zedong's call for open criticism of the party and its policies by its own people during the Hundred Flowers Campaign (*bai hua qi fang, bai jia zheng ming*) of 1956 was crushed with an iron fist following the launch of a brutal anti-rightist campaign in 1957, witnessing a mass scale crackdown on intellectuals. All voices of dissent, thereafter, continued to be silenced for decades to come.

Two catastrophic incidents during the reign of Chairman Mao Zedong are known to stand out as classic examples of his authoritarian dictatorship, and as witness to large scale suppression of intellectual activity in contemporary China; the first, being the Great Leap Forward (1958), which due to Mao Zedong's unpractical ambition to surpass Britain's steel production in fifteen years converted rural farm houses into backyard steel smelting furnaces, resulting in the world's worst man made famine, and the second, being the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) which witnessed the indiscriminate torture and mass executions of hundreds and thousands of intellectuals, party cadres, writers, painters, administrative officers, government officials, most of who were perceived as potential threat to Mao Zedong's unchallenged leadership.

### **Phase of China's Intellectual Rejuvenation: 1978-2019**

With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977, there dawned a new phase upon the history of contemporary China.

The Mao cult which had developed around his charismatic persona was too strong to be demolished, or forgotten, or overlooked. However, there was widespread acknowledgement amongst almost all of the Chinese Communist Party members that grave wrongs had been done against China's own peoples, against her very own intellectuals, against her own thinkers. Post 1977, a potential vacuum was created within the emotional, psychological and intellectual space of China's common populace.

With the ushering in of a new era of openness at the turn of the new millennium, marked by gradual and continuous seeping in of the influences of globalization and modernization, and orthodox Marxist ideology receding to the background, post-Mao China's common masses were found seeking refuge in the country's own indigenous schools and systems of philosophy in order to address their emotional and psychological needs (Roy, 2019: 71).

**John Makeham in his *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*** attests to the revival of Confucianism in contemporary China, both as a cultural phenomenon and also as a philosophical movement. Tze Ki Hon on the other hand, is of the opinion that Confucianism has been an indispensable cultural force operative during China's transition into the twenty first century. He also calls it a benign cultural phenomenon that marked the end of iconoclasm and revolutionary ethos, which previously dominated the Chinese cultural field since the 1920s (Tse-Ki-Hon, 2009: 531).

As a matter of fact, even the Chinese Communist leadership, post 1980s, have been seen to be popularizing Confucianism and Confucian studies in order to address the issue of a proposed homogeneous Chinese national identity amongst its diverse ethnic groups of citizens. Song Xianlin views the revival of Confucianism as nothing short of a 'cultural craze' (*wenhua re*) with an initiative to redefine China's cultural territory under the influence of freshly imported 'isms' which eventually crystallized into the 'national learning craze' (*guoxue re*) (Song, 2003: 81; Peng, 2010: 228).

Whether it be in the curriculum of Chinese higher education system or within the premises of corporate business houses or hospitality management sectors, the Confucian Classics have begun to exhibit their growing relevance. Owing to the fact that Confucian ethics were foundational to the maintenance of complex social equations and human relations at all



levels of society, adherence to Confucian values in contemporary China is now seen to keep alive the spirit of filial piety amongst the young generation for their parents and elders in family, promote benevolence and compassion for other members of society, and ensure worker loyalty and corporate responsibility, all of these being essential features of a harmonious society.

### Epilogue

New millennium China today does not talk about revolution, nor does it engage in class struggle. New millennium China believes in building harmonious social relations, emphasizes upon strengthening economic ties with the rest of the world, strives to help the rural poor and alleviate poverty, and envisions to promote stability and long-lasting national peace (Xi, 397). Despite strict and uncompromising adherence to traditional Marxist ideology in governing the Chinese Communist Party and the present Chinese Communist State, and upgrading it to suit the realities of the modern times (Xi, 69), the current generation of Chinese leadership acknowledges the fact that political cause cannot and should not engulf individual intellectual pursuits, should not stifle individual creative imagination, as forcible detachment of its citizens from traditional Chinese social values could prove detrimental to their psychological health and emotional wellbeing.

From the time since this demarcation between political ideology on the one hand, and social and familial ethics, and philosophical pursuit on the other hand, has been laid down with clarity, conflicts and contradictions have noticeably reduced, and frictions in contemporary Chinese society have been less acute. In 2020, with Star Bucks and McDonalds lining up its central market square, and old-style Chinese tea houses dotting the *hutongs* of the old city complex, the Chinese capital Beijing, exhibits its own emerging image of modernity, one which has been created through its living historical experiences.

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