



Historical Achievements and Contemporary Enlightenment of the Sinicization of Marxism During the Yan'an Period

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Abstract. The Yan'an Period (1935-1948) was a crucial stage in achieving a historic breakthrough in the Sinicization of Marxism. During this historical period, with a view to rectifying dogmatist deviations within the Communist Party of China (CPC), addressing the intricate and volatile context of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, catering to the practical needs of the rapidly expanding revolutionary ranks, and advancing the theoretical development of Marxism itself, the CPC proactively promoted the integration of Marxism with China's specific realities and secured a series of remarkable achievements. These accomplishments are mainly manifested in the following three aspects: first, it realized the first historic leap in the Sinicization of Marxism and established Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding ideology of the Party; second, it formulated the ideological line of seeking truth from facts and forged a set of scientific working methods represented by the mass line; third, it explored the distinctive revolutionary path of "encircling cities from the countryside" and accumulated valuable experience in the construction of revolutionary base areas. In essence, the theoretical explorations and practical endeavors of the Yan'an Period have provided profound and important enlightenment for advancing the cause of adapting Marxism to Chinese contexts in the new era.

Keywords: Yan'an Period; Sinicization of Marxism; Historical Achievements; Contemporary Implications

1 Introduction

The Yan'an Period (from October 1935 to March 1948) stands as a milestone of profound historical significance in the development course of the Communist Party of China (CPC). More importantly, it constitutes a critical phase that witnessed momentous historic breakthroughs in the advancement of Marxism adapted to Chinese contexts. Throughout this period, Chinese Communists conducted a succession of in-depth theoretical explorations and pioneering practical innovations centered on the cause of Sinicizing Marxism. "The Yan'an Period was a crucial stage in the development of adapting Marxism to Chinese conditions, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent development of Marxism in China."^[1] Drawing on the historical backdrop

of the Sinicization of Marxism during the Yan'an Period, this paper conducts a systematic analysis of the historical necessity and core contributions of this theoretical and practical undertaking. It further undertakes an in-depth exploration of the historical insights and contemporary implications embedded within it, with the ultimate aim of providing historical references and theoretical underpinnings for the continuous advancement of the Sinicization and contextualization of Marxism in the new era.

2 The Necessity of Sinicizing Marxism during the Yan'an Period

2.1 The Urgent Need to Correct Dogmatic Errors Within the Party

During the Agrarian Revolutionary War, the dogmatists of the "Left" adventurist tendency, with Wang Ming as their representative, mechanically applied the formulations derived from Marxist classical works and the revolutionary experience of the Soviet Union, while completely disregarding the concrete realities of the Chinese revolution. This misguided approach directly resulted in the defeat of the Fifth Counter-Campaign against "Encirclement and Suppression", thus compelling the Chinese Red Army to launch the arduous Long March. Marx's entire worldview is not a doctrine but a method. It provides not ready-made dogmas, but points of departure for further research and methods for conducting such research." Marxism must never be regarded as "a dogma that must be memorized thoroughly and repeated mechanically."^[2] After Wang Ming returned to China from the Soviet Union in 1937, he continued to promote Right opportunist dogmatism, putting forward erroneous propositions such as "everything through the united front" and "everything subject to the united front." He denied the Communist Party of China's (CPC) independent status within the united front, triggering ideological chaos within the Party once again. In the early stage of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, Wang Ming published a series of impractical articles that contradicted the guidelines and policies formulated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) during this period.^[3] His statements revealed that the tendency of "the dogmatization of Marxism" kept proliferating and intensifying within the Party in the early phase of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. To thoroughly eradicate the detrimental impacts brought about by both traditional and emerging dogmatism, Chinese Communists were in urgent need of advancing the localization of Marxism in China, establishing the ideological line of seeking truth from facts, breaking the rigid mindset of "blindly worshipping books" and "meekly conforming to superiors", and truly turning Marxism into a scientific weapon for guiding the Chinese revolution.

2.2 The Practical Requirements for Responding to Complex Revolutionary Situations

During the Yan'an Period, the principal contradiction in Chinese society underwent a fundamental shift: the national contradiction between China and Japan ascended to

the primary position, whereas the domestic class contradiction was relegated to a secondary status. A host of critical issues thus came to the fore: How should the relationship between national contradictions and class contradictions be properly handled? How can the principle of independence and self-reliance be upheld within the framework of the Anti-Japanese National United Front? How is it possible to secure victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression when confronting a far more powerful enemy with relatively inferior military strength? None of these pivotal questions have ready-made solutions in the classical works of Marxism. It is therefore imperative to integrate the basic tenets of Marxism with the concrete realities of China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, and to explore a revolutionary path as well as corresponding strategies and tactics that are suited to China's national conditions. As Mao Zedong aptly noted, "To talk about Marxism apart from China's specific characteristics is to talk about abstract and empty Marxism." Only by advancing the localization of Marxism in China can we provide scientific answers to a series of practical questions pertaining to the Chinese revolution.

2.3 The Inherent Need for the Revolutionary Forces to Grow and Strengthen

Against the backdrop of the evolving revolutionary landscape, the membership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) experienced a period of rapid expansion during the Yan'an Period. The number of CPC members surged from approximately 30,000 to 40,000 at the conclusion of the Long March to over 1.2 million by the time of the victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. A vast majority of the new CPC members during this phase hailed from peasant and petty bourgeois backgrounds. Ideologically, they had not yet fully assimilated into the Party's theoretical and spiritual framework, lacked a solid grounding in Marxist theory, and as noted in relevant discourse, "many had not yet truly joined the Party in ideological terms". Ideological tendencies deviating from proletarian principles, such as subjectivism and individualism, were prevalent among this cohort. Liu Shaoqi once explicitly pointed out that the CPC "was inadequate in terms of ideological groundwork and theoretical attainments, and remained relatively immature in this respect". This state of affairs posed a grave impact on the Party's internal cohesion and operational combat effectiveness, rendering it imperative to elevate the theoretical proficiency and ideological consciousness of the entire Party through targeted theoretical study programs and ideological education initiatives, with a distinct focus on advancing the localization of Marxism in China.

2.4 The Inevitable Trend of Marxism's Own Development

Marxism is a scientific worldview and methodology, whose essential characteristics lie in its revolutionary nature and practicality. Mao Zedong once said: "The great power of Marxism-Leninism lies in the fact that it is connected with the specific revolutionary practice of each country."^[4] Marxism can only be continuously enriched, developed, and endowed with robust vitality when it is integrated with the concrete

realities of different countries. To apply Marxism to the practice of the Chinese revolution, it is imperative to advance the localization of Marxism in China—that is to say, as the relevant thesis puts it, "this goal can only be achieved through national forms"—thus enabling Marxism to embody distinct Chinese characteristics in both its content and external form.

3 The Main Contributions of the Sinicization of Marxism During the Yan'an Period

3.1 Achieved the First Historic leap in the Sinicization of Marxism

Throughout the Yan'an Period, Chinese Communists kept pushing forward the theoretical innovation of Marxism through practical exploration, thus developing Mao Zedong Thought—a theoretical system of Marxism with Chinese characteristics—and achieving the first historic leap in the Sinicization of Marxism. In 1943, Wang Jiaxiang published an article entitled *The Communist Party of China and the Road to China's National Liberation* in *Jiefang Daily*, where he explicitly and for the first time put forward the proposition that "Mao Zedong Thought is Marxism-Leninism in China". In 1945, the 7th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) officially established Mao Zedong Thought as the Party's guiding ideology and wrote it into the Party Constitution. This momentous move marked the ultimate accomplishment of the first historic leap in the Sinicization of Marxism.

3.2 Forming a Scientific Ideological Line and Working Methods

Throughout the Yan'an Period, the ideological line of seeking truth from facts was firmly established by carrying out a rectification campaign targeting subjectivism, sectarianism and the stereotyped "eight-part essay" style of writing prevalent in Party documents. In his work *Reform Our Study*, Mao Zedong provided a scientific elucidation of the connotation of "seeking truth from facts", stating that "'Facts' are all the things that exist objectively; 'truth' means the internal relations of these things, that is, their laws; and 'seeking' refers to our endeavor to study them." This ideological tenet has since evolved into the quintessence of the Sinicization of Marxism. Meanwhile, Chinese Communists also formulated a set of scientific working methodologies, which include the method of investigation and research, the mass line, and the principle of independence and self-reliance. These ideological guidelines and working approaches not only steered the revolutionary practice of the Yan'an Period toward fruitful outcomes, but also evolved into a precious spiritual legacy of the Communist Party of China.

3.3 Exploring a Revolutionary Path Suited to China's National Conditions

Throughout the Yan'an Period, Chinese Communists emancipated themselves from the dogmatic shackles of the "city-centered doctrine" and resolutely adhered to the revolutionary path of "encircling cities from rural areas and seizing state power through armed struggle". In the process of constructing anti-Japanese base areas, they accumulated profound experience in local governance. Serving as a "pilot field" for the new democratic theory, the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region implemented a series of pivotal policies, including the "three-thirds system" in political power construction and the measure of reducing land rent and interest rates. These initiatives facilitated the all-round development of politics, economy, and culture in the region, thereby laying a solid practical foundation and providing invaluable governance experience for the establishment and construction of New China following the victory of the national revolutionary struggle.

4 The Historical Experience and Contemporary Value of the Sinicization of Marxism during the Yan'an Period

4.1 Adhering to Seeking Truth from Facts and Promoting Theoretical Innovation Based on China's National Conditions

Theoretical innovation is the core driving force behind the sinicization of Marxism. During the Yan'an Period, while upholding the basic principles of Marxism, Chinese Communists dared to "abandon certain outdated individual principles and conclusions in Marxist theory that were incompatible with China's specific context" and created new theoretical achievements. The first generation of the Central Leadership Collective of the Communist Party of China (CPC), during the Yan'an Period, developed a Marxist theory suitable for China's specific national conditions, enabling Marxism to become a fighting weapon for the Chinese proletarian masses and all working people.^[5] In the new era, it is imperative that we not only uphold the fundamental essence and spiritual core of Marxism, but also anchor our work in the evolving progress of practice, continuously drive theoretical innovation, and further develop the latest achievements in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context—with the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as a core component. By doing so, we can provide robust scientific guidance for the advancement of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

4.2 Adhere to Integrating Theory with Practice, and Test and Develop Truth in Practice

Practice serves as both the fountainhead of cognition and the driving force behind theoretical evolution. All the accomplishments achieved in the Sinicization of Marxism during the Yan'an Period were forged on the basis of systematically summarizing the experience garnered from revolutionary practice. To further advance the cause of

adapting Marxism to Chinese contexts in the new era, it is essential to uphold the fundamental principle of primacy of practice. We ought to conduct in-depth investigations and research by immersing ourselves in grassroots communities and among the general public, synthesize the practical innovations initiated by the people, and elevate empirically derived practical experience into theoretical achievements. Meanwhile, we must demonstrate the courage to rectify errors and refine theories in the course of practice, thus ensuring that Marxism consistently advances in tandem with practice and keeps abreast of the times.

4.3 Adhere to the Mass Line and Realize the Popularization of Theoretical Achievements

The people constitute the primary force propelling the Sinicization of Marxism. A host of policies implemented during the Yan'an Period, ranging from the reduction of land rent and interest rates to the "three-thirds system" of political power, were all tangible outcomes of fully respecting the aspirations of the people and pooling their collective wisdom. In the new era, it is imperative that we uphold the people-centered philosophy of development, respect the pioneering spirit inherent in the people, and encourage their active participation in the practice of advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics. By doing so, we can ensure that the cause of adapting Marxism to Chinese contexts is not only rooted in the people's practical endeavors but also dedicated to serving their fundamental needs, thereby fostering positive interaction between theoretical innovation and the people's practice.

4.4 Uphold the Leadership of the Communist Party of China and Strengthen the Communist Party of China's Self-building

To further advance the Sinicization of Marxism in the new era, it is imperative to uphold and strengthen the overall leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), while resolutely safeguarding the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the Party Central Committee. We should continue to advance the comprehensive and rigorous governance of the Party, carry forward the spirit of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, resolutely oppose formalism and bureaucratism, and preserve the Party's advanced nature and purity. Moreover, efforts should be made to enhance the theoretical attainments of Party members and cadres, improve their capacity to analyze and address practical issues by applying Marxist standpoints, viewpoints and methods, and thus enable the entire Party to evolve into a steadfast practitioner and active promoter of the cause of adapting Marxism to Chinese contexts.

4.5 Uphold Openness and Inclusiveness, and Absorb and Draw on the Outstanding Achievements of Human Civilization

To further advance the Sinicization of Marxism in the new era, it is imperative to adhere to the principle of "using the past to serve the present and drawing on foreign experience to enrich China". On the one hand, we need to excavate the profound

wisdom embedded in China's fine traditional culture; on the other hand, we should actively absorb and learn from the outstanding achievements of human civilizations and the development experience of various countries around the world. Meanwhile, we must uphold firm confidence in our own theories and culture, resolutely oppose the erroneous tendencies of "wholesale Westernization" and cultural conservatism. While drawing on the strengths of others, we should keep to the Chinese characteristics, Chinese style and Chinese ethos, so as to ensure that the cause of adapting Marxism to Chinese contexts always retains distinct national features and contemporary characteristics.

5 Conclusion

The Yan'an Period was a glorious era for the adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese context. During this period, focusing on urgent needs such as correcting dogmatism, responding to the national crisis, and expanding the revolutionary ranks, Chinese Communists carried out systematic theoretical exploration and practical innovation, and achieved fruitful results." The internal subjective awareness of a political party to consciously innovate theories is the core source of strength and a necessary condition for the party's sustained development and growth."^[6] This historical course not only accomplished the first historic leap in the Sinicization of Marxism, developed Mao Zedong Thought into a systematic scientific theoretical framework, established the ideological line of seeking truth from facts, and explored a revolutionary path and set of strategies compatible with China's national conditions, but also propelled the indigenization and popularization of Marxism, thereby laying a solid theoretical and practical foundation for the ultimate victory of the Chinese revolution.

"It has always been a fine tradition of the Communist Party of China to scientifically assess and judge the situation, achieve innovation at the theoretical level, and then use theory to promote the development of practice."^[7] The endeavors to advance the Sinicization of Marxism during the Yan'an Period have amassed a wealth of invaluable experience and furnished profound enlightenment for further promoting the Sinicization and contextualization of Marxism in the new era. Specifically, it is imperative to uphold the principle of seeking truth from facts and drive theoretical innovation grounded in China's national conditions; to adhere to the integration of theory with practice and verify and develop truth in the course of practical endeavors; to follow the mass line and realize the popularization of theoretical achievements; to uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China and strengthen the Party's self-improvement; and to embrace an open and inclusive mindset while absorbing and drawing on the outstanding achievements of human civilization. These accumulated experiences and profound insights embody timeless universal value and are of great guiding significance for us to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, as well as to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation in the new era.

General Secretary Xi Jinping attaches great importance to integrating theory with practice. He emphasizes: "Party members and cadres of the Communist Party of China must strengthen their theoretical study, lay a solid theoretical foundation, and con-

sciously use the Party's innovative theories in the new era to observe new situations, study new issues, and solve new problems, so as to advance all work in the correct direction and in accordance with objective laws."^[8] Currently, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, confronted with both unprecedented developmental opportunities and profound challenges. It is imperative that we inherit and carry forward the fine tradition of advancing the Sinicization of Marxism forged during the Yan'an Period, consolidate our faith in Marxism, and adhere to the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. We should continuously promote theoretical and practical innovation, strive for new breakthroughs in adapting Marxism to Chinese contexts and the times, and thereby offer a Chinese solution for humanity's endeavors to explore better social systems.

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