

International Workshop: Marxism in China and North Korea

May 8, 2014 1117UCC

Executive summary:

In the 1960s, when Europe was facing radical left movements, accompanied by the rise of Neo-Marxism, PRC was perceived by many youthful radicals as the future of revolution at the same time that many French communists, viewed it as “the yellow peril” because its practice involved a turn away from Marxism as they understood it. By that time, DPRK had successfully fashioned itself as a leader of non-aligned movement among the newly-independent nations of Asia and Africa, and it, too, deviated from Marxism of both the Soviet and Chinese varieties. Yet, both China and North Korea have in their origins Marxism, or more often, Marxism-Leninism. Today, in the twenty-first century, neither China nor North Korea embraces M-L in the same way, but the reasons for their divergence are radically different: China entering a pact with the global economy, a US-China pact in particular, North Korea intensifying its embracing an ideology rooted in the thought of Kim Il Sung (Juche) in response to its sense of embattled isolation. In the meantime, we have not quite asked a question: what happened to Marxism in these two nations and beyond? This workshop is the start of asking that question.

By gathering key players in China, North Korea and global studies, this workshop will spend two days, divided into morning and afternoon sessions, of in-depth discussion touching upon: historical origins of contact, state implementation, ideological redefinition and revamping, and global geopolitical and political economy transformations. These would be translated into the following four questions:

1. How did Marxism meet China and North Korea?—origins and original conceptions and praxis.
2. How was Marxism implemented in war, revolution and nation-building?—politics, economics, society, and international relations.
3. How was Marxism adjusted, revamped, and redefined?—culturally and socially unique versions of Marxism.
4. Is there a future for Marxism in China and North Korea in the age of globalization?

Outcome:

The outcome of this workshop will be production of exploratory articles that will be published in a special issue of *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (post peer-review). The precise format of articles is to be determined.

Significance:

While there are many excellent works on Marxism and China on the one hand and Marxism and North Korea on the other, the two have rarely been examined in historically and sociologically comparative and mutually engaging ways. This workshop will fill that gap.

Participants:

Presenters

Mark Selden: Professor emeritus, SUNY Binghamton sociology and history, Senior Research Associate Cornell University East Asia Program. The Author of more than a dozen books on China, Asia, and beyond including *The Political Economy of Chinese Development* and *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*. The series editor of numerous publication series which produced volumes with important interventions. The editor in chief of the Asia-Pacific Journal. An international leader in scholarship as well as concerned activism on peace-making and social justice in the Asia-Pacific.

Michael Dutton: Professor of Political Science, Goldsmith College, University of London. The author of key texts on China, including, most recently, *Beijing Time* (2010, Harvard). The internationally acclaimed commentator on China using Foucault, Agamben, and Schmitt. His prolific works have been a major influence on western scholarship on China.

Hoon Song. Associate professor of anthropology, University of Minnesota. Originally trained as a linguistic anthropologist in Chicago. The author of *Pigeon Trouble: Bestiary Biopolitics in a Deindustrialized America* (2013, Penn.), a study of the white unemployed population in rural Pennsylvania. A key scholar to bring Agamben and Schmitt into anthropological view. Recently began exploring North Korea's cultural logic.

Travis Workman, Assistant professor of Asian Languages and Literatures. Having been awarded PhD from Cornell University, Travis represents the new generation of US researchers on North Korea. His publications cover a broad range of topics including North Korean popular culture and cinema. He also writes on Japanese literature.

Moderator

Sonia Ryang: Professor of anthropology and Stanley Family and Korea Foundation chair of Korean Studies, University of Iowa. Most recently, the author of *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (2012, Harvard).

Institutional impact:

Participants are major players in China and North Korea field as well as scholarship on Marxism. Their presence will be of interest not only to CAPS-affiliated scholars and faculty but also for the faculty and students interested in Soviet studies, post-socialist studies, proletarian literature, and Marxism.

Schedule:

Morning

10:00 Mark Selden: Marxism and Maoism in China's Revolutions

10:20 Discussion

10:50 Break

11:00 Michael Dutton: Becoming Maoist

11:20 Discussion

Afternoon

2:00 Travis Workman: Marxism and the Debates on Juche Thought in North Korea

1:20 Discussion

2:50 Break

3:00 Hoon Song: North Korea's "Succession" of Marxism

3:20 Discussion

3:50 Break

4:00 Roundtable

"How Marxism Encountered China and North Korea; How China and North Korea Transformed Marxism"

* Four questions listed in the executive summary will be explored.

1. How did Marxism meet China and North Korea?—origins and original conceptions and praxis.
2. How was Marxism implemented in war, revolution and nation-building?—politics, economics, society, and international relations.
3. How was Marxism adjusted, revamped, and redefined?—culturally and socially unique versions of Marxism.
4. Is there a future for Marxism in China and North Korea in the age of globalization?

5:00 Close

Abstracts:

Marxism and the Debates on Juche Thought in North Korea

Travis Workman, University of Minnesota

This presentation will discuss issues of subjectivity and sovereignty as they emerged within the debates on Juche (the Subject) in North Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. Mostly through the accounts of Hwang Chang-yŏp, a major intellectual figure in North Korea who “defected” to South Korea in 1997, I will discuss Juche not as a unified philosophical or political system, but rather as a field of inquiry marked by disagreement, conflict, and tenuous reconciliation. Rather than approaching “Juche Thought” (*Juchesasang*) as a particularly North Korean worldview, I look at the complex of generally modern philosophical and political problems that it attempted to address (including the relation between theory and practice, the role of the state and the individual in human history, and the necessity or contingency of sovereign decision). I also situate Juche within a transnational context, tracing some of the intellectual lineages reflected in the various concepts of the modern subject of praxis proposed in North Korea. I argue that the philosophical and political versions of subjectivity in North Korea need to be seen in relation to the legacies of Japanese empire and imperial philosophy, concepts of subjectivity and sovereignty under actually existing socialism, South Korean notions of the Subject, and the question of historical praxis in modernity at large. Again through Hwang’s work, I will question to what degree ideas about subjectivity prominent in North Korea can or should be thought of as part of the global history of Marxism.

Becoming Maoist

Michael Dutton, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Beginning with the Schmittian concept of the political this paper rather unusually puts the spotlight on the question of intensity rather than on the binary of friend and enemy. More precisely, it examines the ‘absolute antagonism’ that Mao’s ‘telluric partisanship’ was said to have produced. Tracing the ‘telluric’ and partisan elements back to the early days of the Party in rural China and through that, to the subterranean undercurrents of a peasant tradition, known in China as *jianghu* (rivers and lakes) the process of ‘Becoming Maoist’ the paper argues was the interpolation of that spirit into the body of Marxism. Through *jianghu*, Maoism develops a particularly ‘fluid’ conception of the political and this helps us understand that the political, like power, is not a thing, an institution or even an idea. Rather the political is the result of the intensities produced by affective flows channeled and harnessed in such a manner as to produce a tidal bore.

North Korea’s “Succession” of Marxism

Hoon Song, University of Minnesota

This presentation anticipates likely repercussions of a recent turn in political theory to the scholarship on North Korea. That ‘turn’ is the renewed interest in the contemporary relevance of sovereignty, or the

body sovereign more specifically (e.g., Agamben, Butler, Negri, Spivak). The turn has brought into crisis the historical and conceptual divide between 'sovereignty' and 'governmentality,' the divide most influentially assigned by Foucault. Called to re-negotiation thus are central markers of political modernity, such as the concept of 'representative power.' 'Representative power' not only theretofore normativized liberal-democracy, but was also tacitly deployed to appraise unorthodoxy within Marxism (e.g. Stalinism). Given this turn towards the contemporary relevance of the *body* sovereign, two closely-related North Korean political concepts particularly beg for reappraisal: succession (계승) and life (생명체). This presentation samples how these two concepts – which are central to North Korea's configuring of *Juche* philosophy's filiation to Marxist-Leninism – have been textually evaded by the South Korean left.

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