



mao speaking to a crowd

CHINA. A Socialist Analysis

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China – a socialist analysis

Many Africans have mixed feelings about China. On the one hand China was an underdeveloped peasant economy which transformed itself over the last few decades to being the manufacturing centre of the world. Could this model be successfully followed by Nigeria? On the other hand, China could be seen as a major imperialist power which competes with local manufacturing with its cheap imports that leads to the underdevelopment of Africa.

In this pamphlet we provide a number of different views on China, its economy and the hope for progressive change with some of the major collective struggles that have taken place in recent years.

In the first chapter we provide a brief introduction to recent developments in China. In the second chapter we look back to the origins of the modern Chinese state with the Chinese revolution of 1949 and developments in the 20th Century. In the third chapter we take a more in depth view of the transformation of China in to an industrial power. In the final chapter we remember when there was a mass movement in China against its rulers.

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1. A "new era" for China?

Charlie Hore

In October 2017, the 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party ended with "paramount leader" Xi Jinping becoming seemingly more powerful than any Chinese leader since Mao Zedong. It is not clear what this "new era" will consist of, but a number of key themes emerged from the congress that add up to a renewed assertion of the power of the Chinese state, both at home and on the international stage.

One Belt, One Road

China's rise to becoming the world's second-largest economy has involved becoming not only the biggest exporter, but also the biggest importer, and consequently gaining huge power over the economies of supplier countries. Yet China's rulers have so far not asserted this openly, preferring to deploy "soft power" to extend their influence without seeming too pushy. The "One Belt, One Road" initiative breaks with this approach in being an overt challenge to Western domination of the world economy.

The initiative is still taking shape, but at its heart is the world's largest-ever program of infrastructure construction--allowing for inflation, seven times the amount of investment in Western Europe after the Second World War under the Marshall Plan. China plans to expand rail, road and port capacity in over 60 countries, strengthening land routes to Europe across Asia and the Middle East and sea routes in the Indian and Atlantic oceans, as well as expanding its access to raw materials in Africa and south Asia.

This assertiveness is also evident in the pursuit of China's claims to islands in the South China Sea, and in the promotion of China's political system as a "model" for other countries to follow. And although the new approach predated Donald Trump's election, Xi Jinping clearly sees Trump's isolationism as opening up space for China. He pointedly referred to China being in the driving seat over global warming, and talked of the importance of sustaining the institutions of the world economy, in clear contrast to the USA's withdrawal.

China's Evolution

The irony is that the "China model" that Xi was lauding has serious weaknesses, which he had to spend most of his speech addressing. Those weaknesses include a growing ecological crisis, slowing growth in

the economy, unsustainable levels of state debt, and corruption at all levels of the state bureaucracy. None of these are new, nor will they be easy to resolve. Many are similar to problems that are faced by the Nigerian state.

China's cities have some of the worst air pollution in the world; the water table is falling across northern China; official figures admit that over half of China's rivers are either seriously polluted or toxic; and some of the largest popular mobilizations in recent years have been against chemical-producing or polluting factories. Environmental degradation is thus one of the most pressing issues facing China, and one which carries a variety of political dangers.

The Market and Corruption

One of the key changes in the 1980s reforms was redistributing economic power to provincial, county and lower authorities and factory managements, in an effort to introduce "market dynamism" into the state sector. The idea was that local officials and managers would learn to think like entrepreneurs, and make local economies more flexible and able to take advantage of opportunities. This worked even better than expected, and the local state was one of the key drivers of economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s. The downside of course was that the officials and managers learned to think like entrepreneurs in other ways, and corruption became endemic.

Can It All Work?

The last five years have seen a steady increase in state repression of intellectuals, worker's organizations and anyone else seen as stepping out of line, and the attacks on corruption are part of that tightening of the screw. Xi's mission is to increase the power of the state over society and the economy, and within that strengthen the control of the central state over lower-level officials and managers.

There is a similar ambition to project China's authority on a world scale, not least to take advantage of the decline of the U.S.'s power, and that of the West more generally. No other ruling class in the world today could confidently set themselves 30-year goals, and a plausible strategy for achieving them.

Paradoxically, the potential threat from below comes not from the growth but from the shrinking of the working class. China's workforce peaked in 2011, and has been declining since then. The working-age population fell

by 20 million in the five years after 2011, and is projected to fall from just over 900 million people now to 700 million by 2050 (note that this is the total working-age population, including the state apparatus, self-employed and peasants - the numbers for the industrial working class will be significantly smaller).

One of the solutions outlined by Xi Jinping for is increasing consumption. But getting workers to spend more money involves reducing the reasons why they save (to pay for now-privatized education and health care, as well as major family expenses such as weddings), as well as ensuring a steady growth in real wages.

Winter Is Coming

The recent mass evictions in Beijing highlight a number of the problems with this strategy. Some 200,000 people have been evicted in recent weeks from migrant workers' shantytowns on the edges of Beijing (as in Abuja, Lagos and other cities of Nigeria). Officially, this is driven by the need to enforce building regulations, and to cut down on coal-burning to cut pollution. In reality, as in Nigeria, it is about clearing potentially lucrative real estate to improve the "quality" of Beijing's population.

As one astute if slightly paranoid factory owner told a researcher a few years back: "China is different from other countries. In the West, it is the rich people who influence politics and the government fears the rich. Now, in China, it is the rich who fear the government and the government fears the poor. The poor have a high potential to threaten social stability and social order."

That potential continues to overshadow Xi Jinping's "new era."

2. 1949 — Mao & the Chinese revolution

Seventy years ago revolution in China threw off the rule of landlords and struck a blow to Western imperialism. But it wasn't a socialist revolution, and its aims were not to put people in power, writes Tomáš Tengely-Evans

The democracy movement in Hong Kong has highlighted the ruthless nature of the Chinese state—which fully backs the repression of protesters. China is also a major global economic power, making a quarter of the world's products. None of this is progressive or radical.

But 70 years ago, a revolution in China delivered a huge blow to Western imperialism. Behind it was a widespread desire to transform society. The leaders of the revolt went on to build a regime of repression—socialist in name only—to try and create a major power to rival its former occupiers.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power on 1 October 1949, led by Mao Zedong. His victory followed a protracted civil war that began in 1928. Communist forces fought the Republic of China, run by General Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Kuomintang party.

But from 1937 the two forces allied against Japan, which occupied large parts of China's north and its eastern coast. The CCP's strength grew as its Red Army mounted a successful guerrilla war against far superior Japanese forces.

The Communists won widespread support among peasants, who largely lived off what they produced. The CCP brought real social change to liberated areas under the party's control by breaking the power of the old landlords. Fighting between the CCP and Kuomintang government resumed shortly after Japan surrendered at the end of the Second World War in 1945.

Forces

But now there were bigger forces at play. The Cold War between the US and Russia was beginning. The US was desperate to stop Communists taking power in China, fearing they would align with Russian dictator [Joseph Stalin](#). The US also wanted to inherit the British Empire's interests around the world. China had been dominated by European powers since the 19th century. The vast majority of the country's territory was under Chinese control, but foreign powers had a foothold in key eastern coast towns.

Britain, France, Portugal, Austria-Hungary and Germany had all “leased” territories from China. These included important ports, such as Hong Kong, which Britain seized in 1841 after a war fought over its right to sell opium to China. After the Second World War the US wanted a bigger slice of China. So it poured millions of dollars’ worth of aid and arms into the Kuomintang government.

But the Kuomintang was corrupt, and government officials siphoned off funds. Local warlords that the government relied on hoarded weapons. US president Harry Truman was furious that his plan to stop the Communists wasn’t working. “The Chiangs, the Kungs and the Soongs are all thieves,” he wrote.

The Communists continued to win support from peasants, largely due to their policies of land redistribution. And in 1945 Russia handed them the northern parts of China it had grabbed from Japan. That put more rural areas under Communist control. In major cities controlled by the Kuomintang, food supplies began to dry up. And as inflation rose, the nationalists lost even more popularity with the middle classes and workers.

As early as 2 March 1949, the British Ambassador in Nanjing painted a bleak picture in a cable to the Foreign Office. “Despite all Chiang Kai-shek’s efforts it is in my view out of the question that further successful resistance to the Communists can be organised,” he wrote. The nationalists held out in some provinces until 1950. But the bulk of their - resistance had been broken by the time Mao declared the People’s Republic of China in Beijing on 1 October. The Kuomintang was forced to retreat to the island of Taiwan, where it ruled a brutal US-funded dictatorship until the 1980s.

For ordinary people, China before 1949 was barbaric. The average life expectancy was mid-40s. There was severe poverty, little accessible health care and illiteracy was common. Women were often bought and sold as “domestic servants”. The practice of foot binding, where women would tightly bandage their feet to make them apparently more attractive, reflected their oppression. Rival warlords, tribes and landlords held power.

But Mao’s revolution spelt the end for them. In the 1950s the lives of the majority of ordinary Chinese people improved. Land was redistributed. Unemployment and hyperinflation fell. The Marriage Law of 1952 meant that wives were no longer seen the property of husbands. But the

Chinese Revolution wasn't a socialist revolution—where working class people seize political power and run society.

When the CCP's People's Liberation Army marched into Beijing in 1949, workers lined the streets to welcome it. But workers played no active part in the revolution and there was nothing socialist about the regime it brought to power. Workers didn't run the factories or offices, and peasants didn't control the villages.

In contrast, the Russian Revolution of 1917 was a genuine working class revolution. In China it inspired many workers and radical sections of the middle classes that hoped for a better life. The CCP was set up by a small group of socialist activists, including Mao, in the early 1920s. At that time they argued that China's small but powerful working class had the power to drive through revolutionary change.

A wave of workers' struggles swept the cities in 1925. Chiang Kai-Shek, one of the warlords, initially thought his nationalist Kuomintang could gain from the revolt, so allied himself with Russia. Russia's leadership—increasingly dominated by Stalin—ordered the CCP to enter a disastrous alliance with the nationalists.

But Chiang Kai-Shek wanted to throw off foreign domination, not encourage workers' revolution. In 1927 he turned his guns on the workers' movement. Thousands of militants were imprisoned, shot or forced to flee into the countryside.

The CCP was transformed from a party of working class militants and radical middle class intellectuals into a military organisation based on the peasantry. Stalin encouraged this. By the 1930s Russia had become a "state capitalist" country. A bloody civil war had devastated the soviets (workers' councils) that had run the country. Stalin and his state bureaucracy became a new ruling class. His goal was to force through rapid industrialisation on the backs of workers and peasants.

Mao wanted to turn China into a modern industrial country and saw Stalinist Russia as a model. China too became state capitalist. A real socialist economy would be democratically planned and based on meeting people's needs. In Stalin's Russia and Mao's China's the economy was based on accumulating capital to compete with imperialist rivals. Human need came a distant second. For Mao the "chief enemies" were imperialists and landlords. He thought he could better build up China's economy without them in the way.

Yet there was a huge gap between Mao's ambition and the resources available to finance industrialisation. So in 1957 Mao announced the "Great Leap Forward". Peasants were rounded up into huge "People's Communes", some with 30,000 people in them. They were made to work around the clock and told to meet impossible production targets. The result was a terrible famine that would claim 30 million people's lives by 1960. Tens of millions of others were forced by hunger to eat grass and bark from trees.

Mao failed to drive China's economic growth forward. The rest of the CCP leadership started to turn against him. But they had no alternative to his rapid industrialisation strategy. Another disastrous plan to kick-start Chinese growth followed when Mao regained control in the 1960s. His Cultural Revolution got rid of his opponents inside the CCP, but brought China close to civil war. Mao continued to rule China until his death in 1976.

But it was obvious that China wouldn't catch up with its rivals by relying on continual drives to squeeze more out of workers and the peasantry. In the 1970s and 1980s the ruling class turned towards opening up the country to foreign investment while maintaining tight political control. It saw China grow into an economic powerhouse and finally achieve what its CCP rulers had wanted.

3. *China's Rise As A World Power*

China's rapid rise as a new centre of capital accumulation has increasingly brought it into conflict with the United States. The **Ashley Smith** interviewed the activist and scholar **Au Loong Yu** about the nature of China's emergence as a new imperial power and what it means for the world system.

One of the most important developments in the world system over the last few decades has been the rise of China as new power in the world system. How has this happened?

China's rise is the result of a combination of factors since it reoriented on production within global capitalism in the 1980s. First, in contrast to the Soviet bloc, China found a way to benefit in a twist of historical irony from its colonial legacy. Britain controlled Hong Kong up until 1997, Portugal controlled Macau up to 1999, and the US continues to use Taiwan as a protectorate.

These colonies and protectorates connected China to the world economy even before its full entry into the world system. In Mao's era, Hong Kong provided about one-third of China's foreign currency. Without

Hong Kong, China would not have been able to import as much technology. After the end of the Cold War, during Deng Xiaoping's rule, Hong Kong was very important for China's modernization. Deng used Hong Kong to gain even more access to foreign currency, to import all sorts of things including high technology, and to take advantage of its skilled labor force, like management professionals.

China used Macau first as an ideal place for smuggling goods into mainland China, taking advantage of the island's notoriously lax enforcement of law. And then China used the Casino City as an ideal platform for capital import and export. Taiwan was very important not only in terms of capital investments, but more importantly in the long run was its technology transfer, first and foremost in the semiconductor industry. Hong Kong and Taiwanese investors were also one of the key reasons for rapid growth of the Chinese provinces of Jiangsu, Fujian, Guangdong.

Secondly, China possessed what Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky called the "privilege of historical backwardness." Mao's Communist Party took advantage of the country's precapitalist past. It inherited a strong absolutist state that it would retool and use for its project of national

economic development. It also took advantage of an atomized precapitalist peasantry, which had been accustomed to absolutism for two thousand years, to squeeze labor out of them for so-called primitive accumulation from 1949 through the 1970s.

Later, from the 1980s on, the Chinese state drafted this labor force from the countryside into the big cities to work as cheap labor in export processing zones. They made nearly 300 million rural migrants work like slaves in sweatshops. Thus, the backwardness of China's absolutist state and class relations offered the Chinese ruling class advantages to develop both state and private capitalism.

China's backwardness also made it possible for it to leap over stages of development by replacing archaic means and methods of development with advanced capitalist ones. A good example of this is China's adoption of high technology in telecommunications. Instead of following every step of more advanced capitalist societies, beginning first with using telephone lines for online communication, it installed fiber optic cable throughout the country nearly all at once.

The Chinese leadership was very keen to modernize its economy. On the one hand, for defensive reasons, they wanted to make sure that the country was not invaded and colonized as it was a hundred years ago. On the other hand, for offensive reasons, the Communist Party wants to restore its status as a great power, resuming its so-called heavenly dynasty. As a result of all these factors, China has accomplished capitalist modernization that took one hundred years in other states.

China is now the second largest economy in the world. But it is contradictory. On the one hand, lots of multinationals are responsible for its growth either directly or through subcontracting to Taiwanese and Chinese firms. On the other hand, China is rapidly developing its own industries as national champions in the state and private sector. What are its strengths and weaknesses?

In my book *China's Rise*, I argue that China has two dimensions of capitalist development. One is what I call dependent accumulation. Advanced foreign capital has invested enormous sums of money over the last thirty years initially in labor-intensive industries, and more recently in capital-intensive ones. This developed China but kept it at the bottom of the global value chain, even in high tech, as the world's sweatshop. Chinese capital collects a smaller part of the profit, most of which goes to

the US, Europe, Japan, and other advanced capitalist powers and their multinationals. The best example of this is Apple's mobile phone. China merely assembles all the parts which are mostly designed and made outside of the country.

But there is a second dimension, autonomous accumulation. From the very beginning the state has been very consciously guiding the economy, funding research and development, and maintaining indirect control over the private sector, which now accounts for more than 50 percent of the GDP. In the commanding heights of the economy, the state maintains control through the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). And the state is systematically conducting reverse engineering to copy Western technology to develop its own industries.

China has other advantages that other countries do not have; it is huge, not just in size of territory, but also in population. Since the 1990s, China has been able to have a division of labor within three parts of the country. Guangdong has a labor-intensive export processing zone. The Zhejiang delta is also export oriented, but it is much more capital extensive. Around Beijing, China has developed its high tech, communication, and aviation industry. This diversification is part of the state's conscious strategy to develop itself as an economic power.

At the same time, China suffers from weaknesses as well. If you look at its GDP, China is the second largest in the world. But if you measure GDP per capita, it is still a middle-income country. You also see weaknesses even in areas where it is catching up to advanced capitalist powers. For instance, Huawei mobile phone, which is now a world brand, was developed not just by its own Chinese scientists, but more importantly, by hiring four hundred Japanese scientists. This shows that China was and is still heavily reliant on foreign human resources for research and development.

Another example of weakness was revealed when China's ZTE telecom company was accused by the Trump administration of violating its trade sanctions on Iran and North Korea. Trump imposed a trade ban on the company, denying it access to American-designed software and high-tech components, threatening the company with collapse overnight. Xi and Trump eventually worked out a deal to save the company, but the crisis ZTE suffered demonstrates China's ongoing problem of dependent development.

This is the problem that China is trying to overcome. But even in high tech, where it is intent on catching up, its semiconductor technology is two or three generations behind that of the United States. It is trying to overcome that with dramatically increased investment in research and development, but if you look closely at China's huge number of patents, they are still mostly not in high tech but other areas. So, it still suffers from indigenous technological weakness. Where it is catching up very fast is in artificial intelligence, and this is an area that the US is very concerned about, not only in terms of economic competition, but also military, where artificial intelligence plays an increasingly central role.

On top of these economic weaknesses, China suffers from political ones. China does not have a governmental system that ensures peaceful succession of power from one ruler to the next. Deng Xiaoping had established a system of collective leadership term limits that began to overcome this problem of succession. Xi has abolished this system and reinstated one-man rule with no term limits. This could set up more factional fights over succession, destabilizing the regime, and potentially compromising its economic rise.

Xi has dramatically shifted China's strategy in the world system away from the cautious one pioneered by Deng Xiaoping and his successors. Why is Xi doing this and what is their program for assertion of China as a great power?

The first thing to understand is the tension in the Communist Party over its project in the world. The Chinese Communist Party is a big contradiction. On the one hand, it is a force for economic modernization. On the other hand, it has inherited a very strong element of premodern political culture. This has laid the ground work for conflicts between cliques within the regime.

Back in the early 1990s there was debate among the top echelons of the bureaucracy over which clique of rulers should have power. One clique is the so-called blue bloods, the children of the bureaucrats that ruled the state after 1949—the second red generation of bureaucrats. They are fundamentally reactionary. Since Xi has come to power, the press talks about the return to “our blood,” meaning that the old cadre's blood has been reincarnated into the second generation.

The other clique is the new mandarins. Their fathers and mothers were not revolutionary cadres. They were intellectuals or people who did well in

their education and moved up the ladder. They usually climb up the ladder through the Young Communist League. It is not accidental that Xi's party leadership had repeatedly and publicly humiliated the League in recent years. The conflict between blue-blood nobles and the mandarins is a new version of an old pattern; these two cliques have had tension for two thousand years of absolutism and bureaucratic rule.

Among the mandarins, there are some who came from more humble backgrounds like Wen Jiabao, who ruled China from 2003 to 2013, that are a bit more "liberal." At the end of his term, Wen actually said that China should learn from Western representative democracy, arguing that Western ideas like human rights possessed some kind of universalism. Of course, this was mostly rhetoric, but it is very different than Xi, who treats democracy and so-called "Western values" with contempt.

He won out in this struggle against the mandarins, consolidated his power, and now promises that blue-blood nobles will rule forever. His program is to strengthen the autocratic nature of the state at home, declare China a great power abroad, and assert its power in the world, sometimes in defiance of the United States.

But after the crisis over ZTE, Xi conducted a bit of a tactical retreat because that crisis exposed China's persisting weaknesses and the danger of too quickly declaring itself a great power. In fact, there was an outburst of criticism of one of Xi's advisors, an economist named Hu Angang, who had argued that China was already a rival to the US economically and militarily and could therefore challenge Washington for leadership in the world. ZTE proved that it's simply not true that China is on par with the US. Since then, a lot of liberals came out to criticize Hu. Another well-known liberal scholar, Zhang Weiying, whose writings were banned last year, was allowed to have his speech officially posted on line.

There was already hot debate among diplomacy scholars. The hard-liners argued for a tougher stand in relation to the US. The liberals, however, argued that the international order is a "temple" and as long as it can accommodate China's rise, Beijing should help build this temple rather than demolish it and build a new one. This diplomatic wing was marginalized when Xi chose to be more hard-line, but recently their voice has reemerged. Since the conflict over ZTE and the trade war, Xi has made some tactical adjustments and retreated slightly from his previously brazen proclamation of China's great power status.

How much of this is just a temporary retreat? Also, how does China 2025 and One Belt One Road factor into Xi's longer-term project of achieving great-power status?

Let me say clearly that Xi is a reactionary blue blood. He and the rest of his clique are determined to restore the hegemony of China's imperial past and rebuild that so-called heavenly dynasty. Xi's state, the Chinese academy, and the media have churned out a huge number of essays, dissertations, and articles that glorify this imperial past as part of justifying their project of becoming a great power. Their long-term strategy will not be deterred easily.

Xi's clique is also aware that before China can achieve its imperial ambition it has to eliminate its burden of colonial legacy, i.e., take over Taiwan and accomplish the CCP's historic task of national unification first. But this will necessarily bring it into conflict with the US sooner or later. Hence, the Taiwan issue simultaneously carries both China's self-defense dimension (even the US acknowledges that Taiwan is "part of China") and also an interimperialist rivalry. In order to "unify with Taiwan," not to speak of a global ambition, Beijing must first overcome China's persistent weaknesses especially in its technology, its economy, and its lack of international allies.

That's where China 2025 and One Belt One Road come in. Through China 2025 they want to develop their independent technological capacities and move up the global value chain. They want to use One Belt One Road to build infrastructure throughout Eurasia in line with Chinese interests. At the same time, we should be clear that One Belt One Road is also a symptom of China's problems of overproduction and overcapacity. They are using One Belt One Road to absorb all this excess capacity. Nevertheless, both of these projects are central in China's imperialist project.

There has been a big debate on the international left about how to understand China's rise. Some have argued that it is a model and ally for "third-world" development. Others see China as a subordinate state in an American informal empire that rules global neoliberal capitalism. Still others see it as a rising imperial power. What's your viewpoint?

China cannot be a model for developing countries. Its rise is the result of very unique factors I outlined previously that other third-world countries

do not possess. I don't think it's wrong to say that China is part of global neoliberalism especially when you see China come forward and say that it is willing to replace the US as a guardian of free-trade globalization.

But to say that China is a part of neoliberal capitalism doesn't capture the whole picture. China is a distinctive state capitalist power and an expansionist one, which is not willing to be a second-rate partner to the US. China is thus a component part of global neoliberalism and also a state capitalist power, which stands apart from it. This peculiar combination means it simultaneously benefits from the neoliberal order and represents a challenge to it and the American state that oversees it.

Western capital is ironically responsible for this predicament. Their states and capitals came to understand the challenge of China too late. They flooded in to invest in the private sector or in joint ventures with the state companies in China. But they did not fully realize that the Chinese state is always behind even seemingly private corporations. In China, even if a corporation is a genuinely private, it must bow to the demands put to it by the state.

The Chinese state has used this private investment to develop its own state and private capacity to begin to challenge American as well as Japanese and European capital. It is therefore naïve to accuse the Chinese state and private capital for stealing intellectual property. That's what they planned to do from the beginning.

Thus, the advance capitalist states and corporations enabled the emergence of China as a rising imperial power. Its peculiar state capitalist nature makes it particularly aggressive and intent in catching up and challenging the very powers that invested in it.

In the US there is increasingly a consensus between the two capitalist parties that China is a threat to American imperial power. And both the US and China are whipping up nationalism against each other. How would you characterize the rivalry between the US and China?

Some years ago, many commentators argued that there was a debate between two camps over whether to engage China or confront it. They called it a struggle between "panda huggers versus dragon slayers." Today the dragon slayers are in the driver's seat of Chinese diplomacy.

It is true that there is a growing consensus among Democrats and Republicans against China. Even prominent American liberals bash China these days. But many of these liberal politicians should be blamed for this situation in the first place. Remember that after the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre it was liberal politicians like Bill Clinton in the US and Tony Blair in Britain that forgave the Chinese Communist Party, reopened trade relations, and encouraged massive investment flows into the country.

Of course, this was about padding the ledgers of Western multinationals, which reaped super profits from exploiting cheap labor in Chinese sweatshops. But they also genuinely, if naively, believed that increased investment would lead China to accept the rules as a subordinate state within neoliberal global capitalism, and “democratize” itself in the image of the West. This strategy has backfired, enabling the rise of China as a rival.

The two camps of panda huggers versus dragon slayers also find their theoreticians in academia. There are three main schools of the foreign policy establishment. On top of that, all three schools have their own panda huggers and dragon slayers, who could also be called optimists and pessimists. Within the optimist camp, different schools argue different perspectives. While the liberal internationalists thought that trade would democratize China, by contrast, the realists argued that even if China had its own state ambitions to challenge the US, it was still too weak to do so. The third school is social constructivism; they believe international relations are the result of ideas, values, and social interaction, and like the liberals, believe economic and social engagement would transform China.

In the past, most of the American establishment bought the optimist liberals’ case. The liberals were blinded by their own belief that trade could change China into a democratic state. China’s rise has thrown all of the optimist schools into a crisis because their predictions about China have been proven wrong. China has become a rising power that has begun catching up and challenging the US.

Now it is the pessimist camp of these three schools that is gaining ground. The pessimist liberals now believe that Chinese nationalism is much stronger than the positive influence of trade and investment. The pessimist realists believe that China is rapidly strengthening itself and that

it will never compromise over Taiwan. The pessimist social constructivists believe that China is very rigid in its own values and will refuse to change.

Yet if the pessimist school is now proven right, it also suffers from a major weakness. It assumes US hegemony is justified and right, ignores the fact that the US is actually an accomplice of China's authoritarian government and its sweatshop regime, and of course never examines how the collaboration and rivalry between the US and China occurs within a deeply contradictory and volatile global capitalism, and along with this a whole set of global class relations. This should not surprise us; the pessimists are ideologists of the American ruling class and its imperialism.

China is moving in an imperialist trajectory. I'm against the Communist Party dictatorship, its aspiration to become a great power, and its claims in the South China Sea. But I don't think it's correct to think that China and the US are on the same plane. China is a special case right now; there are two sides to its rise. One side is what is common between these two countries—both are capitalist and imperialist.

The other side is that China is the first imperialist country that was previously a semicolonial country. That is quite different from the US or any other imperialist country. We have to factor this into our analysis to understand how China functions in the world. For China there are always two levels of issues. One is the legitimate self-defense of a former colonial country under international law. We should not forget that even as late as the 1990s US fighter jets flew on the southern border of China and crashed into a Chinese airplane, killing its pilot. These kinds of events naturally remind Chinese people of their painful colonial past.

Britain until recently controlled Hong Kong, and international capital still exerts enormous influence there. An example of Western imperialist influence just came to light recently. A report revealed that just before Britain withdrew from Hong Kong, they disbanded their secret police and reassigned them into the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). The ICAC enjoys huge popularity here as it makes Hong Kong a less corrupt place. But only the head of the Hong Kong government, formerly chosen from London and now chosen from Beijing, appoints the commissioner, while the people absolutely have no influence over it at all.

Beijing was very concerned that the ICAC could be used to discipline the Chinese state and its capitals as well. For example, in 2005 the ICAC

prosecuted Liu Jinbao, the head of the Bank of China in Hong Kong. It appears that Beijing is trying hard to take control of the ICAC, but the public is kept in the dark about this power struggle. Of course, we should be happy that the ICAC goes after people like Liu Jinbao, but we must also recognize that it can be used by Western imperialism to advance its agenda. At the same time, Beijing asserting its control will mean consolidation by the Chinese state and capitalists, something that will not serve the interests of the Chinese working masses.

There are other colonial holdovers from the past. The US basically maintains Taiwan as a protectorate. We should, of course, oppose China's threat to invade Taiwan; we should defend Taiwan's right to self-determination. But we must also see that the US will use Taiwan as a tool to advance its interests. This is the downside of the colonial legacy that motivates the Communist Party to behave in a defensive manner against American imperialism.

China is an emerging imperialist country but one with fundamental weaknesses. I would say that the Chinese Communist Party has to overcome fundamental obstacles before it can become a stable and sustainable imperialist country. It is very important to see not just the commonality between the US and China as imperialist countries, but also China's particularities.

Obviously for socialists in the US, our principal duty is to oppose US imperialism and build solidarity with Chinese workers. That means we have to oppose the relentless China bashing not only on the right but also among liberals and even the labor movement. But we should not fall into a campist trap of giving political support to the Chinese regime, but with the country's workers. How do you approach this situation?

We must counter the lie used by the American right that Chinese workers have stolen American workers' jobs. This is not true. The people who really have the power to decide are not the Chinese workers but American capital like Apple that choose to have its phones assembled in China. The Chinese workers have absolutely zero say over such decisions. Actually, they are victims, not people who should be blamed for job losses in America.

And as I said, Clinton, not China's rulers or workers, was to blame for the export of these jobs. It was Clinton's government that worked with China's

murderous regime after Tiananmen Square to enable big American corporations to invest in China on such a massive scale. And when jobs in the US were lost, those that appeared in China actually were not the same kind of jobs at all. The American jobs lost in auto and steel were unionized and had good pay and benefits, but those created in China are nothing but sweatshop jobs. Whatever their conflicts today, the top leaders of the US and China, not workers in either country, put today's wretched neoliberal world order in place.

One thing we have done here in the US is help to put on tours of Chinese workers on strike so that we can build solidarity between American and Chinese workers. Are there other ideas and initiatives that we can take? There is a real danger of nationalism being whipped up in both countries against workers in the other country. It seems overcoming this is very important. What do you think?

It is important for the left in the rest of the world to recognize that China's capitalism has a colonial legacy and that it still exists today. So, when we analyze China and US relations, we must distinguish those legitimate parts of "patriotism" from those whipped up by the Party. There is an element of common-sense patriotism among the people that is the result of the last century of imperial intervention by Japan, European powers, and the US.

It does not mean that we accommodate to this patriotism, but we must distinguish this from reactionary nationalism of the Communist Party. And Xi is certainly trying to whip up nationalism in support of his great power aspirations, just like American rulers are doing the same to cultivate popular support for their regime's aim to keep China contained.

Among common people nationalism has been declining rather than rising because they despise the Chinese Communist Party, and more of them now don't trust its nationalism, and hate its autocratic rule. One funny example of this is a recent opinion poll that asked if people would support China in a war with the US. Netizens' response online was really interesting. One of them said, "Yes, I support China's war against the US, but we first support sending the members of the Political Bureau to fight, then the Central Committee, and then the entire Chinese Communist Party. And after they either win or lose, we at least will be liberated." The censors, of course, immediately deleted these comments, but it is an indication of the deep dissatisfaction with the regime.

That means there is the basis among Chinese workers to build international solidarity with American workers. But that requires American workers to oppose their own government's imperialism. Only that position will build trust among Chinese workers.

American imperialism's threats are real and known in China. The US Navy just sent two warships through the Taiwan Strait in a clear provocation to China. The American left must oppose this militarism so that Chinese people understand that you oppose the US imperialist agenda on the Taiwan question—although one should also acknowledge Taiwan's right to purchase arms from the US. If the Chinese people hear a strong voice of anti-imperialism from the American left, they could be won over to see our common international interests against both US and Chinese imperialism.

4. May of the Masses: the Tiananmen Square movement 30 years on

*4 June 2019 marked the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the movement that reached its height in the month before also deserves to be remembered, writes **Charlie Hore**. (31 May 2019)*

Thirty years ago, a mass protest movement exploded across China's cities, posing potentially the biggest challenge to China's rulers since 1949. The Tiananmen Square movement, as it came to be known is now best remembered for the horrific massacre that ended it. On 4 June 1989 troop columns and tanks smashed their way into the heart of Beijing, killing hundreds if not several thousands of protesters. And thousands more died or disappeared in the repression that followed.

It is right to remember them, and mark the day, to remind China's rulers of their crime. But it is equally important to remember what they were fighting for, and the inspiration of the movement at its height.

China in 1989 was very different to China today. The economic reforms pioneered by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s had led to a substantial rise in living standards, most of all in the countryside where the vast majority of China's population still lived. These were accompanied by partial social and political reforms, which dismantled many of the petty controls over everyday life that had been the norm in the Cultural Revolution.

Those new freedoms had led some, particularly young workers and students, to demand much more, and the 1980s was punctuated by a number of student protests and demonstrations. Deng's arrival in power had also been greeted with a short-lived 'Democracy Wall' movement, in which young workers who had been exiled to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution published calls for greater freedoms. Both were to be important influences in 1989.

But more important was the changing economic climate. Gains of the early 1980s were threatened by inflation and job insecurity. The return of free markets meant that, when food supplies were disrupted, prices could rise very fast. By the start of 1989 urban inflation was higher than at any time since 1949.

Over-heating in the economy, and a consequent austerity drive, also meant large numbers of factories shut or laid off workers. The economic disruption led to semi-public arguments among China's rulers.

This was a crisis of economic policy, driven by unbalanced growth rather than slump, but it was still the worst crisis since 1949. Workers who had seen their lives improving now faced losing what they had won, and a weak and divided ruling class. The scene was set for an eruption, but no-one expected the size and scale of what happened.

How it began

The 1989 movement started with the death of leading politician Hu Yaobang, who had been one of Deng Xiaoping's lieutenants, and was seen as responsible for many of the political reforms. While it began as a movement to honour his memory, it quickly developed into an attack on other politicians, and on official corruption in general, as well as calling for greater political and social freedoms.

It exploded far beyond the size of any previous protest. On the day of Hu's funeral, 150,000 students and supporters occupied Tiananmen Square despite the government trying to ban them. The following weekend there were solidarity marches in at least eight cities, with serious rioting in two.

The CCP attacked the students as 'counter-revolutionary', which only deepened the anger. The movement's leaders sent students into the streets and workplaces to call on workers and citizens to join them.

The response was magnificent. On Thursday 28 April some 150,000 people marched across Beijing, with workers making up half of the march. The march ended with calls for nationwide demonstrations on 4 May, the 70th anniversary of an anti-imperialist student movement that had kick-started the nationalism movement of the 1920s, out of which the CCP had been born.

4 May marked another step forward for the movement, with demonstrations in cities where nothing had previously happened, although in other cities numbers were smaller than before. More importantly, after 4 May, the initiative passed back to the government, with the movement's leaders having no real idea of the next step.

That changed decisively with the launch of a student hunger-strike in Tiananmen Square on 13 May. It began with just 200 students, but within days there were over 1,000, with thousands more sympathisers joining the camp.

The timing was brilliant – the Russian President Gorbachev was just about to make the first visit of a Russian leader to China since the Sino-Soviet split of 1962. This was meant to be a major diplomatic coup for

Deng, with the two leaders appearing together in Tiananmen Square in front of cheering crowds. The students had ruined it.

The day Gorbachev arrived, there were half a million people in the square. The following day, a million, with workers marching into the square in organised groups from workplaces. The next day, two million. In at least four other cities, students organised sympathy hunger strikes, with 30,000 people camped out in central Shanghai alone. There were protest and sympathy marches in dozens of other cities across China.

Just as the movement was reaching new heights, a pan-Muslim movement broke out in western China, which saw the biggest ever religious protests in China. The demonstrations were over the publication of an Islamophobic book, and drew together Muslims of different nationalities across at least five provinces as well as in Beijing and Shanghai.

The government reacted very quickly, banning the book and organising mass burnings of it. The two movements were separate, but the government's swift response showed how fearful they were of any widening of out of the protests.

18 May saw one final attempt to defuse the protests, with a televised meeting between government ministers and the student leaders. The ministers patronised the students, and the students in turn humiliated them. The following day martial law was declared, troops began to move into Beijing, and the city erupted.

Martial law

The People's Liberation Army had entered Beijing in early 1949 as liberators. 40 years on, the idea that they would repress the protests was unthinkable. Disbelief turned to rage, and workers across the city formed barricades on all the main roads, with numbers of workplaces deserted and the subway lines shut down by workers.

Within two days a British eyewitness could write:

“Saturday night was the most amazing human spectacle I have ever seen. It was unreal, the amount of people who came out onto the streets. There was everybody there: the very old, sitting families with young children; babies carried in mothers' arms; everybody was there to stop the soldiers. They thought the crunch was coming that night and they were fully prepared to try and stop them. An old man said that there were more people on the streets than he had ever seen in his life – certainly more than in 1949.”

And the following day two other eyewitnesses wrote for Socialist Worker:

“For 48 hours now the city has been entirely in the hands of the people. Though the atmosphere is tense, there is no drunkenness, no looting and no violence...We are on the main road in the east of the city The avenue is wide. Three articulated buses span it. Behind this for over 1,000 metres there must be over 100 buses arranged in intricate patterns blocking the road...”

“The barricade won’t, and isn’t meant to, stop tanks. The idea is to halt and slow up moving troops to allow people to argue with the soldiers and turn them back, as has happened so often in the last couple of days. The barricades are to stand in front of, not behind...”

“All of the city centre, maybe six miles wide and six miles deep or maybe more, is now under the control of workers and students. People talk of five million people, over half the entire population, out on the streets yesterday. Most of them are workers. Everywhere open-topped trucks packed with workers and students are passing...And everyone sings the Internationale over, over and over.”

It looked like a revolution, and for many people it felt like a revolution. On the barricades, and in the square itself, women came to the fore as organisers and leaders, in stark contrast to everyday life. One eyewitness estimated the crowds were 40 percent female, adding that she had never felt so safe as a woman in her life. There was a huge sense of liberation and of comradeship, with the police and the state seemingly completely absent.

But, while there was a general sense of rebellion, there was little sense of alternative. The students’ formal demands never went beyond replacing a few ministers, reversing the ‘counter-revolutionary’ judgement made in April, and an end to corruption at the top. And while the student leadership was capable of amazing organising feats, it had a very top-down structure that made little or no attempt to organise wider democratic bodies.

The Workers’ Autonomous Unions that were organised in Beijing and a number of other cities in late May were a response to this, and an attempt to build a distinctively working-class pole of attraction inside the movement. In Beijing some ten thousand people joined, though workplace organising was hampered as many people simply weren’t going to work. In most other cities, however, they simply didn’t have the time to move beyond being small groups of activists.

In the absence of any forward perspective, and with the troops backing off, the numbers on the barricades and in the square gradually shrank. In other cities there were still huge mobilisations, but they were looking to Beijing for leadership, and none came.

The massacre and its impact

There was a half-hearted attempt to send troops into Beijing during the day on 3 June, which quickly broke down, and brought massive numbers back onto the streets. They were to be no match, however, for the full scale invasion that night.

From around 10pm on 3 June tanks, armoured cars and troop carriers burst through the barricades in western Beijing, firing at random into the crowds that came out to oppose them. They moved slowly through the city towards Tiananmen Square, arriving there in the early hours of 4 June. By daybreak there were still huge crowds on the streets protesting, and numerous burnt-out tanks and troop carriers showed the extent of the resistance.

There were credible reports of large numbers of troops simply deserting, and several reports of army units attacking other units suspected of desertion. Away from the main streets, there were numerous cases of troops getting isolated and attacked by workers. But the fight-back was unorganised, and could do no more than make the invasion a costly one for the army.

Across China sympathy demonstrations exploded in what was probably the biggest mobilisation to date. Huge crowds occupied city centres, called for general strikes, and fought the police and the army. Two nights of street fighting in the southwestern city of Chengdu led to almost 300 deaths. Over 180 towns and cities saw disturbances serious enough to report to Beijing. And in Hong Kong a million people, one in six of the population, marched in protest.

The repression that followed was vicious, with 30,000 people arrested by the end of the year, and several thousands killed, often in public executions. The repression came down hardest on workers and other city-dwellers who had fought back. But it was not absolute. The government issued a list of 21 most wanted student leaders, seven of whom were smuggled out of China. Leaders of the Beijing Autonomous Workers Union managed to go on the run for several weeks before being caught.

The economic fallout was also serious, deepening the crisis that had begun at the start of the year. Between the middle of 1989 and the middle

of 1990 the Chinese economy shrank slightly, the worst result since the late 1960s.

But for China's rulers, this was a price worth paying. What was potentially the most serious challenge to their power since 1949 had to be crushed at any cost. And 25 years later the memory still resonates. When the villagers of Wukan, in Guangdong province, took over the village in late 2011 in response to the murder of a protest movement leader, they spoke to Western journalists about 1989 and how it showed that the central government cannot be beaten.

But the memory has not driven all protest off the streets. In the last 25 years China's economy has expanded faster than at any time in history, and so too has social protest. In the mid-1990s there were mass peasant movements across central China against local authorities imposing illegal taxes. They were, to some extent, pushing at an open door, as the central government also wanted the taxes stopped, but the sheer scale of the movement forced the general government to crack down harder than they wanted to. A few years later, there were near-insurrectionary strikes by workers in state-owned companies against being denied the benefits they were promised after the companies closed. They also won – the central government took over the debts and paid out.

Migrant workers, who flooded into exporting factories from the countryside as China's economy boomed, have also fought back continuously against the conditions they live and work in. Their struggle are even more diffuse and disparate, but two decades of refusing to accept everything thrown at them have won some residence rights in the cities they have moved to – and the right to strike itself.

The government has been forced to allow spaces for mass unrest, and to move further and further back the limits of what is allowed. This does to some extent work as a safety-valve – because people can 'bargain by rioting', and win some gains in doing so, they target local officials and managers rather than the central government. But it is an inherently unstable situation for two reasons: firstly, it works because those who protest win things in doing so, but that also stimulates further protests; and secondly, there are no guarantees about particular struggles not generalising.

1989 was an awful defeat, which has in many ways shaped Chinese society and social movements ever since. The university campuses were silenced, and have stayed quiet ever since. But every year, as the anniversary gets nearer, the government steps up security around Tiananmen Square, arrests journalists and intellectuals and increases the

numbers of police on the streets. They know full well that while they managed to drown the movement in blood, they didn't win legitimacy by doing so. The economic boom of the last 25 years has widened the gap between rich and poor, and led to massive corruption at all levels of the CCP and the state, corruption which is now much more visible than it was 25 years ago. The potential for another movement of the size and scale of 1989 has not gone away, and that is what frightens them.

If 4 June 1989 showed how vicious a ruling class can be in hanging on to their power, the 'May of the masses' showed the potential power of China's workers to challenge them. That is the history we should reclaim and celebrate – despite the defeat, that potential power remains.

Charlie Hore has published extensive online articles on China in a variety of left websites. The links below are to the main pieces he has published:

For rs21:

<https://rs21.org.uk/2016/01/20/the-unofficial-cult-of-mao-instability-in-modern-china/>

<https://rs21.org.uk/2015/10/24/five-books-you-should-read-on-china/>

<https://rs21.org.uk/2015/07/15/bubbles-bounces-and-soft-landings-chinas-stock-market-implodes/>

<https://rs21.org.uk/2014/05/29/the-may-of-the-masses-the-tiananmen-square-movement-25-years-on/>

On Tibet for Jacobin:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/tibet-china-tar-self-determination-mao-dalai-lama/>

For the International Socialist Review (ISR):

<https://isreview.org/issue/95/chinas-changing-working-class>

<https://isreview.org/issue/102/voices-workers-resistance-china>

From the International Socialist Journal (ISJ):

<http://isj.org.uk/chinas-growth-pains/>