

As soon as Deng Xiaoping gained political power of China in 1978, a better and brighter future was in store for the Chinese people. Deng promised the people a free land with a modern economic state in order to gain public support. During Deng's reign, a series of economic reforms were made. These reforms had major impacts on both Chinese economy and society. Although historians have argued that Deng was leading a totalitarian regime, they tend to overlook the idea that the Chinese have different ideologies and morals than people in the west. Chinese intellectuals who looked to the west as a model for democracy absorbed themselves into the western culture, and believed that everything that China stood for was 'backward.' This view of the Chinese society forced the people to hold resentments against Deng, which led to Democratic uprisings and movements. Deng wanted to create a better economy for the Chinese people to live in according to Chinese values, but society did not see it this way as an inflow of western attitudes and beliefs had been embedded into their minds. He knew that China's problems were coming from within the political system and so he attempted to solve them. However, Deng resorted to ruling an authoritarian regime rather than a democratic regime when he realized that these problems could not be solved.

After 1978, China's society faced a whole new relationship with the state. As intellectuals became more independent, their perception of the state was changed. Prior to the Deng era, only bureaucratic corruption was questioned, while the actual system of the government was never interrogated. However, following the Maoist Regime, intellectuals threw their attacks on the repressive Communist era. Those who were at one point loyal to the Communist government were now against Communist utopianism.

State socialism was critiqued, and the question of democracy was arisen. Today's intellectuals have become more independent and have formed a whole new relationship with the state, and have withdrawn themselves from the entire establishment. More economic freedom has been given to intellectuals in society, which has given them a chance to assert their professionalism into the socio-cultural realm as well as the socio-political world of China. Several historians have attempted to examine the impact of the west on Chinese intellects. Some argue that the more educated students became, the more they were open to vast forms of knowledge. They became more open-minded to western ideas, and became more patriotic and political minded; this more open view of the west led to strong aspirations for reforms and revolution, which promoted change in the political and social systems. On a similar note, other historians contend that students have been the "...carriers of modern ideas of liberty, socialism, industrialization and equal opportunity, especially under autocratic rule." (Lipset, 1973: 2) Fighting for freedom and democracy was a key thought carried by these students as was shown in the liberation movements and revolutions in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.

Student movements do not only take place in European countries, but are visible in Asian history as well. For example "On December 5, 1986, 3,000 students demonstrated to protest the lack of any real choice in the forthcoming local elections." (Meisner, 1999: 486). It is no surprise, therefore, that the Chinese students would hold demonstrations advocating the need for democracy in 1989. However, 'democracy' had different meanings to the students who participated in these movements. Thus, it is important to discuss the various meanings of democracy, and how the movements came to be known as the "Democracy Movement." Historians have also looked into these

differing views. Andrew Nathan, for example, argues that the Chinese people had misperceived western democracy (Nathan, 1990: 92). In China, the ruled were expected to comply with the ruler, and the system was not based on the basis of individual rights and needs. On the other hand, the west had a say in what their ruler did, and the entire system was based on individual needs. Brantly Womack, who believed that democracy was accepted in China, made another implication on the Chinese view of democracy; he stated that Chinese democracy functioned on the morals and standards of their society. China based her political system on culture and tradition, while the west focused more on individual needs and rights. Also, he believed that China should not be judged according to the standards of the west because each society has its own views and standards of living (Womack, 1982: 124). Robert X. Ware also argued that the Chinese view on politics and society was no comparison to the west. He contended that the Chinese system was based more on the production of goods than on rights, groups rather than individuals, practice over procedure, the objective instead of the subjective, and social mobilization rather than voluntary participation. The latter two theories are true because the west always assumes that western policies are the only policies that do not repress individuals, and they overlook the fact that countries run according to the social as well as political situation of the time, as was the case in China.

During the May 4th Movement Hu Shi, who attacked the government's violations of human rights, advocated one school of thought: he attacked the government for a lack of a provisional constitution, and for the lack of a rule of law. A close relationship with mutual interests was to exist between state and society, and "the May 4<sup>th</sup> incident catalyzed the political awakening of a society which long had seemed inert and

dormant.”(Meisner, 1999: 17). He believed that a Chinese Constitution would put China on the correct path towards ‘democracy.’ However, when Hu expressed the following view, he received much criticism: Constitutional democracy is only a kind of kindergarten political system best suited to the training of people and race lacking in political experience. Many kindergarten races already had a democracy a long time ago. That is not strange at all. The merits of democracy lie in its need for no outstanding talents, in its flexibility in gradually enlarging the base of political authority, in “bringing together talents for general good.” (Edmund, 2000: 27) In short, whereas democracy is the politics of common knowledge, enlightened despotism is the politics of the specialized elite. In a country like ours so lacking in talents, the best political training is a constitutional democracy that can gradually enlarge the base of political authority. According to this view, the British and the Americans were not interested in “political interference,” and that people, even the most ignorant people, were able to elect their government. This view was opposed by several of Hu’s colleagues, who believed that electing for a government was a difficult decision for the voter, who was to make an informed decision during an election. On the other hand, several western scholars have contended that Hu’s view on democracy made sense: they believe that since Hu states that even the most “ignorant” people can vote, he is implying that democracy is based on political “common sense,” and that the Chinese society was capable of accepting democracy as a political institution. (Edmund, 2000: 30-33)

During the Maoist Regime, Chinese intellectuals formed a ‘democratic elite.’ This elite believed that those who were a part of the government should be members of the educated elite. Also, this group contended that peasants generally were not educated

enough to understand the roots and ideas of democracy. Historians, such as Merle Goldman, have argued that the group did not know what ‘true democracy’ was since they focused more on the “scientific methods” of decision making (Goldman, 1994: 54). The basis of this view was brought about by the idea of “rule by the people,” which was used in China during earlier decades of the twentieth century. Initially, they did not understand the concepts of the legal protection of minority voices, the existence of a majority of interests, and the limitations of political power. Once they realized that first Mao and then Deng were repressing them after the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and other repressive actions launched by Deng, they began to question the Communist regime. They began to ask for a stronger National People’s Congress, more independence within the judiciary, freedom of the press, and civil and individual rights that would be protected by various laws. This network of elites eventually spread its thoughts onto urban Chinese, students, other intellectuals, professionals, new entrepreneurs, and reformist party cadres.

During the Deng era, the idea of democracy became more visible as Deng’s original policy was a “socialist democracy.” In one aspect, the Chinese were similar to the west: they also believed in a “rule by the people” slogan. However, the Chinese version of democracy was more different than similar from the west. For example, in the west, ‘liberalism’ included all individuals within society; but, in China, “the people” were social groups or communities. Democracy had two major components in China: ‘democratic dictatorship,’ and ‘democratic centralism.’ The former aspect held that “the people” were the ruling class, while the “others” were the enemies--democracy would be granted to the people, while dictatorship would be held over the enemy. (Kirby, 2000: 99-

101) Also, the people were considered a collective entity, while the government ruled over the periphery. Although China had entered a stage of modernity, much of the society continued to hold traditional interests and cultural values, which contributed to differing views of democracy from the west.

Prior to Deng's reforms, China was an incredibly controlled society. Mao's regime emphasized rural development and industrialization, which increased the size of the proletariat. The amount of people who worked in rural factories was kept below five percent, and in many instances, these workers did not receive wages, but "work points," which were given through their work systems. Although industrial and agricultural production was regulated through public ownership, Chinese society was highly controlled. Through the implementation of "work units," workers were placed in a vertical hierarchy according to the position that they held in the workplace; worker social mobility up this hierarchy was impossible because this work system was highly immobile. During this era, workers were referred to as "...drop[s] of water in the great ocean," or "...giant screw[s] in the giant machine of revolution." (Meisner, 1999: 79) In order to further control the amount of income that an individual made, the Maoist government formed "purchase cards" to be used in urban areas to buy basic commodities. These cards were often given in wages to local workers. At this point, the intellectuals were beginning to doubt the Chinese Communist Party, but no political action was taken to overthrow the Maoist regime because of Chinese cultural respect towards the system of government. However, in 1978, after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping obtained leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Deng's initial objective was to retain a "socialist democracy" within China. As in other issues in Chinese history, scholars have

attempted to define the purpose of Deng's reign. One common theory holds that Deng was willing to do anything to keep his power intact. According to this theory, Deng would use ideological claims to gain support from the public, but would never allow these ideas to interfere with the amount of power that he carried. This argument is perhaps a bit too harsh on Deng since Deng's repression of the Democracy Movement was not the first time that Chinese leaders had used their power to end various other movements. Further, this theory is problematic because it does not view the importance of the Chinese Communist Party's ideologies towards the political system. A second school of thought, contended by Paul Cohen, argues that Deng's era of reform was one that could be traced back to several other Chinese rulers, such as Empress Cixi, President Yuan Shikai, or President Chian Kaishek. After showing how Deng is similar to these other Chinese reformist leaders, he argues that "...Deng's reforms are guided by a very potent ideology—we may call it an ideology of 'authoritarian modernization'—and it is precisely this ideology that Deng shares with his non-Communist predecessors." (Cohen, 1988: 13) This view suggests that Deng wanted modernization, but he wanted to achieve it under his own terms rather than by the wants of the society. This latter theory is true as Deng wanted political reforms to be accomplished only his way, and any person who opposed him, was put down. Deng believed that his economic reforms would bring China into an era of modernization, and he truly believed that these reforms would be beneficial for Chinese society. His suppression of several democracy movements took place only because he believed that these movements would eventually overthrow the power of the Communist Party, which would, in turn, cause chaos within China.

From the beginning, Deng had publicly proclaimed the need for democracy. He

advocated a new constitution that would ensure that public freedom was established. Included in the rights of the people were the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of correspondence, freedom of demonstration, and the freedom to strike. When Deng openly proclaimed the need for a democracy, and the end of the Chinese 'feudal' system, he was criticized by his party members who believed that "...people [would] rush into mass action, which might cause turmoil ideologically, politically, and organizationally." (Schell, 1999: 18) Originally, one of Deng's hopes was to eliminate party centralization over virtually all aspects of Chinese life; he contended, "...over concentration of power in the hands of an individual or of a few people inevitably impaired democratic and socialist life." (Schell, 1999: 19) Deng argued that the Cultural Revolution was caused by the failure to understand that power should be distributed amongst the people. At first, Deng blamed Mao and other leaders for this centralization of power, but he soon changed his views and blamed the actual system itself:

If even now we still don't improve the way our socialist system functions, people will ask why it cannot solve some problems which the capitalist can. Stalin gravely damaged socialist legality, doing things, which Comrade Mao Zedong once said would have been impossible in Western countries. Yet, although Comrade Mao was aware of this, he did not in practice solve the problems in our system of leadership. Some serious problems, which appeared in the past, may rise again if defects in our present systems are not limited. Although Deng knew that China's problems were coming from within, he could not implement policies that would advocate freedom for all of society. He stated that he would no longer hold political campaigns, as they were attacks against party cadres and the masses. Also, Deng proclaimed that there was not a single mass



movement in Chinese history that solved any social problem.

The more people expressed their views on the social and political atmosphere of China, the more Deng wanted to repress them. He believed that the masses would eventually attack Deng's regime, and threaten his position in the Communist Party. Therefore, when people began to demonstrate against Deng's policies, he took actions against them. In 1979, for example, he ended the public demonstrations at Democracy Wall because he believed that the demonstrators held secret ties with agents from Taiwan, had unauthorized relations with foreigners, and used the Democracy Wall to let go of resentments that they had held against the Cultural Revolution. At this point, Deng's "socialist democracy" ideology began to take a steep downturn.

Accordingly, Deng demanded the abolition of the "four great freedoms" – the right to "speak out freely, air views freely, hold great debates, and write big-character posters" – which had been added to the state constitution at Mao's recommendation in January 1975. Although these constitutionally proclaimed rights had rarely been honored in practice, even on paper Deng found them uncomfortable and reminiscent of the attack on the Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution. (Meisner, 1999: 437).

In order to prevent further demonstrations, Deng came up with the Four Cardinal Principles, which were to uphold socialism, maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat, keep the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and to uphold Marxist-Leninist, and Maoist thought. Within a year, Deng had moved to completely opposite ends of the spectrum: rather than allowing the people's freedoms, he attempted to suppress their rights; he forbid slogans, posters, books, magazines, and other materials that opposed the four cardinal principles.

Although Deng did not appear to be a capitalist at first, he eventually reformed China's economic policies to force China into a capitalistic state. Deng believed that

Mao's egalitarian ideas were feudalistic and holding China back from becoming a truly modern economy. In order to achieve this modernization, China would have to undergo rapid economic change. After all, Deng believed that China was in its "primary stage of socialism," and that the contradiction in China existed between the backward productive forces (which slowed down the modernization of economic development), and the advanced socialist system. According to this theory, China was a socialist country, but it was immaturely socialist because of its backwardness. Modern production was necessary to develop a higher level of socialism. However, Deng believe that this process would take a prolonged period of time, so he focused more on an 'accelerated economy.'

(Young, 1994: 5-7)

As a result of this acceleration in the economy, came several downfalls. Although the economy flourished in following years because of these political reforms, the social effects had profound impacts on the society in China. The 1986-87 student demonstrations were followed by a campaign against "bourgeois liberalism." However, many historians have argued that the students had a vague idea of what democracy actually was, and were only using 'democracy' and 'freedom' as catch words to gain public support: "...they might misinterpret democracy merely as freedom of speech and expression, only hoping that democracy could solve any problems when the people could have freedom to express themselves. Without a comprehensive understanding of democracy, like their predecessors at the turn of the century, the students seemed to have an overly optimistic view of what democracy could deliver." It is argued that the students were merely dissatisfied with the country's slow pace in change.

Also, the democracy movement of 1989 was based on the same notion of

democracy as the previous movements. Although these movements were based on democracy and freedom, the basis of these two terms was never defined throughout the movement. In accordance to the understanding of the students, democracy was described as the freedom of the press, better education policies, and freedom of demonstrations. Also, students did not demonstrate an understanding of a true democracy, as the issue of elections was never raised. Regardless of the basis of this movement, it was ended in bloodshed, and was an event that had shaken Chinese history for years to come. A mere disappointment in the government's reforms ended up in disastrous results.

In conclusion, the confusion of the ideals of democracy had profound impacts on Chinese society. To make matter worse, Deng's economic policies became more repressive than he had ever promised, and the student rebellions were an attack against this repression. Although Deng had promised a socialist democracy, he himself did not have a true notion of a democratic society, as his policies were everything that democracy was against. As any other ruler of the Chinese society, Deng became blind to the social effects that his policies had on the Chinese people; he continued to implement policies at an ever-accelerating pace without realizing the impacts that they would have on the Chinese world. Although the economic results of Deng's reforms resulted in a highly efficient country, the Chinese people are still feeling the social impacts today.

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