

# Questions on Mao Zedong Thought/Maoism

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**By Prof. Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong (RADI) for Prof. Jose Maria Sison (JMS)**

1. RADI: In a recent publication of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) entitled “Anniversary Statements (1992-2017),” I found out that it was only during the 26th anniversary of the CPP in 1994 that the term Maoism appeared (not in 1992 and 1993, as far as the said publication is concerned). Previous statements, like the “Rectify Errors, Rebuild the Party,” in 1968 merely mentioned Mao Zedong Thought, despite the fact that Chairman Gonzalo of the Communist Party of Peru in 1983 supposedly affirmed the universality of Maoism. Can you please enlighten me with the CPP’s appreciation of Maoism and the seemingly delayed upholding of the CPP of Maoism’s universality?

JMS: The adoption of the word Maoism, instead of Mao Zedong Thought, by the Communist Party of the Philippines is a matter of transcription and symmetry alongside the terms Marxism and Leninism. It is a reaffirmation of the earlier CPP recognition of the great contributions of Mao (under the rubric of Mao Zedong Thought) to the development of Marxism-Leninism in philosophy, political economy, party building (especially the rectification movement), the people’s war and the proletarian cultural revolution in socialist society. In the course of his leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese revolution, Mao together with his Chinese comrades had the modesty of being averse to glorifying himself by the term Maoism. In the literature of the Chinese CP, you will find summary references to his contributions in ideology and policy as “Mao’s thinking” and “Mao’s thought”. It was only in the course of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that “Mao Zedong thought” graduated to “Mao Zedong Thought (with a capital T).

By that time, the CPC had already acclaimed Mao Zedong Thought as representing the third stage in the development of the universal revolutionary theory of the proletariat. Thus, it is false to say that Gonzalo was the first to sum up or synthesize the teachings of Mao or his theory and practice as constituting the third stage in the development of Marxist theory and practice. The foundation for the Marxist theory and practice of people’s war was already established in the Leninist stage when the October revolution of 1917 shifted from the cities to the countryside in the civil war and war against foreign intervention.

Regarded as Mao’s most important achievement to constitute the third stage of the development of Marxist theory and practice was not his theory and practice of protracted people’s war but that of continuing revolution under proletarian dictatorship through cultural revolution to combat revisionism, prevent capitalist restoration and consolidate socialism. (Considered as the first stage in the development of Marxism was the formulation of its fundamental principles and critique of free competition capitalism by Marx and Engels. And the second stage of Leninism was the further development of Marxism by Lenin in the era of modern imperialism and proletarian revolution).

Before Mao died, he had achieved all theoretical and practical contributions that he was capable of in order to achieve the third stage in the development of Marxism. But the CPC called this the stage of Mao Zedong Thought. In the early years of the GPCR there was even an overenthusiastic notion within the CPC that after

the solution of the problem of modern revisionism “imperialism was heading towards total collapse and socialism was marching towards world victory. But Mao himself cautioned in 1969 that it would take another 50 to 100 years to reach that desired goal.

Soon after Mao’s death in 1976, the Dengist counterrevolution overthrew the proletariat in China. The Chinese state and CPC changed their class character. But they have continued to refer to Mao Zedong Thought formally and ritualistically, despite the official condemnation of the GPCR as a total catastrophe and the full-blast capitalist restoration and teaming up of China with US imperialism in promoting neoliberal globalization. It is to the credit of Gonzalo that he took the initiative in 1983 to use the term Maoism, instead of Mao Zedong Thought, by way of posthumously showing a higher appreciation of Mao at least for some of his great accomplishments and for acclaiming Mao’s theory and practice as third stage in the development of Marxist theory and practice. But it is absurd to assert that because of Gonzalo’s “synthesis” he is responsible for making Maoism “universal” or that the universality of Maoism is reduced to the “universality of protracted people’s war” and the prescription for a “militarized party.”

As I have earlier pointed out, Mao himself constituted in his own lifetime Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism by making great contributions to the development of Marxism-Leninism in philosophy, political economy, party building (especially the rectification movement), the people’s war and the proletarian cultural revolution in socialist society. Mao Zedong Thought has gained universal significance long before Gonzalo called it Maoism. The universal significance of Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism does not depend in any way on Gonzalo who has not really summed up all the great achievements of the great Mao.

The worshippers of Gonzalo use his coinage of the term Maoism to evaluate him as the greatest Maoist after Mao. They should take him to account for his own conduct of leadership in his own country, his “Left” opportunist line before his capture in 1992 and Right opportunist line soon after his capture. These conflicting opportunist lines have brought about the decline of the people’s war in Peru. And the mystique about him as being responsible for “synthesizing” Maoism should not be used as an ax against those who continue to wage people’s war. Kautsky did not prove himself any better than Lenin when he protested that Lenin’s ideas were not Marxism but Leninism. He was the first among all people to utter the term Leninism against Lenin himself.

2. RADI: In the same 1994 anniversary statement mentioned in the previous question, the latter equated Mao Zedong Thought with Maoism (as stated, Mao Zedong thought OR Maoism), a criticism which is likewise charged by Dem Volke Dienen in First Critical Remarks about the Role of the Communist Party of the Philippines in the International Communist Movement (see <http://www.demvolkedienen.org/.../2726-first-critical-remarks...>). You have given the explanation that “there is no difference in content between Mao Zedong Thought and Maoism” in an interview by the New Culture Magazine of the Communist Construction Union of Brazil. For the Dem Volke Dienen, however, if both Mao Zedong Thought and Maoism were terms having the same content, there would be no difference as well in either saying Marxism or Marx Thought, or Leninism or Lenin Thought. However, the “ism” in Maoism has to be distinguished as it means the systematization and closed development of all the three components of Marxism “to a higher level and to a higher truth” and not merely as an individual contribution of a Chinese communist. What is your response to this critique?

JMS: I had the good fortune of being in China in August 1966, when the GPCR was just beginning and Mao was being evaluated, appreciated and defended against his detractors and in relation to his great Marxist-Leninist predecessors. I had very enlightening conversations with members of the CPC Central Committee

and the highest responsables of the CPC Higher Party School. They summed up the great achievements of Mao under the term Mao Zedong Thought, such as the following:

a. In philosophy, Mao elaborated on and developed Lenin's identification of the unity of opposites (divide into two) as the most fundamental law of materialist dialectics. He did so in such essays as *On Contradiction*, *On Practice*, *Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?* and *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*. He applied materialist dialectics in gaining higher knowledge from the dialectics of theory and practice, in carrying out the new democratic revolution through people's war and undertaking socialist revolution and construction.

b. In political economy, Mao had the advantage of learning positive and negative lessons from Stalin's policy of socialist industrialization and agricultural cooperation, the revisionist reversal of socialist revolution and construction and leading self-reliant socialist revolution and construction by using the basic and heavy industries as the lead factor, agriculture as the base of the economy and light industry as the bridging factor under conditions of imperialist blockade, revisionist betrayal and other adversities.

c. In social science, Mao developed further the theory and practice of the new democratic and socialist stages of the Chinese revolution. But his most important achievement in social science was in recognizing the problem of modern revisionism and the continuing fact of classes and class struggle in socialist society and in adopting solutions. He put forward a series of campaigns to uphold, defend and advance socialism, such as the anti-Rightist campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the socialist education movement and ultimately the cultural revolution as he faced greater resistance of the revisionists and capitalist roaders.

d. In party building, Mao adopted and developed further Leninist teaching on building the proletarian vanguard party. He excelled at developing the rectification movement as the campaign for educating the Party cadres and members in Marxist-Leninist theory and practice, as the method for identifying the errors and weaknesses and for saving the patient from the disease and as the way for the Party to better serve the masses, mobilize them, let them acquire power and come under their supervision.

e. In people's war, Mao had already demonstrated how the toiling masses of workers and peasants could defeat an enemy that was superior in military equipment and trained personnel through the strategic line of protracted people's war by encircling the cities from the countryside in semicolonial and semifeudal countries. By winning the new democratic revolution through people's war, the revolutionary proletariat and the people gain the power to proceed to socialist revolution.

f. The theory and practice of continuing revolution under proletarian dictatorship through the GPCR was regarded as the greatest epoch-making contribution of Mao. It was aimed at combatting modern revisionism, preventing capitalist restoration and consolidating socialism. Even as the GPCR would be defeated by the Dengist counterrevolution, it still confirms and explains how socialism can be subverted and destroyed from within. Such a lesson will guide the forthcoming socialist revolutions.

Before, during and after the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the foregoing six components of Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism were already acknowledged and propagated in CPP publications and grasped by CPP cadres and members. What the Gonzaloites are doing is to tear apart Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism and exaggerate protracted people's war as prescription for all countries under all circumstances and require militarization of the party as the principal or essential elements of Maoism. This is not Maoism but a grotesque Gonzaloite distortion of Maoism.

In other articles, I have already pointed out that the Gonzaloites have well proven themselves as mere charlatans by claiming that protracted people's war can be done in industrial capitalist countries and by not doing any single armed tactical offensive anywhere for decades to prove their point. The militarization of the party is an anti-Maoist notion which runs counter to the principle that the Party, as the ideological and political leading force, commands the gun. In its Second Great Rectification Movement, the CPP opposed and defeated the "Left" opportunists who wanted to subordinate the Party to the army.

3. RADI: Contemporary leftist philosophers like Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, and Jodi Dean affirm the communist idea (although they have various interpretations of this idea) but strikingly glaring among them is their divergences in terms of the question of political organization which can be commonly described as a clear surrender of the Leninist vanguard party. Badiou, for example, a self-proclaimed Maoist and an heir to the May of 1968 of France, argues for a "politics without a party." Dean, on the other hand, argues for the necessity of a party but a party in an international level, not anymore the traditional state-bound communist party of the past that clearly claim as its aim the seizure of political and state power from the bourgeoisie. What is your insight in relation to the question of political organization in winning the struggle for communism and what was Mao's or Maoism's important contribution to this problem?

JMS: It is absurd for Badiou to argue for "politics without a party". He is intellectually and practically a subjectivist and anarchist who seeks to disorganize the masses and lead them to the predominance of bourgeois parties and the bourgeois state. He is out of the world of class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Definitely, he is not a Maoist even if he proclaims himself to be a Maoist.

The first great socialist state would not have been established had there been no Bolshevik party to lead the toiling masses of workers and peasants in overthrowing the reactionaries and seizing political power. Without the CPC, the Chinese proletariat and people would not have succeeded in winning the new democratic and socialist stages of the Chinese revolution.

Jodi Dean is somewhat better than Badiou in recognizing the need for a revolutionary party. But while being internationalist, the proletarian revolutionary party has to win the revolution within national boundaries. For Lenin and the Bolsheviks to win the Great October Socialist Revolution, they had to oppose the social pacifism and social chauvinism of the Second International.

It is relevant to recall that the Third International or Comintern tried to run a world party with local communist parties as national sections. But came 1943 the Comintern had to dissolve itself because it could not communicate and instruct or advice the CPs who were engaged in the bitter anti-fascist wars. Consequently, the principles of equality, independence and mutual support and cooperation were adopted in the comradely relations of communist and workers' parties.

In the bitter struggles against the well-organized bourgeoisie and imperialist powers, the proletariat as the leading class in the revolution must have a political party. It must have an ideological, political and organizational line to defeat the enemy. It must grow in strength by being intimately linked to the toiling masses. It must arouse, organize and mobilize them in their own best interest. The mass base generates the mass activists and the best party cadres and masses. The party can defeat the enemy and win the revolution only with the participation and support of the masses.

We can learn from Mao and Maoism how to build the Party ideologically, politically and organizationally, how to do social investigation and mass work, how to arouse, organize and mobilize the toiling masses and how to avail of the people's war and the united front to reach and mobilize the masses in their millions. Mao taught us how to use the rectification movement in order to correct errors and shortcomings and thereby further strengthen the Party. He insisted on the mass line of mobilizing the masses and gaining strength from them from one stage of the revolution to a new and higher stage.

Some petty bourgeois intellectuals have the high flown disdain for nation-states and political parties. But these are progressive products of history in relation to the backward conditions of colonial and feudal domination. And for the proletariat to defeat the bourgeois states and parties, it must create the socialist state under the leadership of the proletarian revolutionary party. Before the classless communist society can be achieved, socialist states and communist parties are needed to fight and defeat imperialism and the local reactionary classes

I need not comment on Slavoj Zizek because you do not raise any specific point about him. You do not have to. He is a chameleon and charlatan who poses as a philosopher, flip-flops from pro-Stalin to anti-Stalin statements and plays with phrases like a child playing with his toys. I suggest that you look into how Noam Chomsky describes him.

4. RADI: Alain Badiou interprets the Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution (GPCR) as a novelty as it is the first revolution to happen in a socialist state in the same way that the Paris Commune was the first revolution to happen in a capitalist state. However, in his reading of the GPCR, Badiou reinforces his stand of the "politics without a party" as the Communist Party of China then (and now) became intertwined with state power, the machinery which he claims must be abolished rather than seized. In this way, his notion of emancipatory politics advances the claim of a politics "at a distance from the state," claiming that restraint rather than seizure should now be the model of contemporary political procedures. What is the correct Maoist view concerning the relation between the party and the state? Can we say that the Mass Line constituted a significant contribution to this problem?

JMS: There would have been no GPCR as a "novelty" for Badiou had there been no CPC that established a socialist society that was being subverted by the capitalist roaders and that needed the GPCR to combat the capitalist roaders and consolidate socialism. The Dengist counterrevolution defeated the GPCR precisely because the revisionist or capitalist roaders were able to retain and eventually enlarge their power and authority within both the Party and state.

As shown in the examples of the Soviet Union and China, when the ruling party of the proletariat is undermined by modern revisionism and the capitalist roaders, the character of the state changes from socialist to capitalist. In the first place, no socialist state and society can ever arise and develop if there were no revolutionary party of the proletariat that leads the people's army and the masses in overthrowing the bourgeois state.

During the GPCR, the most extensive kind of democracy arose, with Mao rallying the masses of Red Guards and the people to bombard the bourgeois headquarters in the Party and state and calling on the Party and the People's Liberation Army to support the Left. Under the leadership of the CPC, revolutionary committees arose to lead the masses in communities, factories and farms. But in the course of the class struggle, the Rightists and the ultra-Leftists also generated an anarchy of factions behind which the capitalist roaders maneuvered to

retain their positions in the CPC and state in collaboration with the Centrists in order to defeat the GPCR ultimately.

It is in accordance with Maoism or the teachings of Mao that the CPP has strengthened itself ideologically, politically and organizationally and has built the mass movement as its and at the same time the local organs of political power as the embryos of the future people's democratic state. The sum of these local organs of political power may be considered the provisional revolutionary government of the workers and peasants. These organs of political power can be formed only because there are the Party, the people's army, the mass organizations and the united front that support and enable them.

5. RADI: In my dissertation, I argue that contemporary communist hypothesis must consider three terms, each of which are dialectically related with each other: party, state, and mass movement. I argue further that the possibility of communism could only be if the nature of the party is "a party in scission," that is, a party which, while utilizes state power to suppress reaction, also immerses itself with the mass movements. What is Maoism's greatest lesson to the question of political organization (a question which Lenin brilliantly answered in *What is to be Done*)? Did Maoism modify, in one way or another, the question of vanguard leadership (especially if we take into account the lessons of the GPCR)?

JMS: You are on the correct track by considering the party, the state and mass movement, each of which are dialectically related to each other. Even if only one of these is lacking or is weak, it is impossible to achieve the full development of socialism, which is the precondition to communism. If there is no genuine communist party, there can be no socialist revolution and no socialist state to establish.

If there is no socialist state, there is no way to promote the forces and factors of socialism and pave the way to the communism. Without the class dictatorship of the proletariat, there is no way to suppress reaction and to prevent the bourgeoisie from reemerging and taking power. A ruling communist party or socialist state cannot survive and progress without relying on the mass movement.

Mao adhered to the Leninist concept of a vanguard party representative of the proletariat as the most advanced political and productive class that is most interested in socialism. In the course of the new democratic and socialist stages of the Chinese revolution, Mao and the CPC had ample time and opportunity to develop the CPC as the leading force and the various types of forces that brought about the Chinese socialist state.

In an all-round way, the CPC benefited from the line of relying and trusting the masses and constantly arousing, organizing and mobilizing them in communities and work places in the course of fighting the enemy and building a socialist society. The Party was in the lead and at the same time at the core of mass formations. In both ways, it drew strength from the masses.

It is also pertinent to mention that, after the death of Lenin, Stalin and the CPSU carried forward Leninism in Party building, mass mobilization and in socialist revolution and construction. He built a powerful socialist state that could defeat fascism and subsequently challenge US imperialism and the world capitalist system. He carried out well the Leninist task of promoting the building of communist parties in many countries through the Comintern.

The Chinese revolution would not have won victory and would not have established the Chinese people's democratic state (gliding into the socialist state) if not for the vanguard role of the Chinese Communist Party, the mobilization of the masses, the use of the people's army to destroy the reactionary state and the readiness of the people to build further as the new democratic government the local organs of political power established in the course of people's war.###

[From the National Democratic Front of the Philippines website at: <https://ndfp.org/questions-on-mao-zedong-thought-maoism/> (download on March 1, 2020).]