

THE INFLUENCE OF CONFUCIANISM ON DENG XIAOPING'S REFORMATION & XI JINPING'S LEGITIMACY

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Abstract: *This article examines the influence of an ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucianism on the leaders of China particularly Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping. In relation to this matter, these two Chinese leaders have been regarded as the transformational leaders of China. In this context, Deng Xiaoping is well known for his huge reputation of Chinese reformation agenda. Deng Xiaoping's historical success has placed the current Paramount Leader of China, Xi Jinping to highly honour Deng Xiaoping's success in transforming China. Xi Jinping clearly realises that it is essential for him to construct his own legitimacy compared to Deng Xiaoping. Therefore, this article is divided into three parts: The first part discusses the influence of Confucianism on Deng Xiaoping's reformation while the second part of this article further explains the embracement of Confucianism by Xi Jinping in creating his own legitimacy. For the last part, this article concludes by indicating that Confucianism plays a highly significant role in Deng Xiaoping's reformation and Xi Jinping's legitimacy. This article is based on qualitative methodology using document analysis of various articles and journals. This method was adopted to integrate the difference components of concepts related to Confucianism and the influence of Confucianism on Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping.*

Keywords: *China, Confucianism, Communist Party of China (CPC), Deng Xiaoping, Xi Jinping*

Introduction

In the era of modern China, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping have been regarded as two China's transformational leaders since the ruling of the first paramount leader, Mao Zedong who ruled China with an iron fist. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Deng Xiaoping was the paramount leader in the 1980s who is well known for his huge success in lifting China out of backwardness through his economic reformation. The success of Deng Xiaoping's reformation

was elaborated in a journal which titled “*Deng Xiaoping: A leadership Case Study*” written by William R.Gruver and Haokang Thomas Zhu in 2016. In this journal, Gruver & Zhu (2016) clearly indicated that the Chinese government led by Deng Xiaoping had managed to free themselves from a legacy of huge economic problems through a feasible programme of economic reforms.

Due to this huge success, the current Paramount Leader of China, Xi Jinping was deeply honoured by Deng’s triumph in transforming China’s economy. An interesting fact worth mentioned is Ambrogio (2017) indicated that the remarkable successes of China’s economy and society through the reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 are always being praised by Xi Jinping. However, this article indicates that it is essential for Xi Jinping to construct his own legitimacy and stop comparing himself to Deng’s tangible successful memories. In order to do so, similar like Deng Xiaoping, Confucianism has also been embraced by Xi Jinping but it is for the creation of his legitimacy.

Therefore, this article examines the influence of Confucianism on the two Paramount Leader of China, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping. This article is divided into three parts: The first part details out the influence of Confucianism on Deng Xiaoping’s reformation. While, the second part discusses the influence of Confucianism on Xi Jinping’s legitimacy and last but not least, the concluding part on how Confucianism played a significant role in Deng Xiaoping’s reformation and Xi Jinping’s legitimacy.

Confucianism and Deng Xiaoping’s Reformation

Gruve and Zhu (2016) stated that Deng Xiaoping became the leader of the most populous country in the world, China in December 1978. Eventually, the Communist Party of China (CPC) after the death of Mao Zedong had changed its views on Confucianism. Confucius (the founder of Confucianism) was regarded by Mao Zedong as a “*rat crossing a street*” and that according to Deng Xiaoping needed to be abolished. It is therefore apparent that Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong had different views on this matter. Prosekov (2018) asserted that devoid of abandoning Marxism, Deng Xiaoping had brought China to rails of Confucianism. This was because Deng Xiaoping recognized Confucianism as huge assistance in forming Chinese mentality for many centuries and returning the Chinese’s historical memory.

Other than that, Deng Xiaoping always believed that domination of power in China had been hugely helped by Confucianism. Hence, he had decided to revive Confucianism by communicating with the Chinese using a language that was comprehensible as well as close to him. It can be said that Deng Xiaoping had turned Confucianism into the key ideology in order to win the hearts of the Chinese. Other than that, Deng Xiaoping also had viewed Confucianism as a Chinese philosophy which formed the essential values of Chinese civilization.

There are many reasons for the remarkable development of China’s economy for the past four decades. In spite of this matter, the most important reason is the reformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. The remarkable success of reformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping can be seen through an article entitled “*Deng Xiaoping: The Economist*” written by Naughton (1993) which clearly stated that Deng Xiaoping’s economic transformation has been regarded by some scholars as the only one that is judged to have succeeded, and to have benefited large numbers of people. During the reformation process, Deng Xiaoping did not limit his reforms notion on the aspect of economy only. Regarding this matter, Whyte (1993) stated that Deng Xiaoping's legacy as a social reformer can be considered in the context of his ideas regarding the selection

and promotion of human talent and the implications of those ideas for the political and social order. As a result, Deng Xiaoping had reformed the mind of the Chinese by embedding Confucianism in order to create more new ideas for China's development.

In this context, according to Confucianism, each Chinese needs to combine achievements of personal success and profit with the interests of their country, reinforce its prestige, and contribute to a harmonic synthesis of traditions and modernisations. In relation to this matter, Deng Xiaoping was fond of Confucius' ideas on the three kinds of states, accomplishments of growth in which to be determined by the ruler's efficiency as well as ethical characteristics. Here, the three kinds of states are; well governed state, poorly governed state and a state that is not governed. These kinds of states mentioned by Confucius remain relevant even in this modern era.

The first kind of state is a well governed state. Confucius stated that the definition of a well-governed state is a state which can help a man to totally realise his capabilities. For the poorly governed state, Confucius claimed that this kind of state is an immoral state and being administered by immoral leaders Last but not least is a state that is not governed. Regarding this kind of state, Confucius stated that it is a state which has been governed with immorality and disarray. Generally, Confucius concluded that in the first kind of state, it is embarrassing to be in poor condition. As for the second kind, it is embarrassing to be rich and last but not least, the third kind of state could not support lives.

Due to Deng Xiaoping's admiration towards Confucius ideas on the three kinds of states, Deng speaks of a new concept known as "*Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*". Moak and Lee (2015) in their book entitled "*China's Economic Rise and Its Global Impact*" indicated that this concept initiated by Deng Xiaoping became the basis for China's reformation in terms of economy after the Cultural Revolution in 1976. In addition, it is a theory of incorporating capitalism into the central planning to increase productivity, advance Chinese culture, and enhance the interests of the people (Moak & Lee, 2015).

Deng Xiaoping had implemented this "*Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*" into the public sector, the growth of multisector economy, enterprises economic independence along with unequal development of living standards of dissimilar group of people. The growth can be observed in multiple fields such as education, science, technology and youth educational work. According to Prosekov (2018), the goals were to maximize productive forces growth, exclusion of huge polarization of population as well as increasing common richness. In this case, all the goals set by Deng Xiaoping at the beginning phase were regarded as the core of "*Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*". Together with this, Deng Xiaoping considered political stability as the basis for the development of reforms as well as openness.

As a result, the reformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 led China to achieve a high Growth Domestic Product (GDP). In relation to this matter, Morrison (2019) stated that the emergence of China from a poor developing country to a major economic power in approximately 40 years can be regarded as spectacular. In this case, the real Growth Domestic Product (GDP) of China developed at an average annual rate of nearly 10.1% since 1979 (when reforms of economic initiated) to 2017. According to the World Bank (2017), China experienced the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history and has lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty. In respect to this, cheap labour as well as massive investment especially into China's internal infrastructure along with its industry became one of

the factors that enabled China to achieve higher growth of its GDP (Prosekov, 2018). Due to these reasons, China has risen as a main world power in terms of economy.

Overall, Confucianism had been clearly understood by Deng Xiaoping as a philosophy which is based on the essential values of Chinese civilization. In this case, Confucianism could be considered capable of constant renewal and Deng Xiaoping acknowledged that the role of Confucianism as the key ideology had a high capability to penetrate the hearts of the Chinese and also for China's economic reformation. Through the usage of Confucianism as the key ideology, Deng Xiaoping was successful in bringing China to the path of Confucianism devoid of abandoning China's core ideology, Marxism. As a consequence, the restoration of Confucianism has reminded the Chinese of their history since the characteristics of Chinese mentality is said to have been shaped by it. The next part of this article will explain on the embracement of Confucianism by Xi Jinping in creating his own legitimacy.

Confucianism and Xi Jinping's Legitimacy

Besides Deng Xiaoping, another Chinese leader who has been influenced by Confucianism is the current Paramount Leader of China, Xi Jinping. In relation to this matter, de Burgh (2018) stated that Xi Jinping was the first leader of Communist Party of China (CPC) to deliver a speech in remembrance of Confucius and also paid a visit to Confucius' birthplace, his temple and memorial. Other than that, as part of in-service training, Xi Jinping's administration makes it compulsory for the senior government officials to take lectures regarding Confucianism (de Burgh, 2018).

Xi Jinping has always admired Deng Xiaoping's initiatives to practice an open economy and society to the global market. In relation to this matter, Ambrogio (2017) indicated that Xi Jinping clearly mentioned that the opening of China's economy as well as its society to the world is considered as the one and only conceivable way in order to attain policy reforms, progress in economy and a better quality of life for the Chinese. Other than that, Xi Jinping clearly mentioned that it was a main concern for China to open a free market in support of its industrial and financial growth (Ambrogio, 2017). This caused Xi Jinping to honour Deng's reformation and at the same time, it is essential for Xi to construct his own legitimacy. This is because Deng Xiaoping is well known for his huge reputation in reforming China's economy and this matter had become a shadow over the succeeding Chinese paramount leaders such as Jiang Zemin Hu Jintao as well as Xi Jinping in establishing their own legacies.

The trade war between the United States of America (USA) and China in 2018 which led to the downturn of China's economy has made the judgement of Xi-Deng to be crucial. The rise of China in economic aspects for the past 40 years is indistinguishably interrelated to Deng's reformation as well as the opening up of China. In relation to this matter, the US-China trade war generally has caused China's economic growth to deteriorate to 6.4 percent compared to 10.4 percent in 2017. According to Fifield (2019), China's economic slowdown has not happened since 1990. As a consequence, China's economic slowdown along with its conflict with the USA might have impacted the way the Chinese view CPC.

The legitimacy of the CPC as the ruling party of China was based on the fact that China's economic strength managed to hugely reduced poverty level, initiated the rising number of middle-class citizens as well as challenged the USA's economic domination. In this context, Lin (2017) clearly highlighted that the CPC's legitimacy has become the main priority for Xi Jinping in order to sustain its "perennial rule". As a consequence, a completely new meaning

regarding the differences between Xi Jinping and Deng Xiaoping will occur if China's economy continues to decline.

The question on whether the Chinese people still remain with democratic reforms by Deng Xiaoping that produce huge success and Xi's power grab with economic instability will arise. In this kind of situation, Xi Jinping obviously starts to lose its legitimacy due to economic deterioration as well as the impacts from the trade war. As a consequence, Xi Jinping has been put in a situation that needed him to show himself as a different kind of leader from Deng Xiaoping but at the same still highly honouring the reformation initiated by Deng.

This article indicates that Xi Jinping has the intention to demonstrate clear differences from Deng Xiaoping especially in terms of actions and policies as a leader of China. For that reason, Xi Jinping needs a positive narrative that is in favour of himself. This is very crucial for Xi Jinping so as to not remain under the shadow of Deng's reformation success of China forever.

As a result, Xi's intention has led him to instil ideas along with the rhetoric of Confucianism in order to create its own legitimate identity. This is because Confucianism is able to reflect Xi Jinping to the rulers of ancient China rather than on going tangible memory of Deng Xiaoping. It is a reasonable choice for Xi Jinping to choose Confucianism since Zhao (2018) in his article entitled "*The Influence of Confucianism on Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy*" clearly stated that, Confucianism has always been referred to by Chinese political elites since this ancient Chinese philosophy has a very solid foundation in Chinese history and is able to unify the Chinese society under its rule.

In addition, Xi Jinping has planned to overcome these challenges through the influence of Confucianism in his Chinese Dream and the longstanding foreign policy of China. Here, Chinese Dream has become the backbone of Xi's rhetoric since the day he became the highest leader of China. According to Kallio (2018), Chinese Dream is the real destiny for China and when this country is going to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2049, China will become a world leader in terms of national strength and global influence. The Chinese Dream initiated by Xi Jinping directly embraces the Confucianism ideology in order to describe the Chinese Dream. In this context, Chinese Dream has been obviously seen as having a connection with the American Dream which is a western political rhetoric.

Generally, the basis of these two dreams are undoubtedly similar to each other since they emphasised on prosperity, a high standard of living, as well as hard work in order to attain those objectives. In spite of this matter, Xi has no intention or attempts to compete with any political ideology from the West. Through this Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping as the highest of China can pacify the Chinese along with members of CPC who have suspicious feeling towards traditions.

In terms of China's foreign policy, Deng Xiaoping had implemented specific characteristics in communicating with foreign countries. Confucius' quote which is "*calmly observe, acting like a monkey that watches a battle of two tigers from the mountain*" was embraced by Deng Xiaoping as a guidance in order to formulate the foreign policy of China. In regard to Confucius' words, Deng Xiaoping advised the future China's leaders to strengthen the position of China in the international arena but remain humble, not seeking for attention, protecting own interests without going for the first place. Due to this matter, Meteliova & Chghen (2020) clearly stated that Deng Xiaoping as a great reformer of China in his foreign policy be in favour of a Confucianism peaceful position.

Therefore, Xi Jinping deeply endorses that China must have a clear cut stand against hegemony and power politics. In this context, Xi's embracement of this principle in China's foreign policy is due to several factors. Those factors are contemporary China's political climate with concern to the USA, the mounting of China's influence and this principle contradicts Xi's own statement which stated that under Mao, China "stood up", under Deng China "got rich", and under Xi China "has become strong".

Xi's decision to endorse this longstanding foreign policy that China needs to have a clear cut stand against hegemony and power politics clearly points out that Xi is not practicing his legitimacy based on nationalistic, the anti-American sentiment. As a result, Xi Jinping made the decision to embrace Confucianism which is rooted in the Chinese traditional culture as the base for his legitimacy. Zhao (2018) clearly stated that Confucianism has been mentioned numerous times in Xi Jinping's public speeches and also the Chinese traditional culture demonstrated by Confucianism has also been praised by Xi Jinping.

According to Lao (1979), common people's welfare is the main objective of a government which is also the basic principle of Confucianism. In this context, he stated that this principle has remained unchanged over time. Through this principle, Xi Jinping has realised that contending the USA in an aggressive manner will only lead to the destruction of China's economy while jeopardising China's relationship with other foreign countries. Zhao (2018) indicated that the narrative of China's foreign policy fits well with the emphasis of structure and harmony in Confucianism. This is because China has constantly showed itself as the victim who is only seeking for peace, stability and harmony when it faces conflicts with other countries (Zhao, 2018).

Therefore, it is clear that contending the USA in an aggressive manner is not China's biggest interest. In addition, it is irrelevant for the Xi as the Paramount Leader of China to contend with a major power such as the USA for the sake of hegemony. This is because China themselves are against the hegemony of the USA. In this case, if China wants to become a power like the USA, China clearly will violate the Confucianism central tenant which is "*Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire*" which strongly prohibits a country to seek for hegemony just for the sake of status" (Lao, 1979). Based on these reasons, Confucianism has provided a solid explanation for China's foreign policy while serving as a moral guidance. Through this matter, Confucianism as an ancient Chinese philosophy is able to put China in a superior position where its society is morally high as compared to the USA.

Conclusion

Overall, this article has illustrated how Confucianism played a highly significant role on Deng Xiaoping's reformation and Xi Jinping's legitimacy. In this article, we agree that the similarity between Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping is based on the understanding of Confucianism to unite the Chinese, strengthen their identity and play a significant role in their administration matters. However, the dissimilarity is when Deng Xiaoping adopted Confucianism as a tool to fill the vacuum space within the Chinese hearts especially after the tragedy of Tiananmen Square in 1989. The brutality and violence shown by the military towards unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square had led the Chinese to resume back their interest on Confucianism. For many Chinese, they view the massacre of Tiananmen Square as putting the nail in the Communist ideology's coffin. This is because the Chinese were totally indoctrinated with this Communist ideology since 1949 and began to feel like living in a moral vacuum within the Chinese society.

Besides that, Deng Xiaoping also adopted Confucianism in order to reform China in many aspects especially in economy. From a poor and isolated country, Deng Xiaoping through adoption of Confucianism in his economic reformation able to transform China into an economic powerhouse for a long period of time. Today, the status of China as one of the economic powerhouse without any doubt is due to the economic reformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping 44 years ago.

Meanwhile, Xi Jinping is using this ancient Chinese philosophy as a way to differentiate himself from the success shadow of Deng Xiaoping. The reformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping has glorified even after his death and this matter had become a shadow over the succeeding Chinese leaders including Xi Jinping in establishing their own legacies. Therefore, it is important for Xi Jinping to create his own kind of legitimacy and put himself away from the shadow of Deng Xiaoping.

It is true that history has already witnessed a huge denunciation towards Confucius and his teaching, Confucianism after the fall of Qin as the last Chinese dynasty. Nonetheless, the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 turned out to be a great opportunity for the complete revival of Confucianism. After the death of Mao in 1976, Deng Xiaoping became the second Paramount Leader of China and his keenness towards Confucianism is pursued by Xi Jinping. His strong belief towards Confucianism has led Xi Jinping to extensively promote this ancient Chinese philosophy with the aim to revive the Chinese culture as well as turning Confucianism as an effective tool to strengthen his legitimacy. Besides that, the continuous efforts made by Xi Jinping has led Confucianism to be known as the China Brand around the world. Therefore, the influence of Confucianism in Deng Xiaoping's reformation and Xi Jinping's legitimacy as the Paramount Leader of China become a solid evidence that Confucianism remain highly relevant and provides essential contributions towards the future of China.

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