

Analysis on Reasons of Different Socialist Thoughts of Qichao Liang and Yat-Sen Sun

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Abstract: Both Qichao Liang and Yat-sen Sun met with the socialist theory after their domestic political activities suffered setbacks. However, there were obvious differences in their socialist thoughts because they had many differences in the process of accepting the socialist theory. At the beginning of cognition, Qichao Liang saw difficulties in the implementation of socialist theory, while Yat-sen Sun saw the hope of implementation. When cognition was promoted, Liang focused on understanding what socialism was in the original context, while Sun focused on exploring what socialism should be in China. When judging from the reality, Liang believed that socialism could not solve problems in China, while Sun believed that implementing socialism could avoid the deterioration of China's practical problems.

1. Introduction

Qichao Liang (1873-1929) and Yat-sen Sun (1866-1925) were influential figures on the stage of modern Chinese society. They were both well-known figures who had contact with the theory of socialism earlier. However, Liang believed that if socialism was transplanted to China, "I dare to say that it will eventually fail." [1] However, Sun strongly advocated socialism and wanted to create "socialism in China". [2] Over the years, comparative studies on their respective socialist thoughts and the two people's opinions never stop, but generally speaking, these researches focus on the comparison of results. In fact, how the results are produced is as important as the results themselves. This paper does not comment on their conclusions; it further extends the question and asks the reasons for the conclusion. In front of the socialist theory, the original identity of Liang and Sun was readers. By comparing their thinking differences in the process of accepting the socialist theory, we can find out the reasons for the opposite trend of their thoughts, and understand the early influence of socialist theory in China's ideological circle.

2. Different Cognitive Starting Points

In 1894, the Guangzhou Society translated and published the book *Looking Backward*, which is written by Edward Bellamy, an American utopian socialist. The Director-General of the Guangzhou Society at that time was a British missionary, Richard Timothy. In 1895, Qichao Liang served as the Secretary of Timothy Li for a period of time. It is possible for him to have access to this book. In 1896, Liang was appointed by Zunxian Huang and Kangnian Wang as the chief editor of *Shiwu Newspaper*. In 1896, the 6th periodical of *Shiwu Newspaper* reported the International Congress of the Socialist Party. In the 40th issue of 1897, the news of Spanish socialists being executed was published. In the 50th issue of 1897, the German Socialist Party was also mentioned. The information was inextricably linked with the socialist theory. Qichao Liang had a good chance to contact with these contents, but Liang did not have a clear exposition on socialism in this period. He clearly mentioned "socialism" in his article, *Biography of Mr. Kang in Nanhai*, in 1901; in the paper he used "socialist philosophy" to summarize his teacher, Youwei Kang's philosophy. [3] At that time, Qichao Liang took refuge in Japan because of the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform. The socialist theory was rising in Japan. Qichao Liang, who was interested in Western learning and new learning, did not reject it at first. However, Liang did not give up his original political ideal and still insisted on royalism and reform. After travelling to America in 1903, Liang saw that in

capitalist countries with developed industries, there were still great disparity between the rich and the poor, and the socialist movement was full of difficulties. He was full of doubts about the feasibility of socialism. In his *Travels To The New World*, Qichao Liang wrote, “superstition is the strongest in the world; it is also appropriate for socialism to spread throughout the world.” [4] Using the word “superstition” to explain the cause of the spread of socialism all over the world clearly reflects he did not agree with the socialist theory.

Yat-sen Sun's encounter with socialist theory can be traced back to the end of the 19th century in England. In 1896, Sun fled to Britain because of the failure of the Guangzhou Uprising. Shortly after the closing of the Fourth Congress of the Second International, Sun applied for the reader's card of the British Museum for half a year. He often went to the British Museum for a period of time, and he should have a good understanding of the congress and the socialist thought. From 1897 to 1903, Yat-sen Sun lived in Japan. During this period, he had contacts with Japanese socialist leaders Shusui Kotoku and was familiar with the socialist movement in Japan. Yat-sen Sun clearly mentioned socialism in 1903. He said that he had “deeply thought about socialism and could not forget it for a moment”. [5] In 1905, Yat-sen Sun also took the initiative to visit the Executive Board of the Socialist International, hoping that the party would accept his own party as a member. After the failure of the revolutionary action, Yat-sen Sun continued to search for a breakthrough in revolution. After contacting the socialist theory, he cherished the feasibility of this theory. Later, he not only advocated, but also believed that “we should learn from Russia”. [6]

Generally speaking, at the beginning of contact with the socialist theory, Qichao Liang and Yat-sen Sun showed different thinking directions. Liang saw difficulties of its implementation, while Yat-sen Sun saw the hope of its implementation. This initial small difference eventually showed greater differences in the later development.

3. Different Thinking Approaches

When Qichao Liang and Yat-sen Sun faced the socialist theory, “long-term concern” was their common feature and the basis for their interaction. At the same time, they all agreed that the theory of socialism had existed in ancient China. Liang believed that the socialist spirit was not external. Confucius said, “if the wealth is equal, there will be no poverty; if there is peace and unity within the territory, there will be no shortage of people”. Mencius said, “only those who have certain property income have certain moral concepts and codes of conduct”. These are the most important arguments of socialist doctrine. [7] Liang held that, “the modern Marxist School said that capitalists' enjoyment comes from plunder. The basis of this argument is exactly the same as that of Mo Tzu 2000 years ago.” [8] Yat-sen Sun also said that, “after studying history, it is found that our country firmly advocates socialism. The well field system in China's slave society is the origin of equalitarianism, and cohabitation for many generations is the key to communism.” [9] Although both of them found same factors with the socialist theory from traditional Chinese thoughts, the difference was that Qichao Liang believed that socialism was nothing new in China, while Yat-sen Sun regarded it as a favourable condition for China to implement socialism.

There was also a significant difference in their acceptance of socialist theory: Qichao Liang emphasized cognition and evaluation, while Yat-sen Sun emphasized absorption and reference. Qichao Liang's attention to the theory of socialism always revolves around a fundamental question, that is, “what is socialism?” The answer to this question can be found in his papers in different periods. For example, in *Interference and Indulge*, he said that the essence of socialism was interference and “seeking equality in inequality”; [10] in *Socialism in China*, he pointed out that the essence of socialism was, “the return of land to the public, the return of capital to the public, and use labour as the source of all things of value”; [11] in *Answer to Newspaper*, he wrote, “the purpose of socialism is to come up with the disadvantages of free competition”. [12] Qichao Liang has his own understanding of “what is socialism”, which is also the foundation for him to ridicule Yat-sen Sun and others for “not knowing what socialism is”. Yat-sen Sun's understanding of socialism theory is not limited in its definition; he paid more attention to what it should be in the Chinese context. For example, Qichao Liang borrowed the word “socialism” directly from Japanese terms.

Yat-sen Sun did not use this ready-made translation, but thought that it was more appropriate to translate it into “people's livelihood principle”. [13] When Qichao Liang made a judgment on “what socialism is”, Yat-sen Sun proposed that “socialism in China should be people's livelihood principle”.

4. Different Logic in Research and Judgement

Qichao Liang and Yat-sen Sun had a common point in their interpretation of socialist theory: they both divided socialism into two parts. Qichao Liang believed that the spirit of socialism must be adopted and implementation methods should be different in different times. Yat-sen Sun also believed that the theory could be advocated and the method should be adapted to the time. What's more, their attention to the theory of socialism tended to the same problem: how to treat socialism in China. How to understand the actual national conditions were the main criteria for them to make judgments. Qichao Liang said that China should not regard socialism as a “fire on the other side”. However, socialism lied in solving the problem of unfair distribution, but “today's urgent problem in China is the production problem, not the distribution problem”. Socialism was the doctrine of the working poor people, while China had “no working class”; the essence of socialism was intervention, while our citizens “do not regard interventionism as a public creed”. Based on his understanding of socialism and China's reality, Qichao Liang came to the conclusion that socialism is not feasible in China because “it cannot solve the key problem”.

Yat-sen Sun's analysis of China's practical problems was similar to Qichao Liang's, but different from Liang, Yat-sen Sun believed that when China's distribution problem was not serious, the implementation of socialism could avoid repeating the mistakes of Europe and the United States. Yat-sen Sun not only believed that China “should implement” socialism, but also put forward various proposals for “how to implement it”; for example, “state-owned railway is national socialism and the foundation of the prosperity and strength of the country”; “we can get the essence of socialism if we study the method of land control.” [14]

When he accepted the theory of socialism, Qichao Liang focused on answering what socialism was in the original context, and came to the conclusion that China did not need socialism; Yat-sen Sun kept thinking about what kind of socialism China needed. He first advocated German style national socialism, then Russian style socialism, which showed his urgent mood to transform China. Based on “what socialism is”, Qichao Liang reviewed reality with the theory as the coordinate. What he saw was that China was not compatible with socialist theory at that time, so he came to the conclusion that socialism was not feasible in China. Yat-sen Sun focused on “what China needs”. He saw the value of socialist theory to the transformation of China, and believed that China should carry out socialism. When Qichao Liang stopped at the conclusion that socialism was not feasible in China, Yat-sen Sun began to explore how to carry out socialism in China. Although their conclusions were different, they all connected China with the theory of socialism, which originated from foreign countries. This same trend of thinking provides a new way to solve social problems in China at the beginning of the 20th century.

5. Conclusion

Both Qichao Liang and Yat-sen Sun thought deeply on the theory of socialism. Their common concern on this theory reflected that they had some similarities in exploring the road of saving the country and the people. However, in the process of accepting the socialist theory, due to differences in cognitive starting points, thinking approaches as well as logic in research and judgment, their socialist thoughts gradually went on different paths.

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