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# The projection of Mao in Xi Jinping: Marxism and university in the strengthening of Chinese socialism

*A projeção de Mao em Xi Jinping: marxismo e universidade no fortalecimento do socialismo chinês*

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**Abstract:** Since the end of the 1970s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has stood out in the international conjuncture with impressive growth rates, in many years with up **Abstract:** This work indicates that the process of reform and opening up represented an instrument for the continuous development of China's productive forces. We adopt the perspective that ideology plays a central role in Chinese political and social stability, being an element of concern for the leaders of the Communist Party. In this sense, the article proposes a reading of the insertion of Marxism in Chinese universities, making a parallel between Mao Tse-Tung's thought and the speech of Xi Jinping, as well as the concrete policies in relation to higher education. It is also pointed out that the strengthening of the Marxist Theory is the foundation of internal cohesion and paradigmatic rupture in relation to the collapsed neoliberal system centered on the West. For this endeavor, the text "About art and literature" (TSE-TUNG, 1979) and recent speeches by President Xi Jinping will be used, as well as some policies defined through the Ministry of Education in the recent period, such as the institution of the Schools of Marxism.

**Keywords:** Chinese university. Marxism. Xi Jinping. Mao Tse-Tung. Marxist Theory.

**Resumo:** Este trabalho compreende que o processo de reforma e abertura, conduzido pela China, a partir de 1978, representou um instrumento de contínuo desenvolvimento das forças produtivas daquele país. A partir deste ponto, adota-se a perspectiva de que a ideologia cumpre um papel central na estabilidade política e social chinesa, sendo elemento de preocupação das lideranças do Partido Comunista. Neste sentido, o artigo propõe uma leitura da inserção do marxismo nas universidades chinesas, fazendo um

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paralelo entre o pensamento de Mao Tse-Tung e o discurso de Xi Jinping, bem como entre as políticas concretas em relação ao ensino superior. Assinala-se, ainda, que o fortalecimento da Teoria Marxista é alicerce de coesão interna e de ruptura paradigmática em relação ao colapsado sistema neoliberal centrado no Ocidente. Para este empreendimento, serão utilizados o texto “Sobre a arte e a literatura” (TSE-TUNG, 1979) e discursos recentes do presidente Xi Jinping, bem como algumas políticas definidas por meio do Ministério da Educação, como por exemplo, a projeção das Escolas de Marxismo.

**Palavras-chave:** Universidade chinesa. Marxismo. Xi Jinping. Mao Tse-Tung. Teoria Marxista.

## **1. Introduction**

The first signs of the URSS’s dissolution, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, represented a fundamental moment of transition in the international system. The Soviet bloc promoted an alternative to the capitalist mode of production, imposing geopolitical rivalry on the latter, by shaping zones of influence in different regions of the globe. Such a process would also occur in terms of promoting advances in the productive structure of society and in the living conditions of workers, making the consolidation of the welfare state in the Western world strongly linked to competition with socialist countries.

From the 1970s, after the break with the Keynesian-Fordist commitment, there is already an indication that the victory of capitalism would mean a substantial increase in social inequality and asymmetries between countries. In other words, the “End of History” would represent the triumph of a system based on individual competition, in the consolidation of its financial stage of capital accumulation (wealth concentrator) and in the precariousness of workers’ living conditions.

Faced with this scenario, China emerges as a contradictory element, symbolically representing pro-liberalization, modernizing and westernizing ideological discourses; as well as asserting itself as the greatest and most powerful heir to the 20th century socialist revolutions. In view of this dichotomy, this article understands that the social change that occurred in China, although renegotiated after the 1978 Reform and Opening, still takes place on socialist bases and, in this context, ideology fulfills two important functions: (i) to provide stability to the political system and (ii) reinforcing an antagonistic stance towards American hegemonic power.

In this sense, the idea that ideology is central “in the establishment, development and maintenance of the communist political system” is assumed as a premise and that this

framework is in a stage of frank strengthening in the political command of Xi Jinping. In other words, “the ideas that underlie the whole state-building of New China are rooted in Marxism, ranging from Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong to the most recent developments centered on the collective leadership of Xi Jinping” (XUAN; DORIA, 2017, p.118).

Domenico Losurdo understands that the base of the contemporary Chinese productive structure is socialist, considering that it uses, in an instrumental way, the bourgeois technical-productive-organizational arrangement, understanding it as the outpost of the development of the productive forces. But, the big difference is the virtual absence of political power of the economic elite that owns these productive means. Such an arrangement is possible by controlling goals from the central planning tool. In other words, the existence of the Five-Year Plans in itself reiterates the primacy of political power over economic, excluding the process of self-regulation of the market by the exclusive price mechanism, as neoliberalism predicts. Losurdo argues that

It is therefore a question of distinguishing between economic expropriation and political expropriation of the bourgeoisie. Only the latter should be conducted to the end, while the former, if not contained within well-defined limits, would compromise the economic development necessary to guarantee the territorial integrity and the resurgence of the country and, consequently, the respect of the social pact on whose base the communists conquered power (LOSURDO, 2004, p. 145).

This configuration is supported by the idea of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”, a term that first appeared in 1982. Controversially, this name appears in the literature as (i) support for the restoration of capitalism in China and (ii) as development of the thought of Mao Tse-Tung, namely, a Chinese interpretation of Marxist theory (XUAN; DORIA, 2017). In the framework of this work, we will use as a guideline the Xi Jinping’s definition, who points out that Socialism with Chinese characteristics “was created in the new historical period after China implemented the policy of reform and openness, but, always based on the basic system of socialism already established by New China ”and that“ despite great differences in the construction of socialism in aspects of the guiding thought, guidelines, policies and real works, these two historical stages are not isolated or contrary to each other in any way ” (XI JINPING, 2014 apud XUAN; DORIA, 2017).

The Chinese theoretical arrangement has as its horizon an articulation between theory and reality, in order to observe the particularities and historical conditions of that country. This requires an effort in two main directions: (i) to develop productivity and production relations and (ii) to consolidate socialism with Chinese characteristics, which should ensure that the superiority of Chinese socialism could be demonstrated, precisely, through modernization (LIU, 2018) and improving the living conditions of the working class. This latter phenomenon is observable in China, in contrast to a worldwide trend of significant deterioration in the subsistence conditions of the popular strata. In other words, it is understood that such a process would not be possible without a strengthening of ideology in the political-institutional sphere. In other words, the relative internal political stability in China is based on a movement of restricted liberalization and the use of capitalist productive capacity, without this mechanism having become a platform for reforms towards political liberalization. This argument is strengthened by the speeches of the current president, Xi Jinping, who reaffirms the conviction of Marxism-Leninism as a fundamental theoretical apparatus and guiding political action.

There is a dialectical relationship between capitalist advances and the formation of a socialist society, entirely new and based on the particularities of that country. Thus, China takes, in practical terms, the lessons of Maoism, in the sense that a truly socialist society will be built out of its concrete historical and material conditions. In the face of these introductory arguments, this investigation will seek to indicate the strengthening of Marxist thought in Chinese universities, bringing an alignment between Mao Tse-Tung and Xi Jinping.

In summary, this article follows the assumptions below:

1. Chinese liberalization is restricted to the continuous development of the productive forces, and does not represent a form of political power inserted in the State and in planning decisions;
2. Derived from the last point, we understand that the Chinese superstructure stills based on Marxism, within a logic of constant confrontation between theory and concrete reality. This movement has its formulation in the idea of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”;
3. Such an ideological apparatus expands internal cohesion and reinforces the figure of China in the international system as an antagonistic pole in relation to the United States;

4. China's current condition in the international system, that of protagonism and dispute in relation to hegemonic power, requires the reinforcement of these superstructural bases, which is clear in Xi Jinping's speech and practices;

5. Specific case under analysis: universities as an instrument for strengthening Marxism in China.

On this basis, the work will make an appreciation of Mao Tse-Tung and Xi Jinping thought in relation to the centrality of Marxist ideology and its insertion in higher education. From the point of view of the methodological approach, it is an examination that puts Mao Tse-Tung's thought in perspective, based on his text "On art and literature", and some statements by Xi Jinping, distributed between 2010 and 2020. Discourse is a relevant element in the construction of social life, being a material form of ideology. In concrete terms, some policies will be presented in relation to Chinese universities without, however, having it as a guide a refined exploration of historical periods. The comparison between the two leaders is justified by the frequency which Xi Jinping has been confronted by Mao Tse-Tung, especially by the Western media

**Table 01:** Comparison between Xi Jinping and Mao Tse-Tung in Western media

<b>Título da matéria</b>	<b>Publicação e ano</b>	<b>Link de acesso</b>
<i>"Xi Jinping 'most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong'"</i> .	BBC, 2017	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41730948">https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41730948</a>
<i>"China equates Xi Jinping with Mao Zedong"</i> .	DW, 2017	<a href="https://www.dw.com/pt-br/c-hina-equipara-xi-jinping-a-mao-ts%C3%A9-tung/a-41085797">https://www.dw.com/pt-br/c-hina-equipara-xi-jinping-a-mao-ts%C3%A9-tung/a-41085797</a>
<i>"Is Xi Jinping now a 'leader for life,' like Mao? Here's why this is dangerous"</i> .	Washington Post, 2018	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/27/is-xi-jinping-now-a-leader-for-life-like-mao-heres-why-this-is-dangerous/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/27/is-xi-jinping-now-a-leader-for-life-like-mao-heres-why-this-is-dangerous/</a>
<i>"Xi Jinping uses travel as a chance to rise to the pedestal of Mao Tse Tung"</i> .	Folha de São Paulo, 2018	<a href="https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/09/xi-jinping-usa-viagem-como-chance-para-se-alcar-ao-pedestal-de-mao-tse-tung.shtml">https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/09/xi-jinping-usa-viagem-como-chance-para-se-alcar-ao-pedestal-de-mao-tse-tung.shtml</a>
<i>"China's Neo-Maoist Moment"</i> .	Foreign Affairs, 2019	<a href="https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-10-01/chinas-neo-maoist-moment">https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-10-01/chinas-neo-maoist-moment</a>

**Fonte:** Author's elaboration.

The first part, after this brief introduction, will address the criticism of the arts and literature, formulated by Mao Tse-Tung, indicating his understanding of knowledge, and universities, as tools at the service of the masses. Still in this section, we will present the general characteristics and the main transformations that occurred in Chinese universities in the Mao Era.

Subsequently, Xi Jinping's stance will be addressed, as an element of projection of Marxism-Leninism as a theoretical orientation, as well as some concrete measures taken in his government, especially from the Ministry of Education. This step aims to reinforce the central argument that the Chinese government has sought to provide ideological reinvigoration from higher education. This work finally points out that the role played by China today implies a strengthening of its theoretical and political bases, both in the external and internal dimensions. Such a project has as its central element universities and the production of intellectuality.

## **2. “Raising the level from the bottom”: Mao Tse-Tung and the university**

Scientific practice, as part of the historically determined conscience of man, is an integral and fundamental element of maintenance the status quo. Universities are ideological arms that are components of the superstructure, which give functionality to the reproduction of material life. In other words, these institutions supply the market with technical work and analyze the reality acting as an auxiliary line in the capitalist mode of accumulation.

In “About art and literature”, Mao Tse-Tung (1979) analyzes that the transition to a socialist society must have, as a basic institute, the disposition of its intellectual effort in the struggle and in the cause of the popular ranks. Mao rejects the spread of petty-bourgeois behavior, which understands that intellectual work is more noble than the tasks performed by workers, peasants and soldiers.

Therefore, the Chinese leader emphasizes that it is a fundamental task of intellectuals not only to describe the working class in a distant way, but to be between them and learn from them. In this regard,

Coming from the petty-bourgeoisie and being themselves intellectuals, many of us only look for friends among the intellectuals, and pay all their attention to the study and representation of the latter. It would be fair if they put themselves in the position of the proletariat to study and paint them. But that is not how it happens, or not at all. They put themselves in the position of petty-bourgeoisie and make their works a self-portrait of the petty-bourgeois. [...] In many cases, they have the greatest sympathy for intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin and even in the face of their defects they show benevolence and even praise them. On the other hand, they lack ties with the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers [...] try to paint them, keep the clothes of a worker, but the face is that of the petty-bourgeois intellectual (TSE-TUNG, 1979, p. 99).

This excerpt is relevant because, even after the victory of the revolutionary movement, the reproduction of petty-bourgeois ideological forms was maintained, as part of a historical determination of material life in the consciousness of the Chinese intellectual. In other words, one of the great battles in the realm of socialism is the construction of a mentality, of a morality, of a subjectivity fixed in collective bases and in function of the collectivity, dismantling the individualistic character and turned to the profitability and the commodification of life and nature, present in the subjective and objective structures of capitalism.

From this point of view, Mao indicates that we must “raise the level” in the arts and literature. This should not proceed as an anti-people movement, away; but for the integration of the people as a founding base and through the cultural elevation of the popular strata:

Given that our art and literature are essentially for soldiers, peasants and workers, popularization means popularizing among them; level raising means raising the level from their level. What should we popularize among them? [...] We must popularize only that which workers, soldiers and peasants lack and which are willing to receive well. That is why, before undertaking the task of educating them, it is necessary to learn from them. This is particularly true when it comes to raising the level. To lift anything, you need to start from the base. [...] So, where do we start from to raise the bar? From the base of the feudal class? From the base of the bourgeoisie? Of petty-bourgeois intellectuals? No, neither. We can only raise it based on the mass of soldiers, peasants and workers. [...] Here, the task of placing ourselves at the school of the proletariat still imposes itself (Ibidem, p. 102).

Popularizing and raising the level are the basic tasks of intellectual work. Having the people as a foundation means that the intellectual exercise can offer back an analysis closer to reality, in a strongly dialectical activity: (i) from concrete reality to subjective elaboration; (ii) from theoretical subjectivity to the people, in the challenge of culturally elevating the masses. According to the diagram below:

**Figure 01:** Intellectual work and its relationship with concrete reality



**Source:** Self elaboration.

Intellectuality should serve as an instrument for building the economic, political and cultural emancipation of the working class, freeing it from alienating configurations that serve the interests of the exploiters. This movement has, according to Maoist

understanding, an enormous capacity for generating unity and recognizing the common enemy.

Currently, the problem they face is that they are engaged in a fierce and bloody struggle against the enemy and that being illiterate, without culture, for having been subjected by the feudal class and the bourgeoisie in long domination, insistently demand the development of a wide cultural initiation process. They require instruction, art and literature which they are in urgent need of and which they could assimilate without difficulty. That which would exalt your enthusiasm for combat, which would strengthen your faith and strengthen your union in the unanimous struggle against the enemy (Ibidem, p. 105).

Specifically, since the Revolution, Chinese higher education has undergone an important expansion. In 1949, there were 180 universities across the country and about 80,000 students regularly enrolled; as of 1957, China now has 440,000 people regularly enrolled in higher education. At first, the adoption of the Soviet model of heavy industrialization was reflected in the predominance of courses aimed at technical and scientific areas (SAYWELL, 1980).

After 1952, the Chinese university underwent a process of curricular modification, which reduced the influence of the Western system. Special emphasis to Economics courses, strongly marked, even after the Revolution of 1949, by the spread of orthodox economic theory. Gradually, economics curricula at Chinese universities began to replace the traditional framework with the Soviet academic system. Most universities modified their “Western” courses by Marxist economic theory, based on a markedly Soviet interpretation (LIU, 2018).

Subsequently, from the gradual Sino-Soviet withdrawal, it is possible to verify the materialization of the Maoist discourse of approximation between the intellectuals and the popular masses. Especially from 1958:

Politics and class background were introduced as criteria for admission to university. Priority was given programmes which aimed at achieving mass literacy, providing local initiative, expanding rural educational opportunities, encouraging curricular and structural innovation and politicizing education at all levels. Many of these policies including programmes like the part-work/part-study schemes had their roots in the Chinese Communists' revolutionary tradition long before Liberation and had been continued in the early 1950's (SAYWELL, 1980, p. 2).

As of 1959, 16 universities were categorized as “key universities”, directly linked to the Ministry of Education and the central government, which obtained greater resources and more qualified human capital. The binomial "technical education" - "political / class



education", in the 1960s, appears again as one of Mao's main concerns. For him, the emphasis on technical education reveals revisionist attitudes and the expansion of capitalist ranks within the Chinese Communist Party. Such concerns, within a broader and more complex context, will find an echo in the Cultural Revolution, starting in 1966.

Wangbei Ye and Fei Ye (2019) indicate that, since 1978, China has been going through a process of declining the teaching of Marxism in basic education, despite a certain impulse of this component in the curricula of higher education. Before that period, there was greater homogeneity in the transmission of Marxism as Mao Tse-Tung's political ideology and thought on these two levels. In this sense, mostly, during the Mao Era:

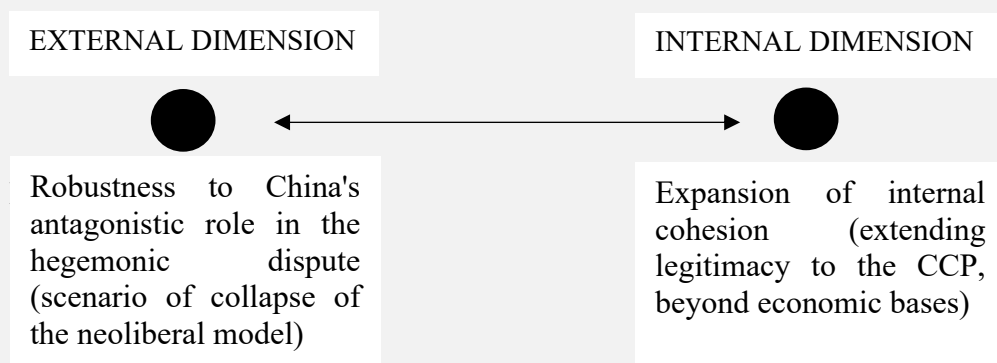
[...] As stated by the PRC's Ministry of Education (MoE), at the time, the aim of Chinese education was to 'convert youths into faithful communists' (Kirby 1965, 68). The relationship between political education in basic education and higher education at that time highlighted cooperation. For instance, political education in universities, in the early years of the PRC, was intended to 'equip young students with Marx-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, providing them proletarian education, to cultivate strong revolution successors, to cooperate with political education in middle schools (Ye; Ye, 2019, p. 3).

As of 1985, the "Decision on the Reform of Educational Structure" was launched, which meant a decentralization of basic education - with greater control by local governments and communities. This new regulation implied the alignment of basic education with the market demands, replacing Marxist political instruction in favor of more generic moral and civic qualities. In the late 1980s, Tiananmen protests forced the Communist Party to pay more attention to the carelessness about ideological instruction in universities in that decade, causing the government to boost political education at the higher level (Ye; Ye, 2019).

This question suggests that there is a fundamental dilemma in a socialist economy: would it be possible to expand the technical capacity, at the disposal of the development of the productive forces, without this process producing a countermovement based on a subjectivity / morality of a capitalist character? In other words, it is politically feasible to allow the university to promote a scientific / technological apparatus of a capitalist character, which can be used in the service of socialism - as indicated by Losurdo (2004; 2015), in the case of the use of bourgeois economic capacities ( without political power)?

This article is not intended to answer these complex questions. It is identified, however, that the change in the Chinese posture, in the Xi Jinping Era, indicates the need to invigorate the Marxist theoretical and cultural bases within the Chinese university. This procedure feeds the antagonistic reference in the hegemonic dispute, given the intensification of Sino-American relations; and, internally, it reinforces the social stability necessary to strengthen the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. In this respect, Mao and Xi Jinping get closer, given the idea of raising the consciousness of the masses in the light of Marxism-Leninism. This we will try to prove from elements of the speech of the current Chinese leader.

**Figure 02:** The role of Marxism-Leninism from Xi Jinping



**Source:** Self elaboration.

Therefore, as in the Maoist elaboration, it is understood that in today's China it is essential to rescue a theoretical-cultural-ideological mentality that reinforces the socialist project. In the current moment of intensification of the Sino-American dispute, it seems that the Asian country's distance from Western morality and values seems to be central, especially in relation to the neoliberal configuration. This option is realized in the political personality of Xi Jinping.

### **3. “Brilliant rays of truth”: Xi Jinping, Marxism and the university**

On the occasion of the celebration of Karl Marx's 200th birthday in May 2018, Xi Jinping says that that thinker is “a teacher of revolution for the proletariat and workers worldwide, the main founder of Marxism, the creator of Marxist parties, a pioneer for international communism and the most important thinker of modern times” and that “Marx's doctrine still shines with the brilliant rays of truth” (XI JINPING, 2018). He goes on to state that

In the new era, Chinese Communists still need to study Marx, study and practice Marxism, and continually draw on its powerful knowledge and theories [...]. In our efforts at carrying out the coordinated advancement of the “five-pronged” overall plan and the “Four Comprehensives” strategy, thus ensuring that we always stay the course toward national rejuvenation as we break the waves and sail ahead (Ibidem, 2018).

Then, the PCC Secretary-General reinforces the imperative need to develop the productive forces within the scope of socialism, passing through the Western apparatus, of bourgeois character, alluding, even, to the Reform and Opening process:

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, and especially since reform and opening up, within 70 years our Party has led the people in resolute efforts at unleashing and developing national forces of production and completed a process of development that took the West several centuries to complete, thus propelling our country’s high-speed rise to become the world’s second largest economy. We need to have the courage to deepen reform in all areas, rouse the vitality of the national forces of production via balancing the relations of production, and adapt to the requirements of developing the economic foundation via improving the superstructure. By doing so, we will ensure that the development of Chinese socialism better conforms with the patterns governing the forces and relations of production (Ibidem, 2018).

At this point, Xi Jinping's speech connects the arguments of Domenico Losurdo (2004; 2015) and Mao Tse-Tung (1979), for establishing the importance of the development of the productive forces without, on the other hand, neglecting the ideological framework. He points out that the conscience of the working class must be elevated, according to a superstructure that is in accordance with its interests; otherwise, a social barrier will form:

Once advanced ideas and culture are apprehended by the masses, they transform into a formidable material force; conversely, if outmoded or erroneous ideas are not done away with, they become fetters on social development. Theoretical awareness and cultural confidence are a force for national progress; advanced values and a free mind are the source of social vitality. Culture both transforms and fashions the spirit of a nation. While remaining grounded in China’s realities, our nation must embrace modernization, the world, and the future. We must consolidate the position of Marxism as our guiding thought, develop an advanced socialist culture, and strengthen observance of socialist cultural and ethical standards. We must also see that all areas of social development are imbued with core socialist values, promote the creative transformation and innovative development of our fine traditional culture, help our people raise their political awareness and moral standards, and foster appreciation of fine culture. By doing so, we will continue to add new luster to Chinese culture. (Ibidem, 2018).

Ele também lembra, em declarações mais antigas, a necessidade de aproximação entre a intelectualidade e as massas. Em uma edição de 2010 da Revista Qiushi<sup>2</sup>, Xi Jinping elabora uma crítica muito semelhante àquela feita por Mao Tse Tung (1979<sup>3</sup>), qual seja, a de que o elevado grau de instrução dos membros do Partido não deve resultar em distanciamento das camadas populares:

Some cadres have forgotten about the mass line. Many Party members and ordinary people complain that cadres are keeping a longer distance from the people [...]. in spite of the higher level of education of cadres, they are less able to do mass work. Such complaints reflect problems in the mass work of the Party and in the relationships between the Party and the people and between the cadres and the people. This is both a problem of their stand and feeling and a problem of working method and competence (XI JINPING, 2010).

In this same article, initiatives related to the Party School of the CPC Central Committee are shown. In June 2010, the first interview was carried out, with the participation of foreign journalists, and the institution's efforts to open up the institution to the outside world were reinforced. The publication reports the growth of academic cooperation with government departments, research institutes and universities in almost 30 countries (QIUSHI, 2010). However, this research found no additional evidence for this openness.

More concrete measures, in the sense of reaffirming Marxism as a master theory, can be verified through the Ministry of Education. In 2015, Minister Yuan Guiren would have, according to The New York Times, defined Western ideas as being dangerous for Chinese universities, warning of their growing presence and influence. The publication, of a critical character, points to Guiren as a remnant of the Cultural Revolution and still expresses concern with the Minister's guidelines, aligned with ideological loyalty to the Party, with the thinking of Xi Jinping and with the priority given to the teaching of Marxism<sup>4</sup>.

In the same year, the government issued, through The General Office of the Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, a document containing “suggestions to strengthen and improve the work of propaganda and ideology in colleges and universities”. In this statement, it is emphasized that "as a frontier of ideological

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<sup>2</sup> Available in: <[http://english.qstheory.cn/magazine/201004/201109/t20110920\\_111355.htm](http://english.qstheory.cn/magazine/201004/201109/t20110920_111355.htm)>. Access in September 21, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See previous section.

<sup>4</sup> Available in <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/09/world/asia/china-tells-schools-to-suppress-western-ideas-with-one-big-exception.html>>. Accessed on September 21, 2020.

work, colleges and universities are responsible for studying, researching and propagating Marxism, cultivating and promoting the fundamental values of socialism, in order to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Chinese Communist Party; State Council, 2015).

The document outlines the seven fundamental guidelines below:

1. Reinforcing and improving the propaganda and ideological work of colleges and universities is a strategic, important and urgent task;
2. Guiding ideology, basic principles and main tasks;
3. Effectively promote the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics in teaching materials in the classroom and in the mind;
4. To vigorously improve the ideological and political quality of university professors;
5. Continue to strengthen dominant public and ideological opinion in colleges and universities;
6. Focus on strengthening the management of advertising and the ideological position of colleges and universities;
7. Effectively strengthen party leadership in propaganda and ideological work in colleges and universities<sup>5</sup>.

In March 2016, Yuan Guiren declared that "the Communist Party of China combined Marxist theory with the country's practical situation to establish it as a guiding ideology" and that "the value we refer to is that which is defended by ideology Marxist and that combines with the traditional value of China" (XINHUA, 2016<sup>6</sup>).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education defined new standardization rules for the study of Marxism in universities, such as: facilities, faculty and courses, medium-sized classes and assessments. Within this framework, department directors and Party representatives will act in a more aligned manner, holding periodic meetings; Party members can also act as teachers, being directly linked to the pedagogical practice of the courses. In this

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<sup>5</sup> “《意见》分七个部分：一、加强和改进高校宣传思想工作是一项重大而紧迫的战略任务；二、指导思想、基本原则和主要任务；三、切实推动中国特色社会主义理论体系进教材进课堂进头脑；四、大力提高高校教师队伍思想政治素质；五、不断壮大高校主流思想舆论；六、着力加强高校宣传思想阵地管理；七、切实加强党对高校宣传思想工作的领导。”

<sup>6</sup> Available in: < [http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2016-03/11/c\\_135176497.htm](http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2016-03/11/c_135176497.htm)>. Accessed on September 21, 2020.

scenario, the Schools of Marxism gained relative autonomy, being considered independent institutions, although in the context of the university to which they are affiliated (Qu Qiuyan, 2017<sup>7</sup>).

The table below indicates that the strengthening of the Schools of Marxism is a recent phenomenon. Many of the universities listed below already had research groups related to the study of Marxist Theory, however, the institution of the Schools of Marxism occurred, mostly, in the last 12 years. Among the ten best placed universities in the QS World University Rankings, seven have such centers:

**Table 02:** Best Chinese universities and the presence/absence of Schools of Marxism in these institutions

UNIVERSITIES	RANKING	IS THERE A SCHOOL OF MARXISM?	FOUNDATION <sup>8</sup>
Tsinghua University	16	Yes	2008
Peking University	22	Yes	1992
Fudan University	40	Yes	2014
Zhejiang University	54	Yes	2015
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	60	Yes	2009
University of Science and Technology of China	89	No	-
Nanjing University	120	No	-
Wuhan University	257	Yes	2011
Tongji University	265	No	-
Harbin Institute of Technology	277	Yes	2011

**Source:** <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2020>. Universities websites. Author's Elaboration.

The comparison between Mao Tse-Tung and Xi Jinping is justified by the political strength that the current Chinese president represents, in particular, by his expanded presence in the context of global governance and, also, by his argument intensely based on a Marxist approach. An example of this latter direction was the approval, at the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China, of the theoretical framework “Xi Jinping’s Thought about Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Age”. On that occasion, it was decided to expand the study of Xi Jinping’s thought, through the establishment of

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1068750.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> Some of these centers already had consolidated Marxist research centers, being renamed and made independent as “Schools of Marxism” later. The dates listed here refer to this milestone.

introductory courses at important universities, such as Beijing and Tsinghua, having been the first center established at Renmin University in 2017.

The PCC's publication also indicates a concern with the articulation between Xi Jinping's Thought and local particularities, even at the community level: “the three units (Renmin, Beijing and Tsinghua) adapted measures to local conditions and combined the study of the ideas of Xi Jinping on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era with local practice ”.

In practical terms, this means that the theoretical framework must serve regional development needs. In the same document, it is also possible to identify the close relationship between the implementation of Xi Jinping's Thought in universities and the direct role of the Schools of Marxism in the process.

The consolidation of these structures, as a project, does not mean the orthodox, static and Eurocentric reproduction of Marxism. In several speeches, Xi Jinping has reiterated the need to develop the theory based on contemporary and particular elements of the Chinese experience, which includes the process of reform and opening up. In August 2020, in an article for Qiushi Magazine, he argues in favor of the continuous study of Marxist political economy, as a parameter for understanding the movements proper to the reproduction of material life. On the other hand, Xi emphasizes the maintenance of vitality and the opening of new horizons in this field of study, essential for the elevation of the country's economic and social conditions. In the same text, he highlights the centrality of state ownership and China's greater participation in global governance (XINHUA, 2020<sup>9</sup>).

A more assertive international projection is constantly associated with the figure of Xi Jinping. As argued at the beginning of this work, the more firm stance in relation to the promotion of Marxism, both in the speech of the Chinese leader and in universities, seems part of a dynamic to strengthen the Chinese position, of his socialist project, both internally and in international relations. This interaction between the internal and the external, through the mediation of Marxism as a guiding theory, is noticeable in this excerpt:

A theory has great global value only if it has a strong national identity and will only be able to influence internationally if it is advanced. We must base ourselves on the characteristics of time and renew Marxism

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<sup>9</sup> Available in: < [http://portuguese.xinhuanet.com/2020-08/16/c\\_139294592.htm](http://portuguese.xinhuanet.com/2020-08/16/c_139294592.htm)>. Accessed on September 21, 2020.

to those characteristics and, at the same time, use Marxism to better observe, interpret and conduct the era, to truly understand the mission it confers on us and to know well the past world history and its course of development in the future (XI JINPING, 2019, p. 75).

The consolidation of socialism with Chinese characteristics goes through a constant reformulation of Marxism, which is different from a revisionist position or a rehabilitation of capitalism. We understand that the theory serves to guide the opening process within a non-Western logic and to create a morality that places the collective as a priority over the individual. Such a principle, of the primacy of the collectivity over the individual, would be projected for the international system, which can be verified, for example, in the Chinese action against coronavirus pandemic, in its posture of growing international solidarity, and in the constant incentive to multilateralism - in a scenario of rising protectionist, nationalist, neo-fascist discourses, etc.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Those who are not convinced that China still operates on mostly socialist foundations will not have enough arguments, however, to prove that it is a full capitalist economy. State-owned companies are still the major holders of strategic resources, public banks play an important role in the stability of economic cycles and millions of people are lifted out of poverty every year.

Central planning, aiming at economic and social prosperity, is a basic instrument of the Chinese economy. At the same time, in much of the globe, society is walking the tightrope of the market's "moods". This market is daily emphasized by Western ideological devices, as a natural and ontologically linked element to human existence. This is the daily task of building an alienating mentality, that the human being is himself a commodity, responsible for his own individual success or failure.

In other words, it is difficult to sustain China's full liberalization argument, in a context where the differences between the Asian country's system and the collapsed neoliberal model are quite considerable. Contemporary example of the superiority of the Chinese social formulation was the fight against coronavirus in that country, capable of presenting surprising results in terms of preserving life, collective conscience and economic recovery<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> As of the closing date of this text, the USA had 6,951,789 infected and 202,344 deaths. China, in the same period, had a total of 90,416 people infected and 4,738 lives lost, being the first country affected and



This opposition to the Western world is not possible without a relative internal cohesion, without a strong political direction and without articulating a different mentality and moral base. While neoliberalism denies ideology, reinforces discourses of neutrality and imposes its institutions as neutral, natural and superior, it strongly expands inequality - in unprecedented patterns since post-World War II. In this model, the denial of ideology becomes its immediate opposite.

If this article had American universities as its focus of analysis, it would not be difficult to prove that, with the advance of neoliberalism, those institutions are also completely modified, due to the creation of technical and ideological staff, capable of spreading the aligned principles to that political-economic practice. In the documentary *Inside Job*, by Charles H. Ferguson, the close link between North American universities and the financial market and the performance of these agents within the country's political system is quite evident. This demonstrates that, for an economic system to work, it needs to be powered by a superstructural apparatus that gives sustainability to its practices on the material plane.

In this work, we tried to prove the strengthening of Marxist theory in the context of Chinese higher education. This aspect has an affinity with the consolidation of a society that operates in patterns essentially different from the Western system. Such concern, namely, of an ideological strengthening, externalized in the speeches of Xi Jinping and in the policies of the Ministry of Education, has reason to be in the expansion of internal cohesion - in addition to limited economic gains; and attitude towards the international community.

Xi Jinping projects Mao Tse-Tung in his narrative of (i) continuous reformulation of Marxism according to China's historical-concrete bases and determinations, (ii) in his concern with the continued formation of the cadres and their approach to the popular masses and (iii) the centrality of the theoretical apparatus as a guiding element in political action. The summary table below presents the points of approximation between thought and practices for higher education (and the understanding of intellectuality, more broadly) in Mao Tse-Tung and Xi Jinping:

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the one with the largest population in the world. Source: Johns Hopkins. Available at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>. Accessed on September 24, 2020.

“[...]China is the only major economy that expects positive growth this year. J.P. Morgan recently increased its Chinese growth prospects in 2020 to 2.5%, compared to 1.3% in April”. Source: Xinhua. Available in [http://portuguese.xinhuanet.com/2020-08/26/c\\_139318556.htm](http://portuguese.xinhuanet.com/2020-08/26/c_139318556.htm). Accessed on September 24, 2020.

**Table 03:** Mao’s projection on Xi Jinping -  
theoretical and practical elements for strengthening Marxism

<b>IDENTIFIED ELEMENTS</b>	<b>MAO TSE-TUNG</b>	<b>XI JINPING</b>
Proximity between Party and People	Discourse and practice	Discourse (practice not evidenced within this research limits)
Concern with the Westernization of universities	Discourse and practice	Discourse and practice
Promotion of basic guiding principles (consolidation of a theoretical construct around the leader)	Discourse and practice	Discourse and practice
Marxism-Leninism in education as a promoter of loyalty to the Communist Party and the Chinese development project	Discourse and practice (1950’s)	Discourse and practice (19th CCP Congress, 2017)
Concern with the continuous reformulation of the theory in relation to community realities	Discourse and practice	Discourse and practice

Source: Author’s Elaboration.

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