

Deng xiaoping — the great leader of china



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Today China is a global economic superpower. If one man can be credited to have led China on the path of economic modernization, it is certainly Deng Xiaoping, the former paramount leader of China. He is the one that started China's 'second revolution'. Deng was a nation builder par excellence. He is the quintessential Chinese hero. Though Mao Tse-tung may still be more famous around the world, Deng Xiaoping's name is of more substance. Those days when Mao used to be blindly regarded as the foremost of Chinese leaders were long over.

Today, Mao is more associated with violent excesses that brought about colossal suffering to the Chinese people. Like his Russian counterpart Stalin, Mao may have become more infamous than famous. Deng had been a Marxist and Maoist himself. However, he tempered his adherence to the Communist ideology with a good measure of practical sense. Deng is remembered today for releasing the country from the stranglehold of Leninism and Maoism (Baum, 1994). Despite being a communist at the core, Deng was the person who allowed China to embark upon the road of continuous technological progress and free international trade.

It is owing to Deng Xiaoping that Mao's revolutionary legacy has become almost irrelevant to modern China. As Mao shrinks in status in history books, Deng is rising. Deng used to say that it did not matter whether it was a black cat or a white cat as long as it could catch mice. It was this pragmatic and hard-nosed approach of his that spurred him to move the gates of China wide open to the entire world, and introduce a new dynamism into the country's economy. Deng is a heroic figure of epic proportions.

His greatness is acknowledged both within China as well as the whole world over. He not only transformed a nation, but in doing so changed the face of the earth for posterity. The policies he put into action and the stances promulgated by him altered the fate of the most populous nation in the world. He rose to the position from where he could achieve this in 1977, at the age of 73. He immediately targeted the whole Maoist framework of state control. He was a tremendous visionary who could see that China had powerful entrepreneurial spirit, and most of it was just lying dormant.

Having been a staunch communist all his life, it would have been very difficult for him to admit that the communist model was not working for the nation. Therefore he could not embrace capitalism wholeheartedly; nevertheless he initiated the process of change boldly, and accepted the capitalistic nature of many of the changes that he set into motion. Deng's vision for China went beyond the economy. Reflecting the aspirations of many leaders of the New Culture Movement in the late 1910's when he was but a school boy, Deng desired a cultural awakening of China.

China would be a strong nation and rise to the status of world superpower only when all the foundations of the Chinese economy and society in general are strong. Deng focused on the educational system, especially higher university-level education. He wished for more Chinese students to go and study abroad, while foreign students poured into China at the same time. Hence it is particularly ironic that Deng's name has come to be associated with the tragic Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 when 2000 students were killed.

This is perhaps the only blemish that stands out in the otherwise resplendent career record of the great leader. Deng's reputation suffered enormously because of this event, although his actual role in sanctioning the massacre is somewhat debated. To whatever degree Deng may have been responsible for the student massacre, he was also equally responsible for the liberation of tens of thousands of students, intellectuals and professionals who had all been sent into exile into remote rural areas during Mao's regime.

A majority of these victims of Maoist Cultural Revolution were allowed to reunite with their families, thanks to Deng. Deng gave particular attention to certain sectors which needed changes. For example, he instituted many changes to streamline the Chinese military. China has been a major military power of the world for a long time now, and Deng's initiative reinforced China's military supremacy. He also gave much attention to the country's judicial system. Because capitalism was going to come to China, Deng rightly foresaw that the country would need an army of lawyers well trained in commercial and corporate law.

In the name of ideology, Mao quelled the intellectual and creative impulse of the country. Very much like Stalin, Mao was essentially paranoid of any person who could think on his or her own, or even of anyone who showed some potential to do that. The damage that had to be undone by Deng Xiaoping was immense. Yet, he went about the task with his characteristic aplomb. He authorized loosening all kinds of controls on a variety of creative enterprises such as filmmaking, music, visual arts, fashion.

He lifted restrictions for investigative journalists, in fact they were encouraged to expose any kind of evil or abuse that was happening anywhere in the country. Deng did not hesitate at the consideration that this might lead to implicating many people in his own Communist Party. Interestingly enough, in 1978, in a locality situated close to the Party headquarters, a wall was opened to freely broadcast all sorts of public opinion on the state of affairs, via posters. Known as the Democracy Wall, it became a place for ventilating people's grievances and anguish on all kinds of matters of local and national importance.

Frequently even Deng himself was targeted in the criticism featured on the wall, while Mao was, quite understandably, its permanent hallmark during the brief time that this wall lasted. Dissent was given free rein only for one year during 1979. Subsequently it proved too much and had to be put in check. Mao crushed intellectuals and the people from higher classes purportedly to benefit the hundreds of millions of Chinese poor. Mao only succeeded in increasing the numbers of poor in China. It was Deng who was actually able to lift untold numbers of Chinese poor out of the clutches of poverty.

The effects of Deng's policies had a long reach. Albeit somewhat reluctantly, Deng led the country on the capitalist path, and in process many kinds of state economic control were relaxed or simply removed. Special Economic Zones were launched; these were free-trade enclaves and represented the potential of a liberalized economy. It is changes and initiatives such as these that were eventually responsible for dramatically improving the economy of

the country and reducing the suffering of millions of poverty-stricken people of China.

The magnitude of changes for which Deng can be credited is simply unprecedented in history. Within a decade or two of Deng's initiating the changes, China was transformed into the manufacturing capital of the world. To gain a deeper perspective on Deng's achievements, one has to try to get to the roots and look at Deng's childhood. Deng was born on 22 August of 1904 in a small village called Guang'an in the Sichuan province. His family had settled in that region for several generations by then. His father studied at the University of law and political science at Chengdu.

Deng graduated from the Chongqing Preparatory School in the summer of 1919. The 1910's were a momentous epoch of change for China. The general intellectual culture of Deng's formative years must have naturally influenced his outlook toward life. Some background information regarding China's political conditions at this period can help us place a context to Deng's intellectual growth during his adolescence. China had been traditionally ruled by monarchic dynasties. In 1644 China's Ming dynasty was overthrown by invaders from Manchuria in the North. The Manchus were a semi-nomadic primitive people.

They took over China and divided the whole country among themselves. The Manchurian Qing dynasty ruled China for over 250 years. By the mid 1900's when Deng was born, the Qing dynasty had become very weakened. In addition, Russia, Japan, France, Britain, and Germany — all these countries had previously invaded the country and established their colonies. There was

foreign imperialist presence everywhere in China, although the country as a whole was not a colony of any imperialist power. Patriotic Chinese yearned for freedom and a democratic and independent China.

It was into this milieu that Deng was born. There was an enormous degree of chaos, suffering and oppression. The first step toward modernization took place when the last Qing emperor was deposed in the Wuchang Uprising of 1911. A democratic government was established, but it was democratic only in name. China's new government was a weak, dissent-torn government that was virtually controlled by Chinese warlords from various regions, and it showed clear tendencies toward totalitarianism. While many common people despaired at the developing situation, many others were filled with rebellious sentiments.

These were times of crisis, but the Chinese intellectuals of the period realized that the way out of the crisis was not a quick and easy one. They saw that the causes of the turmoil of the present had very deep roots in the past. The problem was with the entire traditional Chinese culture and outlook toward life. Modernity could not spread and bring about progress just by a change of the political system, because the political system could not be changed effectively in the first place without getting rid of many of the burdens of the past.

A great amount of groundwork had to be done first for the successful change of the polity, and much of this change had to take place at the grassroots level. The national character and the essential mold of the Chinese mind had to be transformed. The enlightened intellectuals of China banded together

into an avant-garde force in order to lead the nation in new directions. In 1915, an intellectual revolutionary by the name of Chen Duxiu started a monthly magazine called ‘ The Youth Magazine’ which was later renamed to “ New Youth.”

This magazine propagated iconoclastic ideals to do away with the past and its oppressing feudal traditions. Duxiu urged people to think and discuss and come together with a cause. Young intellectuals of the nation began to burn with a desire to reform the Chinese society and strengthen its government and economy. These would-be leaders of the New Culture Movement intended to change China in every way that was possible, and transform it into a strong and prosperous, democratic and liberal state. They exalted Western ideas and ideals and disparaged the traditional Chinese mores based on Confucianism.

Science (scientific thinking) and democracy (a rational form of government) became the new gods on whose altar an increasing number of thinking people in China were willing to lay their lives (Schwarcz, 1986). On May 4th of 1919, a group of 3000 students of the Peking University marched in protest against the government at Tiananmen Square. Very soon it triggered student protests and demonstrations all over the country which turned into a movement and gave a massive boost to political and cultural changes happening in the country.

Around that time, upon completing his basic education in China, Deng was about to travel to France for further education. He was too young to participate in or even fully understand the nature of the social and cultural

revolution that was taking place in his country. Yet he must have soaked in many of its values. Just before leaving for France, Deng's father had a private conversation with his son and asked him what was the purpose of his education abroad. Deng, of course, had a ready answer, one which reflected the unanimous view of hundreds of thinkers and writers across the country at that time, whose collective influence was inescapable.

Deng replied, " To learn knowledge and truth from the West in order to save China. " This response highlights how much the whole intellectual climate of the period indeed looked toward the West for inspiration (Stewart, 2001).

Many key aspects of Deng's attitudes and actions in his later life can be traced back to this period. Deng too believed that a country can become strong only if it is based on sound social, economic and cultural foundations; a change of polity in itself cannot have much of a meaning.

Deng too looked upon the West as an enemy (one of the main targets of the May Fourth Movement was Western Imperialism), but at the same time he drew much inspiration from it. All his life, Deng carried with him essentially the same ideals and aspirations as Chen Duxiu and other leaders of the New Culture Movement. Unfortunately, the May Fourth / New Culture Movement betrayed itself when — form 1920 onward — it abandoned the concept of democracy and embraced communism.

This ironically happened because democracy was sought in all respects — political, economic and social. However, economic democracy meant economic equality, and it was thought that the millions of the Chinese poor dependent on agriculture could not be uplifted in an American style capitalist

democracy. And so political democracy fell out of favor, and socialism took its place. Very soon, Marxist communism became the dominant ideology of leading thinkers in China in the 1920's. Deng too was carried away by the wave of communism for the better part of his life.

However, it was he that finally turned the tide of communism in China and restored the democratic ideals of many of the pioneering thinkers during the New Culture Movement, at least to the extent possible. Incidentally, Deng's role in the ghastly Tiananmen Square episode of 1989 can be perhaps explained by considering the impact of the May Fourth Movement on his young developing mind so many years ago. The May Fourth Movement spearheaded by just a few thousand students in the Tiananmen Square in 1919 had far reaching impact on Chinese history and led to many dramatic changes.

Hence we may go so far as to conjecture that Deng was very deep down clearly aware of the potential of student unrest and its capacity to destabilize a whole country. Of course it was a good thing when it happened in 1919, but it could be very bad if such instability were to occur once again in 1989 when China was on the path to prosperity. Such considerations may have prompted Deng to take that most regrettable decision of brutally cracking down the student unrest at whatever cost. The cost was immense indeed, both to the country and to Deng's image.

Also, Mao's mass movements invariably turned into national disasters.

Therefore though Deng at first sincerely intended to give full freedom for the expression of dissent among the masses, he soon realized that this may not

be a practical idea and began to clamp down on dissenters in his own way. This kind of relatively mild suppression, however, finally ended up in 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Although we have tried here to explain one of the possible reasons that could have spurred Deng's involvement in Tiananmen massacre, it essentially remains an enigma.

Because it is simply inconceivable how such a great and compassionate leader — not a Mao, not a Stalin — could sanction the murder of so many innocent people. It can be hoped though that future historians would be able to exculpate Deng from the responsibility for so many sudden deaths. Deng first came under the sway of communist ideology in the 1920's when he was a young student in France. After the First World War, the economy of France was in a shattered condition. Life was tough, and in fact Deng did not have much of an opportunity to pursue his studies.

He had to spend most of his time doing all kinds of menial jobs just to eke out a living. He would have been certainly disillusioned with regard to what he had heard about the glories of the West. France at this time was also a breeding ground for many political ideologies, as people were intensely searching for alternative ways of organizing social existence. Communism was very much in vogue. Most of the Chinese students in France were attracted to communism and Deng was no exception. In 1922, he joined the Communist Youth League. Here he first came under the wing of Zhou Enlai, the future Premier of China.

Zhou would be an important figure in Deng's political life. Deng studied at Moscow in 1926, and here his knowledge of Marxist-Leninist thought became

consolidated. He returned to China in 1927 (Florcurz & Chua, 1997). Deng first met Mao in the remote Guangxi province in the late 1920's. As active members of the Communist Party, both of them were there to organize the rebels of the region. Deng was very much impressed by Mao's guerilla tactics. Mao and Deng were almost like brothers, and they worked together from 1931 to 1934 on the task of establishing a Red Army base in the Jiangxi province of China.

Deng and Mao were then ousted out of the party for taking a different stance from the pro-Soviet party high commission. Now Deng took part in the grueling Long March of 1934-36 alongside Mao. Thereafter, Deng worked under Mao on several military assignments until the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. After the proclamation of the Republic by Mao, Deng rose in power and was made the General Secretary of the party. By 1956, he was one of Mao's Deputy Premiers. Deng was loyal to Mao, and Mao regarded Deng highly.