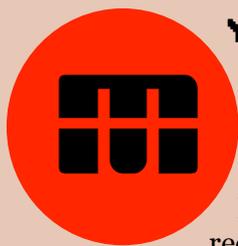


**IF IMPERIALISM IS  
THE HIGHEST  
STAGE OF  
CAPITALISM, THEN  
ANTI-IMPERIALISM  
IS THE HIGHEST  
STAGE OF CLASS  
STRUGGLE**

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by ZHONG XIANGYU

Like many communists born to immigrant families in the United States, my political development has been an extension of connecting with my cultural roots. Though I was born and raised in the United States, I spent many childhood summers in Tainan, my mother's hometown in southern Taiwan, which undoubtedly *strengthened* my bond with my heritage.



**MY FATHER** is a *Hwagyo* – a member of the Chinese diaspora in Korea – and although he was born and raised in Korea, the south Korean regime refused to

recognize him as a citizen because his father was not Korean; the fact that he was born to a Korean mother did not matter to the Rhee and Park regimes. At the time, the south Korean regime had not established diplomatic relations with the new Chinese government in Beijing, and therefore the “Republic of China” (whose effective administrative area had been reduced to Taiwan, Penghu, Jīnmén/Kinmen, and Mǎzǔ/Matzu) was the Chinese government recognized by Seoul. Because the Kuomintang (KMT) lost the mainland and had its authority openly challenged in 1947 by Taiwanese people unhappy with the KMT’s mishandling of internal contradictions, the KMT actively tried to win over overseas Chinese people during the first few decades following its relocation to Taiwan. As a result, people like my father in Korea became citizens of the “Republic of China,” and attended schools set up for the Chinese community that

taught the curriculum designed by the “R.O.C.’s” Ministry of Education. Many of those who chose to attend university did so in Taiwan due to affirmative action programs that favored overseas Chinese.

**THE BASIC INFORMATION** I absorbed growing up provided me with a schematic, and frankly trivial, understanding of my background; to truly understand it, I needed to study how these realities came about. In addition, I realized at a young age that I would always be considered a foreigner in the United States, similar to how my father was never seen as a real Korean despite having been born and raised in Seoul. With these realizations, and my affinity for and with Taiwan (the island and its people, not its reactionary ruling class), and by extension all of China, maintaining my connection with my cultural roots became a serious matter that involved the self-study of history, current events, and the Chinese language.

**THE COLD WAR** placed Taiwan and south Korea on the front lines of a global divide between capitalism and socialism, so my desire

to dig deeper into my cultural heritage was also inseparable from an understanding of the Cold War. I returned to facts I had learned as a child, like Chiang Kai-shek being a bloody tyrant, or the difference between *waishengren* and *benshengren* in order to investigate their real historical meaning. Witnessing the riots that occurred after the election in 2000, when the first non-KMT leader was elected, I found out that much of the strife stemmed from the antagonism between the *waishengren* and *benshengren*, which was the result of the KMT's policy of excluding *benshengren* from higher levels of government for the first few decades of its rule in Taiwan. The KMT policy deepened mistrust between the two broad categories of people in Taiwan: *benshengren*, meaning "people of this province," referring to those people already living in Taiwan by the time the Japanese imperialists surrendered and Taiwan was returned to China in 1945; and *waishengren*, or "extra-provincial people," meaning those who arrived in Taiwan from the Chinese mainland between 1945 and the mid-1950s. Because the ruling elites in the KMT were all *waishengren*, *waishengren* of all classes were seen by many *benshengren* as oppressors, even though neither was safe from the KMT's anti-communist White Terror.

**INTERESTINGLY**, though, anti-*waishengren* and anti-KMT sentiments did not translate over into anti-U.S. sentiments among the petty-bourgeois opposition that grew in the 1970s and 1980s, despite the ruling elite drawing their power from the U.S. imperialists. It also did not escape me that *benshengren*, who are majority Han just like *waishengren*, often exclude indigenous Taiwanese from their conversations regarding Taiwanese rights. I share these facts in order to better illustrate my path towards communism and why anti-imperialism cannot be neglected by communists in the 21st century. These facts do indeed provide a basic understanding of

Taiwan, but they were merely a starting point. To truly understand Taiwan, I needed to further study how these realities came about, which necessitated familiarizing myself with the indigenous history of Taiwan, the various waves of Han Chinese migration from the Chinese mainland starting in the 17th century, the Qing Empire's attitudes towards Taiwan, Japanese colonization, the KMT's exile to Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek's White Terror and martial law, the history of the opposition to the KMT, and especially U.S. imperialism.

**OF COURSE**, one can study all of this through a liberal, pro-U.S. lens, but such an approach leaves many related events and trends unconnected. One of the questions I asked myself as a college freshman was this: if the goal of United States foreign policy is to spread freedom and democracy, how do dictators like Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee not only gain the support of the United States, but get upheld as democratic leaders? The liberal answer might go something like this: "True, Chiang and Rhee were brutal leaders who were far from ideal, but they were fighting communism, which was much worse than anything imaginable in Taiwan under Chiang or south Korea under Rhee." At the same time, liberals downplay the fact that most of those imprisoned and executed by Chiang were communists or suspected communists. Victims of his right-wing dictatorship are nowadays portrayed in the mainstream as "freedom fighters" in the abstract with little mention of their communist leanings. Though Chiang Kai-shek is dead, and although the bourgeois opposition to the KMT casts him in a negative light, his anti-communist spirit lives on. Realizing this hypocrisy, I began studying U.S. imperialism, how it relates to capitalism, how ideologies such as white supremacy are designed to justify the various systems of oppression that are in place, and how much I had been lied to.

**MOST GOVERNMENTS**

overthrown by the United States are democratically elected. Once overthrown, they are, without fail, replaced by comprador regimes that serve U.S. corporate interests. The United States formed alliances with political figures like Chiang and Rhee to control as many populations and resources as possible. The liberal interpretation of history without an anti-imperialist context would have us believe that the United States was on a quest to “civilize” the world with the universal values of “freedom,” “democracy,” and McDonald’s, a quest that was

at worst misguided and mismanaged, and that the appearance of the Chiangs, the Rhees, the Mobutus, and so on, were the exception rather than the rule. Because Taiwanese liberals have failed to draw these connections, their idea of international solidarity has been to reach out to Uncle Sam and the ruling classes of the “advanced democracies,” rather than to form an international solidarity with oppressed peoples. As a result, “progressive” politics in Taiwan are suspended in a limbo of historical nihilism and no real solutions.

**IMPERIALISM** forms the line that connects seemingly unrelated dots. Studying the works of revolutionaries like Marx, Lenin, and Mao illuminated the underlying structure of historical events. “The history of all hitherto existing human society,” in the words of Karl Marx, “is the history of class struggles.” If imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, as theorized by Vladimir Lenin, then it follows that anti-imperialism is the highest stage of class struggle. Soon, I began to see the connection between various seemingly unrelated events: the Chinese communists fighting the



Japanese invaders, the Korean guerillas led by Kim Il Sung, and the anti-Japanese rebellion in Taiwan's Wushe by the indigenous Seediq people that tragically ended with the Japanese Air Force dropping chemical weapons. These three events were all part of a greater struggle against Japanese imperialism. In 1950, the eruption of the Korean War not only crushed my grandfather's dreams of returning from Korea to his home in China's Shandong Province (he happened to be in the south when the war broke out; his brother in the north escaped back to China as the US Air Force was bombing every city north of the 38th parallel), but also shaped the destiny of Taiwan as U.S. attitudes towards Chiang shifted from abandonment to reluctant support, rescuing the "R.O.C." regime from certain defeat. This time, it was U.S. imperialism that became the greatest common factor between seemingly unrelated developments. Decades later, the Black Panthers and other groups who fought for liberation drew a similar conclusion about the Vietnam War and the fight for racial inequality: that the U.S. ruling class was the common enemy. And, further, that standing up against the U.S. ruling class meant support for the People's Army of Vietnam and

the National Liberation Front.

**COUPLED WITH** the study of U.S. imperialism, knowing how much of your own family's history was shaped by imperialism makes imperialism a very real system of oppression rather than an abstract concept.

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**Studying imperialism is the process of relearning everything you've been taught. It is a struggle filled with anger and sadness, but also love and liberation. Unfortunately, this is not a struggle undertaken by many self-described leftists nowadays, especially those whose families have been in the imperial core for generations, since the incentive of understanding one's roots is generations removed.**

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If your family does not have history in Korea, for example, you won't hear stories about how the Korean People's Army treated the people in areas it liberated with dignity, whereas the U.S. forces—and the south Korean army it

controlled—acted like the occupation troops they were. Hence, you would be less likely to question the mainstream narrative on topics like the Korean War, filled with mentions of the "democratic" south Korea and "dictatorial" north Korea.

### **IMPERIALIST**

**AMNESIA** not only distorts our understanding of world events, but also impairs our ability to interpret domestic developments, because the two are inseparable in the age of imperialism. Without a firm grasp of imperialism, we will be deceived by reformists like Bernie Sanders who call for a phony form of "socialism" funded by the hyper-exploitation of the Global South by the imperial core. What use is "socialism," or more accurately, social democracy, in the United States if millions continue to suffer under the boot of U.S. aggression? Can these social democrats "make progress with the Latin American immigrant community" in the United States when they continue to attack and destabilize Latin American countries, subjecting the people to levels of poverty unimaginable to the average American and condemn leaders like Hugo Chavez as "a dead dictator" as Bernie Sanders has? Do social democratic politicians in the

United States have any credibility talking about Black rights in the U.S. when they are complacent with “humanitarian intervention” resulting in the reemergence of slavery abroad as in the case of Libya? I do not believe Sanderistas have the intention to do harm abroad, but this is where social democracy leads every time. Social democracy is capitalism with a better safety net; it markets itself as capable of managing capitalist crises, as a humane “middle way” between laissez-faire capitalism and actual socialism, yet without scientific socialist answers to the problem of imperialism it only provides a temporary and deceptive delay to yet larger capitalist crises, and without the super-profits generated by imperialism, the source of its “shared wealth” evaporates and along with it the legitimacy of “social democracy” as a political position.

**WITHOUT** a political line that is uncompromisingly anti-imperialist, we will settle for concessions that do not threaten our class enemies, but do threaten the lives of members of oppressed nations worldwide, including those within the United States. Can we overlook the fact that Sanders endorsed the bombing of Yugoslavia and supports Israel, a settler-colony that has occupied Palestine and terrorized the Palestinian people for decades? What use is Bernie popularizing the word “socialist” if the meaning of the word has been bastardized to such an extent? Ironically, Sanderistas are quick to point out how the mainstream media lies about the phony “socialists” they support, but are equally quick to regurgitate lies about countries that challenge U.S. hegemony in any way that they’ve been told by the same media. Socialism is not capitalism with a big safety net, but the establishment of a proletarian state that serves the interests of those who work for a living. As people gain a greater understanding of imperialism, they will not

settle for the likes of Sanders or AOC, and they will be able to see through all such unprincipled careerists.

**IN THE** United States, the favored tool of the ruling class has been the ideology of white supremacy. Taking liberally from phony European race “science,” the U.S. ruling class created two broad categories of people — white and non-white — thus enabling them to divide and conquer the working class, knowing that a united proletariat would threaten the power of the bourgeoisie. From this, we can see that white supremacy sabotages not only the solidarity between non-white people and white people, but also the solidarity between different groups of non-white people. In response to this reality, ideologies opposing white supremacy emerged among oppressed nations in the United States. Broadly speaking, these ideologies fall between a reactionary chauvinism that does not pose a threat to the bourgeoisie, and a revolutionary nationalism that does not contradict internationalism. Just as is it important to connect the struggles of different racial groups with one another in order to undermine white supremacy, we must connect the various struggles throughout the world with one another in order to undermine the imperialist system.

**MOST PEOPLE** who call themselves leftists would agree that reactionary calls for white power are qualitatively different from revolutionary calls for Black power. They would also agree that when people of oppressed nations in the United States express reactionary chauvinism, they do so as a response to white supremacy, and therefore combating white supremacy should be the main ideological issue at hand. Unfortunately, many self-described “leftists” lose sight of this when it comes to the international arena. Ultra-leftists and anarchists often refuse to

stand in solidarity with the people of countries targeted by U.S. imperialism, because, failing to recognize U.S. imperialism as the primary contradiction at hand and the domestic issues of its victim countries as secondary contradictions, they hold the position of both sides being “equally bad” and objectively side with imperialists. During the Chinese Civil War, an anti-Japanese united front between the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang was formed, with the understanding that the contradiction between the Japanese imperialists and the Chinese people had become primary, and the contradiction between the Communists and the KMT had become secondary. Mao stressed the fact that the fall of China to Japan would have compounded the existing oppressions faced by the Chinese people, and would have made the Chinese people’s liberation far more difficult. Had the Chinese people taken the position of the KMT and the Japanese being “equally bad,” China would have been completely subjugated by the foreign boot, which is typically more difficult to fight off than the domestic boot. Communists must learn from this example and honestly analyze the contradictions of today’s world.

**SYMPATHIZING** with, making excuses for, and objectively enabling U.S. imperialism on the international stage is similar to making excuses and objectively enabling white supremacy within the United States. We cannot overcome national divisions and form political solidarity within our class, the working class, without understanding and combating white supremacy, and we cannot expect international solidarity if we do not understand and actively oppose U.S. imperialism. Furthermore, it is nothing but chauvinism to expect anything less than perfection from other countries while turning a blind eye to the imperialist activities of the country we are in. To give an example: even if everything the mainstream media says about China were true (this is not the case, but let’s say what-if), we must ask ourselves: who is threatening whom? Is it China or the U.S. that has the other surrounded by military bases in client states? Is it China or the U.S. that actively overthrows democratically elected governments abroad? And is it China or the U.S. that actively props up military dictatorships throughout the world? Can we honestly say the two are “just as bad” as one another? Even if we have criticisms of China, like I

personally do, should we not support the defense of their sovereignty from U.S. aggression, especially since we are in the United States and have the power to exert pressure on those who run things here?

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**We live in the age of capitalist imperialism, and the United States, though not the only imperialist country, is the leading imperialist power. This makes the struggle against Yankee imperialism the primary contradiction in today’s world. Many who consider themselves “leftists” in the west fail to see this, and are instead against an abstract form of imperialism which deems all countries equally bad.**

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To draw the parallel once again between what the United States does internally with what it does externally, if we are able to recognize the false equivalence the U.S. legal system makes between the weak and the powerful when it claims there is “equality before the law,” then we must also see that those

who claim the U.S. and Assad are “just as bad as one another” are really siding with U.S. imperialism.

**WHILE THERE** should be no controversy in condemning U.S. aggression against the DPRK and supporting the Korean people’s struggle against U.S. imperialism, expressing such views invokes the scorn from across the U.S. political spectrum, including from self-described “leftists.” You will even hear these pseudo-leftists call for the assassination of Kim Jong Un. For the sake of argument, even if every lie told about him is true—that he is the ruthless and maniacal tyrant the bourgeois news outlets make him out to be—when and where has U.S.-sponsored regime-change ever resulted in more freedom and democracy for the people of the targeted country? Did the situation of Iranians improve after Mosaddegh was overthrown? Did Chileans live better lives after Allende was killed and Pinochet was installed? Do Libyans enjoy more freedoms now that Gaddafi is gone? Are Bolivians enjoying human rights and better living standards now that Morales has been exiled? The problems, real and imagined, of countries attacked by imperialism are not excuses for us to withhold our internationalist solidarity. Oftentimes, problems such as limited freedom of expression in countries on the receiving end of imperialist aggression are exacerbated if not caused by the imperialist aggression itself. If we truly want these countries to thrive, and if we truly care about the people of those countries, then we must do our part as people living in the imperial core to stand up against the military aggression, economic sabotage, and political isolation carried out by the country in which we reside. All other positions, including drawing false equivalence (“both parties are bad, so pick neither”), liberal savior mentality (i.e. advocating non-intervention based on the target country’s non-political factors like its

scenery, history, food, or supposed helplessness, etc.), of apathy (“we can’t do anything from here”), are simply expressions of western chauvinism that leave the door open for U.S. intervention. Just as white supremacy damages the solidarity between various ethnic groups within the United States, these chauvinist attitudes similarly keep the workers of the world divided and conquered by the imperialists. The bourgeoisie has its own international solidarity known as globalism to them and imperialism by us. It is time that we fight their international solidarity with our own anti-imperialist solidarity.

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**Suggested reading:**

*Killing Hope* by William Blum

*Rogue State* by William Blum

*Late Victorian Holocausts - El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* by Mike Davis

*The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon

*Black Bolshevik* by Harry Haywood

*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* by Vladimir Lenin

*On Contradiction* by Mao Zedong

*Against Empire* by Michael Parenti

*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* by Walter Rodney

*Assata: An Autobiography* by Assata Shakur

