

Global Maoism and the Politics of Localization in Peru and Tanzania

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In 1853 Karl Marx wrote in reaction to the Taiping Uprising in China “it may safely be augured that the Chinese revolution will throw a spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolution on the continent.”¹ Marx may not have been aware of the Christian Taipings’ hellfire and brimstone millenarian beliefs, but he saw in their rebellion a spark that could start a prairie fire of political progress. This paper holds Mao Zedong’s proposal in 1938 for the “Sinification of Marxism,” which referred to specific ways in which the foreign theory of Marxism-Leninism could be adapted to the concrete historical realities of modern China, in the same regard.² The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officially recognized the Thought of Mao Zedong (later “Maoism”) as the guiding ideology of the Chinese Revolution in 1945 after years during which Chinese Marxist intellectuals including Mao attempted to reconcile Marxism with China’s specific revolutionary situation. But despite a handful of existing scholarship on Maoism outside China, only a few attempts have been made to subject Mao’s groundbreaking concept model to an analysis of its impact in the developing world.³

This essay examines two cases through the scope of a twin theoretical focus: O.W Wolters’ theory of localization and Mao Zedong’s Sinification, which, in Mao’s words, means the blending of Marxian universals with the “concrete historical practice of the Chinese revolution” to suit the country’s unique historical experience, struggle, and culture (termed by Mao as its “peculiarities”).⁴ The first case, Peru, conveys the ways in which the orthodox Maoist Shining Path appropriated Jose Mariátegui’s concept of *indigenismo*⁵ and Andean cultural and traditional norms.⁶ In so doing, the Party attempted to “localize” Maoism to fit Peru’s unique geographical and cultural contexts. The second case in Tanzania, however, provides a counter example. Chinese advisers made concerted efforts to indoctrinate Tanzanians, but African socialism—embodied in Nyerere’s *ujamaa* villagization⁷—prevailed over foreign ideological influences. Nyerere and the Tanganyikan African National Union (TANU), later the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), drew inspiration from Nyerere’s idyllic perception of pre-colonial African life and adapted it to suit Tanzania’s current needs rather than espouse a foreign ideology and apply it to local settings. But *Ujamaa* as a uniquely “African” idea ultimately failed to make the transition from egalitarian theory to practice.