

# Mao Tse-tung Thought, the Last Struggle for Succession, and the Post-Mao Era

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## I

In a letter to Joseph Bloch, dated 21–22 September 1890, Friedrich Engels wrote: “[W]e make our history ourselves, but in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are *ultimately decisive*. But the political ones, etc., and indeed, even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one.”<sup>1</sup> The phrase, “the political ones, etc.,” refers to the superstructure and the forms of social consciousness of a society as distinguished from its economic base or the mode of production.

In his article, “On contradiction,”<sup>2</sup> Mao Tse-tung deals with the same problem of the role of the economic factor in history but goes much further than Engels in recognizing the importance of the superstructure. Mao writes:

True, the productive forces, practice, and economic base *generally play* the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory, and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the *principal and decisive* role. . . . When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Lewis S. Feuer, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 398. Emphasis added.

2. For the controversy over the precise time of its composition and the extent of its revision, see Arthur A. Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 22–28.

3. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 336. Emphasis added. Many years later, Mao wrote a series of 33 comments on Stalin’s *Economic Problems of Socialism* (1952). He began with the following highly critical remarks: “From the beginning to end, this book of Stalin’s has not touched upon superstructure. It has not considered

In acknowledging the principal and decisive role of the economic base, Mao uses the term “generally” (*i pan ti*), which carries, at least in its Chinese phrase, the notion of frequency rather than the idea of casual flow and finality implied by Engels’ term “ultimately.” Going beyond Engels, Mao affirms that in certain conditions, political and cultural changes become *principal and decisive*, not merely “playing a part” in the course of human history. Moreover, in the quoted passage as well as in the preceding sentences in which he uses the notion of principal and secondary aspects of a contradiction,<sup>4</sup> Mao puts “productive forces,” and “the economic base” together on one side of the contradiction and “relations of production” and “the superstructure” together on the other side.

Mao’s reformulation of historical materialism represents not only a descriptive generalization of the process of ideological, political, social, and economic changes in 20th century China, but also a programmatic prescription for revolutionary action. As such, it comprehends, encompasses, shapes or legitimizes a number of developments in China before 1949 which cannot be understood in terms of the conventional wisdom of Marxism up to that time, but which are familiar to all China scholars. Changes in the sphere of ideology and the political superstructure under the impact of the west far outpaced the development of the “forces of production” or the “economic base.” A Communist Party, supposedly the vanguard of the proletariat, led the revolution to victory while its organic ties with the proletariat were severed and few of its leaders were of proletarian origin. It was the ideological form and the political superstructure established in guerrilla bases in the rural areas which gave the Party its character and the movement its direction, while the economic base (in the form of a system of land tenure with an oppressed peasantry) furnished it with the opportunity to gain political support and manpower through a programme of land reform which changed quickly and sharply over a period of 22 years. Correct, flexible political-military strategy and tactics executed by effective, disciplined organizations overwhelmed the vast superiority in economic resources commanded by the other side. Political power grew out of the barrel of a gun in a “peasant war under proletarian leadership” rather than economic power in the most advanced part of the country. The descriptive generalization *cum* programmatic

man. It saw things but not man. . . . The standpoint of Stalin’s last letter [‘Reply to Comrades A. V. Sanina and V. G. Venzher,’ dated 28 September 1952] is almost totally wrong. The basic error is his distrust of the peasantry.” *Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan sui* (no place of pub.: 1967), p. 156. Some of the ideas of Nicos Poulantzas and Antonio Gramsci parallel Mao’s emphasis on the superstructure and political and ideological line over economic base. This will be developed in another paper.

4. For a Marxist view of the importance of Mao’s distinction between the principal contradiction and secondary contradiction, and the distinction between principal aspect and secondary aspect within a contradiction, see Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 193–96.

prescription was then raised to the level of a new tenet of historical materialism. This fusion of descriptive generalization, programmatic prescription and general principle is resonant with the traditional principle of Chinese thought.

Mao's qualification of Engels' formulation of historical materialism suggests that an ideology which has its roots in social, economic, and political circumstances vastly different from those existing in China must be modified if it is to serve as useful "maps of problematic social reality," as "templates for the organization of social and psychological processes,"<sup>5</sup> and as guides to actions. In China as well as many other late comers to modernization, this process of adapting a transferred ideology to local conditions was protracted and tortuous. Mao's success in this task produced what he called "sinification of Marxism"<sup>6</sup> or, to use the later official formulation, "the integration of the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practices of the Chinese Revolution." Mao's modification of Engels' formulation of historical materialism is one of the two most significant theoretical developments in this process of sinification.

The sinification of Marxism in turn led Mao to a related significant insight. Mao declared that:

There is no such thing as abstract Marxism, but only concrete Marxism. What we call concrete Marxism is Marxism that has taken on a national form, that is, Marxism applied to the concrete struggle in the concrete conditions prevailing in China, and not Marxism abstractly used.<sup>7</sup>

This remark reflects a complex of experiences which easily led Mao to the abstract statement that "it is precisely in the particularity of contradiction that the universality of contradiction resides."<sup>8</sup> This seemingly commonsensical statement has nevertheless a significant place in the development of Marxism. Althusser notes: "Mao Tse-tung begins with contradiction in its 'universality,' but his only serious discussion centers around the contradiction in the practice of class struggle, by virtue of another 'universal' principle, the principle which Mao reflects, *vis à vis* contradiction, in the following form: contradiction is always specific and specificity universally appertains to its essence."<sup>9</sup> Althusser makes clear that Mao's formulation is "essential to dialectical materialism, and Marx discusses an illustration of it in the *Introduction* . . ."<sup>10</sup> The point is that whereas Marx used this

5. These phrases are borrowed from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 216–20.

6. Stuart Schram and Benjamin Schwartz did more than any other China scholars to develop and popularize this development of Marxism in China. Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1969). Revised edit., pp. 171–74. The Chinese text can be conveniently found in *Mao Tse-tung ch'i*, Vol. VI, pp. 259–62.

7. Schram, *Political Thought*, p. 172.

8. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 316.

9. Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 183.

10. *Ibid.*

idea mainly in intellectual, scientific pursuit and academic discourse, Mao brought it to the realm of the practice of revolution and employed it to study the revolutionary situation, to formulate programmes, or at least to rationalize policies and legitimize his struggle with his opponents inside and outside the Party.

The sinification of Marxism is inseparable from the second and perhaps more basic and lasting heritage which Mao has left for the Chinese. This is his development of the notion of the unity of theory and practice and the concrete examples which he provided in this development. Guided in the Kiangsi period only by some vague and imprecise notions of Marxist theories, goals, and values, he took vigorous actions, formulated general programmes, adopted specific policies on the basis of concrete analyses of concrete situations. These programmes and policies underwent frequent changes and modifications in the light of their success or failure and the rapidly changing circumstances. For the purpose of arriving at a correct analysis of the changing situation and for the purpose of policy experimentations, the method of "study and investigation" was developed and employed. The guidelines to action, policies, and programmes, as well as the analyses of concrete situations, were then raised to a higher level of generalization. This process of decision-making and theoretical generalization was justified in terms of the notion of unity of theory and practice which was then self-consciously employed as an epistemological principle, a prudential guide to action, and a criterion of valid theory. As Brantly Womack observes, "there is little propositional novelty in the principles of Mao's theory-practice relations," but "the difference is that what Marx states as a premise for theoretical criticism, Mao takes as a fundamental problem area for action."<sup>11</sup> In so doing, Mao introduced and, through his personal example and his writings, explicated for the Chinese a modern principle which, for the first time since the end of the 19th century, holds out the promise of restoring the Chinese tradition of unity of knowledge and action.

But one should not overlook a basic difficulty in Mao Tse-tung thought which he did not resolve and which has furnished the ideological background for serious political struggles. In his reformulation of historical materialism, he has never explicitly and systematically explained what constitute the *generally* obtained conditions in human history under which productive forces and economic base play the principal and decisive role or, in contrast, what are those "certain conditions" under which the relations of production and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. The vague phrases, "when it is impossible for the productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production" and "when the superstructure obstructs the development of the

11. Brantly Womack, "Theory and practice in the thought of Mao Tse-tung," in James Hsiung, *The Logic of Maoism* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 15.

economic ease" are poor guides and raise more questions than answers. The reformulated thesis that in certain conditions the superstructure and the relations of production play the principal and decisive role served him well during the period of revolutionary civil and foreign wars. But after 1949 the Party is in power; can it not be said that the productive forces and the economic base now play the principal and decisive role? If it is the case that both theses are still applicable after 1949 in different areas of human activities, under different conditions, and in different periods of time, can one or other thesis be applied? How can the two theses be reconciled at any one period of time? In what way are specific policies and institutional arrangements to be judged or rationalized in terms of these two theses? How to answer these questions is a matter of judgment over which loyal Chinese Communists can and do differ, when they are taking decisions or rationalizing specific policies.

In principle, these questions can be answered through recourse to a vigorous application of the notion of unity of theory and practice as developed in his article "On practice" which gives primacy to practice.<sup>12</sup> The primacy of practice also reflects a common-sense truth that in daily affairs, *a fortiori* in a revolutionary situation, one frequently must act before one has finished theorizing or even thinking, and that the generality of theory and the infinite horizon of thinking cannot supply the basis for any concrete decision with certainty.<sup>13</sup> But there is a basic antinomy in Mao's very notion of theory and practice if one takes his writings and actions as a whole. While the primacy of practice in Mao's epistemology is clear, the relationship between theory and practice in Mao's dialectical materialism and historical materialism and in the sphere of political actions is ambivalent. His writings and actions point to two very different ways of resolving the tension between theory and practice, and of turning it into unity. In his "On contradiction," on the one hand he writes that in the contradiction between theory and practice, practice *generally* plays the principal and decisive role, and on the other hand underscores the thesis that in certain conditions, theory in turn manifests itself in the principal and decisive role. Mao has not given his followers any criterion to differentiate the two sets of conditions other than the phrase "in those times of which Lenin said, 'without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolution.'" <sup>14</sup> Whether there should be another revolution or a drastic change in the prevailing practice when the Party is in power is a matter of judgment. Indeed, what constitutes a revolution when the Party is in power is a very difficult question to answer. In practice, such a question involves the issue of political survival

12. In this article, Mao emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice and emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 297.

13. I am indebted to Dr Theresa Chu for this formulation.

14. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 336.

and self-preservation for a large number of leaders. Of course one can assign the epistemological principle a higher theoretical status than the reformulated thesis in "On contradiction." But the operational test of the validity of theory or policy provided by practice is the test of success or failure which in human affairs involves a prolonged process, a balance between subjective efforts and objective results, and a calculation of costs and benefits. Then the unanswered question, perhaps a question unanswerable in abstract terms, is at what point in the process and the balance one should decide that practice has proved or disproved the validity of a theory or a policy.

Our research does not allow us to ascertain to what extent these abstract ideas shape the perceptions, attitudes, and preferences of the political leaders which in turn influence their policy choices since 1949. We also do not know for certain whether or not policy choices are made "pragmatically" and exclusively in light of the objective demands of the situation and then rationalized by ideology. Nor can we be sure that policies are the product of rational choice according to some objective and subjective criteria or are merely the products of political bargaining constructed out of the personal and special interests of the actors. If policies represent a mixture of rational choice and political bargaining, we cannot easily separate one from the other. Sometimes, leaders espousing different ideological principles share a common view on concrete policies. At other times those who share common ideological principles may differ violently over specific decisions. Political leaders do not usually align themselves neatly into two camps over a period of time or even at any one time. The policy process produces consensus, compromise, domination and submission, violent disagreements, and purges.

But at a minimum we can assert that policy debates, particularly on the more fundamental and persistent issues, are couched or justified in terms of ultimate ideological principles. Ideological debate is an integral part of the policy-making process. The rise to ideological eminence of the "gang of four" in 1975 and 1976, the programmes formulated by the veteran political leaders to contain their influence, and the counter-attack against them after their arrest have produced ideological statements and writings richer in quantity and quality and have raised the ideological debate to a higher level than all other intra-Party struggles since 1935, with the possible exception of the *Cheng-feng* movement. Though couched in Marxist and Maoist terminology and principles, the ideological debates evolve around serious concrete policy issues. Some of these issues are common to all developing countries such as the question whether to accord priority to economic growth over equality and participation or vice versa, and what is the proper mix of these desiderata. Policies in education and basic scientific research fall partly into this area. Other issues are pertinent to revolutionary regimes such as the question of whether to consolidate the revolutionary gains already achieved or to push the revolution



further into various spheres of social, economic, and political life, or how a society can combine revolutionary change with stability and economic growth. Still other issues are relevant to Marxist regimes, such as whether a new class can emerge after the means of ownership have been socialized, what the basis of this new class is, and how to deal with it. There are issues which are specific to China's response to the west but are also of general relevance to Third World countries – such as the issue of self-reliance and the question of importation of technology and industrial plants. The revival of the terms “foreign affairs faction” and the problem of “substance and function” indicates that the issues confronting the Chinese since the late 19th century have not been completely solved.

But the most significant feature of this ideological debate is that both sides rely ultimately on Mao's reformulated thesis on historical materialism and his use of the notion of unity of theory and practice to justify their positions on concrete issues. This characteristic points at once to the vitality of these two ideas and to the unresolved problems and antinomy in them.

## II

In the last three months of 1974,<sup>15</sup> final preparations were made for the convocation of the Second Plenum of the 10th Central Committee and the Fourth National People's Congress for the purpose of adopting a new constitution of the People's Republic of China, of reorganizing the State Council, and of electing a new Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. There is little doubt that the struggle between the two groups and the manoeuvring for position were intensified by this process. It is now charged that, in November and December, the “gang of four attempted to exclude Premier Chou from the preparatory work and to organize their own ‘cabinet’.”<sup>16</sup> It is also charged that in October, Wang Hung-wen, a vice-chairman of the Party and number three man in the Party hierarchy, went to see Mao and made “false accusations against Chou.”<sup>17</sup> It is said that Mao “severely scolded him.” Mao is alleged to have pointed out: “Chiang Ch'ing has ambition. She wants Wang Hung-wen to serve as the chairman [of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress]. She herself wants to be chairman of the Party.”<sup>18</sup> Apparently managed by Premier Chou, the Second Plenum and the first session of the Fourth NPC produced a series of compromises in the choice of

15. In this paper, we shall not discuss the campaign to “criticize Lin Piao and Confucius” and the movement to “study the historical experience of the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools.”

16. Article by Kao Ning, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 14 November 1976, p. 1.

17. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 2 December 1976, p. 3.

18. Kao Ning in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 14 November 1976.

personnel and in official documents adopted. But it is clear that the election of Teng Hsiao-p'ing at the Plenum to be a vice-chairman of the Party and a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, and his confirmation by the Congress as the ranking vice-premier, as well as other appointments, gave the balance of power to the veteran political leaders at least in government administration. Similarly, the operational significance of Chou's report on the work of the government lies in its emphasis on building a firm foundation for "an independent and relative comprehensive industrial and economic system" by 1980 and "accomplishment of comprehensive modernization of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology before the end of the century." In political terms, Chou may have endeavoured to build up a collective leadership under Mao and a package of compromises in policies which would, he hoped, prevent the developing inner-Party struggle from erupting into an open break after the death of Mao and himself. Although Mao did not attend either of the two meetings, many of the results must have had his general endorsement, or were not strongly opposed by him.

But Mao probably wanted to balance the emphasis on rapid economic growth with all its social and political consequences by underscoring the need to avoid "revisionism," and to prevent the restoration of the "capitalist system" by further eliminating the existing socio-economic inequalities. Thus, on 26 December 1974, the same date on which he approved Chou's plan for a new Party constitution and the list of major appointments, he issued a series of "important instructions on the question of theory," which were then made public, beginning with the February 9th issue of the *People's Daily*, just three weeks after the conclusion of the first session of the Fourth National People's Congress. In these instructions, Mao stressed the importance of "exercising dictatorship over the bourgeoisie." He noted that:

Our country at present practices a commodity system; the wage system is unequal too, as in the eight-grade wage scale, and so forth. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat such things can only be restricted.<sup>19</sup>

He also pointed out: "Lenin said, '[S]mall production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously and on a mass scale.' This also occurs among a section of the workers and a section of the Party members. Both within the ranks

19. The English translation can be found in *Peking Review*, 28 February 1975, p. 5. The term "only" as well as the original Chinese phrase is ambiguous. It can be interpreted as "must be" or as "merely" restricted, but not eliminated. It is perhaps highly significant that Mao issued his instructions on the study of theory on the same day after he had listened to Chou's report on the preparatory work on convening the Fourth National People's Congress. On 23 and 24 December he warned Chiang Ch'ing, "Don't form a faction. Those who formed factions will fall down." *Hung ch'i*, No. 2 (1977), pp. 13-14.



of the proletariat and among the personnel of state organs, there are people who follow the bourgeois style of life.”<sup>20</sup>

While the veteran Party leaders were pre-occupied with the formulation and implementation of concrete policies in a variety of fields, particularly scientific research and factory management, the “gang of four” and their followers made a systematic effort to give radical interpretations to Mao’s instructions and to draw out the operational significance of these radicalized interpretations. The ideas expressed in the published articles formed the basis of a series of unpublicized attacks on the veteran Party leaders. The limitation of space does not allow me to describe the political struggle in any detail, but these writings do contain some interesting ideas. The published counter-attacks launched by the Party veterans after the purge of the “gang of four” show how the latter attempted to rely on the writings of Mao Tse-tung to legitimize their concrete actions. It is to these theoretical formulations and general policy orientations that we shall turn our attention.

The central theoretical problem which the “gang of four” and their followers tried to solve is to explain in Marxist terms how classes and class struggle can exist after the means of production have been socialized and owned by the state or the collective units, i.e. after the economic base of classes – the private ownership of the means of production – has been destroyed. Up to this time, the existence of classes and class struggle had been explained: first by the remnants of the “feudal” and bourgeois classes and their ideological influence, and secondly by those in power in the Party taking the capitalist road, who were designated as “representatives” or “agents” of the bourgeoisie. In a comment dated 29 January 1965, on a report concerning the Socialist Education Movement, Mao applied the term “class” to the category of “bureaucratic officials” and declared that “the class of bureaucratic officials [on the one hand] and the working class and poor and lower middle peasants [on the other hand] are two classes in sharp opposition.”<sup>21</sup> But this statement by Mao had not been officially published or quoted in major editorials or documents. Standing alone, moreover, it suggests that instead of the economic base, political power and the relationship between superiors and their subordinates, which constitute, in Marxist terms, a part of the superstructure, are the only basis of classes and class struggle. Without abandoning these old explanations, the ultra-leftists endeavoured to find the basis for “newly engendered bourgeois elements” or the “new bourgeoisie” in the socialist system, and more specifically, in the continued existence of “bourgeois right” in a socialist society. They found

20. *Peking Review*, 28 February 1975, p. 5.

21. “Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan-sui” (April 1967). This compilation is different from the now generally available Chinese version with the same title. (*Current Background*, 891 p. 49.)

a convenient point of departure in the three aspects in the relations of production, as generally defined by Marxists: first, ownership of the means of production; secondly, the form of distribution; and thirdly, relations between men. But they gave these familiar notions and the interconnection between their empirical referents a new twist. According to Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, public ownership of the means of production took two forms in industry, agriculture and commerce in China: ownership by the whole people (i.e. the state) and collective ownership. While state ownership predominates in industry and commerce, collective ownership held sway in agriculture. He asserts: "the non-existence of bourgeois right in the realm of the system of ownership in a socialist system, as conceived by Marx and Lenin, implies the conversion of all the means of production into common property of the whole society."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, private plots and private trade at rural fairs still exist in China.

Most significantly Chang followed Mao's modification of Engels' formulation of historical materialism and adopted the same pattern of reasoning to analyse the interconnection between the system of ownership and the remaining two aspects of relations of production. Chang wrote:

It is perfectly correct for people to attach importance to the decisive role of the system of ownership in the relations of production. But it is incorrect to attach no importance to whether the issue of the system of ownership has been resolved *in form or in reality*, to the reaction exerted on the system of ownership by the two other aspects of the relations of production – the relations between men and the form of distribution – and to the reaction exerted on the economic base by the superstructure; *these two aspects and the superstructure may play a decisive role under given conditions.*<sup>23</sup>

22. Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, "On exercising all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie," *Peking Review*, 4 April 1975, p. 7. Chang did not tell us how Marx and Lenin conceived of a socialist society and how this conception is related to his own conclusion. Chang is later accused of claiming that the "thought of Chang Ch'un-ch'iao" represents the fourth milestone in the development of Marxist thought, following Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung. Chang's concern with equality and "bourgeois right" went back at least as far as 1958. An article of his on the subject was republished from 13 October 1958 in the *Jen-min jih-pao*. The editor noted that "Chang's article is basically correct but somewhat one-sided." This article with the editor's note is reproduced in *Pan-ku* (Hong Kong), April 1975, pp. 6–8.

23. *Ibid.* Emphasis added. Politically speaking, this is very skilful writing which links his new formulation with Mao's familiar formula. But, in terms of Marxist theory, it raises more questions than it answers. Chang's opponents later pointed out that Chang's article did not once mention the development of socialist production. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 30 November 1976, p. 4. Another and simpler statement is the following one: "[I]n the process of production, the relations between people and the form of distribution are determined by and react upon the system of ownership, and they played a decisive role under given conditions." "Dictatorship of the proletariat and the renegade Lin Piao," *Peking Review*, 27 June 1975, p. 8.

This assertion that the relations between men and the form of distribution can play a decisive role after the system of ownership has been nationalized or collectivized is absolutely essential for Chang's purpose. For this formula enabled him to underscore the decisive importance of the fact that in China, "bourgeois right . . . is still prevalent to a serious extent in the relations between men and holds a dominant position in distribution." In so far as the system of distribution and exchange of commodities were concerned, the ultra-leftists referred specifically to the eight-grade system of wages and more generally to "material incentives."

Theoretically, this assertion about the existence of "bourgeois right" was buttressed by quotations from Marx and Lenin which were widely publicized in the official media.<sup>24</sup> Whereas Marx considered the existence of bourgeois right in the socialist society as inevitable birthmarks of the old society and envisaged its gradual disappearance, and whereas Lenin thought that bourgeois right can exist without the bourgeoisie,<sup>25</sup> the ultra-leftists in China pointed to bourgeois right and the socialist economic system which retains it as the source of a new bourgeoisie. Since this state of affairs cannot be changed in a short period, class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is inevitable and the proletariat must exercise "all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie" to prevent them from seizing power and from restoring capitalism.

As for the "relations between people," the ultra-leftists charged that under Lin Piao and, by implication, under the veteran Party leaders, these had become "relations of buying and selling of commodities." ". . . [P]olitics has become something like a big business transaction. . . . If you pledge loyalty to me, I will offer you higher official posts."<sup>26</sup> Thus, in the writings of the ultra-leftists in China, "the relations between people" become more than the relations between economic classes as these are defined by other Marxists.

Equally important is the Chinese ultra-leftists' distinction between the form and actual content of the system of ownership. Chih Heng wrote: ". . . if the revisionist line should become predominant in a unit, this unit would change its nature; in which case, the ownership

24. The most relevant quotations are drawn from Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Actually, Marx in precisely this work criticized "vulgar socialism" for considering and treating distribution as independent of the means of production and "hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution." See David Resnick, "Crude communism and revolution," in *American Political Science Review*, December 1977, p. 1137.

25. Lenin observes: "It follows that under Communism, there remains for a time not only bourgeois right but even the bourgeois state – *without the bourgeoisie!*" Quoted in *Peking Review*, 28 February 1975, p. 9. Emphasis added.

26. "Dictatorship of the proletariat," p. 8. According to the ultra-leftists, the relations between the people should be governed exclusively by the lofty spirit of "utter devotion to others without thought of self."

would be socialist only in form but capitalist in reality.”<sup>27</sup> Referring to the “Lin Piao anti-Party clique,” Yao Wen-yuan wrote: “in units and departments under their domination and control they turned socialist public ownership into Lin Piao anti-Party clique private property.” Whereas Chih Heng was referring to factories and enterprises, Yao’s terms “units” and “departments” were applicable to the government, the army, and the Party as well.

As the leading theoretician, Chang Ch’un-ch’iao offered an explanation of this distinction between the form and actual content of the system of ownership and the paradox that a unit may be publicly owned in form but capitalist in reality. After having referred to Mao’s dictum that the superstructure may play a decisive role under given circumstances, Chang immediately observed that “the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line, and the control of leadership in the hands of one class or another, decide which class owns a factory in reality.”<sup>28</sup> These basic ideas were then linked with other revised concepts. Together these revisions formed the basis of a programme to encourage the workers at the lowest levels to rebel against veteran and middle aged Party cadres who controlled the various units and departments. A number of methods, including slowdowns and strikes, were used in many factories, railroads and enterprises.

Another theoretical weapon of the “gang of four” was the slogan raised by Mao in attacking P’eng Te-huai and his followers in 1959 and cited by Yao Wen-yuan in his signed article published on 1 March 1975. Mao said: “at present, the main danger lies in empiricism.”<sup>29</sup> According to a later account, Chang Ch’un-ch’iao, in his capacity as the director of the Political Department of the PLA, praised on the same day Yao’s article at a conference held by the PLA. He observed that opposition to empiricism “has realistic meaning.”<sup>30</sup> He suggested that opposition to empiricism be considered the “key link” or “the main theme.”<sup>31</sup> The operational meaning of this definition of the situation can be found in the ultra-leftists’ remark that not only old cadres but also new cadres are influenced by “empiricism.” It is made even clearer by the subsequent charge that the ultra-leftists

27. Chih Heng, “Conscientiously study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat,” *Peking Review*, 14 February 1976, p. 8.

28. Chang, “On exercising all-round dictatorship,” p. 7. To the extent that “control” and “own” are indistinguishable, that part of Chang’s statement referring to “the control of leadership” is tautological.

29. Yao Wen-yuan, “On the social basis of the Lin Piao anti-Party clique,” *Peking Review*, 7 March 1975, p. 9.

30. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 19 November 1976, p. 1. This is an awkward and literal translation of the Chinese phrase, “*yu hsien-shih yi-i*.” It can perhaps be loosely rendered as “has operational meaning.”

31. The term “key link” is used in the official English publication to translate the Chinese character, “*k’ang*.” The term “*k’ang*” can also be translated as “the main theme.” Mao himself explained that “*k’ang*” is the “main theme.” *Jen-min*, 7 February 1977, p. 1.

“wanted to put the label of ‘empiricism’ on a large group of old and new cadres as well as cadres of peasant and worker origins who had been nurtured and trained by our Party in the protracted revolutionary struggle, who firmly upheld Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line, and who had had rich *practical experience*.”<sup>32</sup> Their intention was to “criticize and overthrow” them all. They were accused of conspiring “to overthrow a large group of responsible comrades in the Party, the government and the army at the Centre and localities.” They were said to have criticized many cadres for “following the established ways and adhering to the old,” for “resting on the laurels of their seniority.” They called the latter “bourgeois democrats who relied only on their own experience to manage affairs,” and who were not willing to push forward the socialist revolution.<sup>33</sup> They noted that the army was run by “old fellows.”<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately for the ultra-leftists, their definition of the current situation did not receive the wholehearted support of Mao. Mao’s own ambivalence towards the ultra-leftists, his endeavour to strike a balance between them and the veteran leaders, and his attempt to prevent an open break were revealed in a comment written by Mao on 23 April 1975. He declared: “The correct way to raise the problem is opposition to revisionism, including opposition to both empiricism and dogmatism. Both [empiricism and dogmatism] represent a revision of Marxism-Leninism. Do not raise only one item and allow the other item to get away.”<sup>35</sup> In his long career, Mao had opposed both “empiricism” and “dogmatism” and at one time or another he considered one or the other as the “main danger.” His refusal to endorse the radicals’ definition suggests that he had not made up his mind.

Another theoretical concept which the ultra-leftists had stressed as the basis for their attack on the veteran leaders was opposition to the “theory of productive forces.” This was the theory which was used by the Cultural Revolutionary Group to deal a devastating blow against Liu Shao-ch’i. It was, according to the ultra-leftists, embodied in the following remarks made by Liu in the mid-1950s: “[I]n our country, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, has now been settled,” “class struggle is over,” and “now, the main task of the Chinese people is to develop the productive forces as rapidly as possible.”<sup>36</sup> This theory was restated by the ultra-leftists as follows:

32. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 14 November 1976, p. 1. Emphasis added.

33. Chiang Ch’ing is reported to have said that “[M]ore than 75 per cent of the old cadres inevitably turn from members of the democratic faction into members of the faction of the capitalist roaders.” *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 14 December 1976, p. 4. (Article by Chang Chun-po.)

34. *Ibid.* 19 November 1976, p. 1. See also the revealing article under the by-line of the Theoretical Group of the Military Training Department of the General Staff in the *Jen-min*, 4 December 1976, p. 2.

35. *Ibid.* 19 November 1976, p. 1. In another statement, Mao said: “As I see it, those who criticize empiricism are themselves empiricists.” This statement is more critical of the ultra-leftists; but no data is given for this

. . . the relations of production were no longer in contradiction with the productive forces, and the socialist revolution on the economic front had ended; the superstructure was no longer in contradiction with the economic base, and the socialist revolution on the political and ideological fronts was entirely unnecessary; classes were eliminated, the bourgeois no longer existed, class struggle was over, and it was quite enough for the working class and other labouring people simply to immerse themselves in production and professional work.<sup>37</sup>

To oppose this theory, the ultra-leftists again borrowed a leaf from Mao: "[T]he productive forces generally play the principal and decisive role. . . . [But the relations of production] react upon the productive forces, promote or hinder their development, and play the decisive role under certain conditions." In this manner, changes in relations of production were given priority by the ultra-leftists over the development of productive forces. Moreover, the ultra-leftists downgraded the existential and theoretical importance of "forces of production" by advancing a peculiar definition of the economic base: "[T]he economic base refers to the economic system at a certain stage of social development, that is, the *sum total of the relations of production*."<sup>38</sup> This revision of Marxism by the device of a simple definition excludes "forces of production" as a part of the economic base.

These rather abstract ideas formed the justification of slogans and actions with serious consequences not only for economic growth but also for political stability, particularly after February 1976. According to their opponents, the ultra-leftists said that "when the Revolution is handled well, production will naturally go up."<sup>39</sup> To achieve the goals of their revolution, they wanted to destroy the rules and regulations adopted to manage the various enterprises. They also wanted to dispense with normal procedures in production. They urged the workers "not to produce for the wrong [ideological and political] line," "not

statement. It is not known whether it was really directed at the ultra-leftists. *Jen-min*, 28 November 1976, p. 1. Mao's criticism of the ultra-leftists found expression in an article under the by-line of Li Chun in *Hung ch'i*, No. 6 (1975), p. 9. This article criticized both "empiricism" and "dogmatism." Mao's support of the veteran Party leaders was also reflected in the article in the same issue which stressed stability and unity and the unified leadership of Party committees and governmental organs at all levels.

36. Hung Hsueh-ping, "The essence of 'theory of productive forces' is to oppose proletarian revolution," *Peking Review*, 19 September 1969, p. 7.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Hung Ou, "Economic base and superstructure," *Peking Review*, 15 August 1975, p. 7. Contrast this definition with the following sentence of Etienne Balibar: ". . . it, the second form of antagonism is *inside the economic base*, typical of a determinate mode of production, and its terms are called, 'the level of the productive forces,' and 'the relations of production'." Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: 1975), p. 203.

39. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 30 November 1976, p. 6.



to produce for the faction of those taking the capitalist road.”<sup>40</sup> They raised the slogans: “[D]o not fear strikes, do not fear stoppages of production, and do not fear social disorders,” “[I]n such a country as China, a little disorder will bring about a lively atmosphere,”<sup>41</sup> “[W]e would rather have socialist low rate of growth than capitalist high rate of growth,”<sup>42</sup> and “we would rather stop production for two years than stop class struggle for one moment.” They are also accused of saying that “to disrupt the production of one factory is to put a knot around the neck of the faction in authority,” and that “the loss belongs to the state, the responsibility belongs to the faction in authority, and the power belongs to us.”<sup>43</sup> With regard to the leadership group of cadres, managers, experts, and knowledgeable persons, they issued the call: “[O]verthrow those who can be overthrown; chase away those who cannot be overthrown; as for those who cannot be chased away, attack them until they get sick; attack those who do not get sick until they fear us.”<sup>44</sup>

More specifically, the ultra-leftists attacked the management system of the Taching oilfield as one that “controls, curbs, and oppresses” the workers. They characterized it as merely a model of production, implying that it was not a model of revolution. They attacked the cadres running the railroads for “lowering their head to pull the cart rather than raising their head to look at the road,” for allowing “running the trains on time to take command” of all other work, and “for taking the road of the white experts.”<sup>45</sup> These charges find support in the strikes, work stoppages, drop in production, and local disorders which were reported in newspapers outside China in 1975 and 1976.

In the field of agriculture, Chang Ch'un-ch'iao was, to say the least, sceptical about the movement to learn from Tachai. He is now accused of advocating the development of the rural areas around Shanghai as a model, and of criticizing certain slogans raised by Tachai as “reactionary,” and as “typical theory of forces of production.” He called for an item by item criticism of Hua Kuo-feng's report on increasing the number of Tachai-type counties, delivered in mid-October 1975. Chiang Ch'ing is reported to have said that, “Tachai has been influenced by revisionism.”<sup>46</sup>

40. Article under the by-line of the Great Criticism Group of the State Planning Commission, *Hung ch'i*, No. 12 (1976), p. 47.

41. *Ta-kung pao* (Hong Kong), 27 January 1977, p. 1.

42. *Ibid.* 3 December 1976, p. 2. Chang Ch'un-ch'iao is charged with having said: “[D]o not fear a decrease in growth rate. It is all right to have a lower rate of growth.” *Hua-chiao jih-pao* (New York), 18 February 1977 p. 1.

43. *Hung ch'i*, No. 12 (1976), p. 48.

44. *Hua-chiao jih-pao* (New York), 18 February 1977, p. 1. For a different translation, see *Peking Review*, 11 February 1977, p. 13.

45. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 22 November 1976, p. 2. See also *ibid.* 6 December 1976, p. 3.

46. Article under the by-line of the Big Criticism Group of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 20 January 1977, p. 1.

Mao's attitude towards the ultra-leftists' attempt to push revolutionary changes in the management of the enterprises at the expense of economic growth is even now not entirely clear. But we do know that Mao personally issued a document on China's steel and iron industry on 4 June 1975. This statement placed its emphasis on the political and ideological aspects of managing the enterprise. It called for the examination of seven aspects of work:

Whether or not the ideological and political line is correct; whether or not the movement to study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat has really been developed; whether or not the masses are fully mobilized; whether or not a strong leadership core has been established; whether or not the bourgeois characteristics in the management of the enterprise had been overcome; whether or not the Party's policies have been implemented; and whether or not an effective blow has been struck against the disruptive activities of the class enemy. In sum, whether or not the task of consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat has been implemented at the basic level.<sup>47</sup>

The opponents of the ultra-leftists now claim that Mao's document dealt a serious blow to the "gang of four." But it is also likely that the ultra-leftists derived strong support from this document. What is certain is that both sides claimed the support of the chairman but gave his statements diametrically opposed interpretations. Each side apparently defined the "task of consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat" in very different terms. For the ultra-leftists, it meant radical changes in the management system and the removal of the experienced leadership groups regardless of the consequences for economic production and political stability and oblivious to the real needs of the people. For the veteran political leaders it meant the consolidation and gradual development of the present political and economic system as a whole.

In the name of giving equal opportunity to the workers and peasants for education and opposing the creation of an "intellectual aristocracy," the ultra-leftists succeeded in blocking the endeavours of the educators to maintain a minimum standard for admission to institutions of higher learning by reintroducing and perfecting a new system of examinations. Chang Ch'un-ch'iao argued, in November 1975, that "I would rather have a labourer without culture than to have an exploiter, an 'intellectual aristocrat,' with culture."<sup>48</sup> He is now accused of advocating the elimination of education for the sake of transmission of knowledge and propagating the idea that "it is useless to study." The ultra-leftists also opposed efforts on the part of scientists to put more stress on basic research in order to correct the over-emphasis on the practical application of science.<sup>49</sup>

47. *Hua-chiao jih-pao* (New York), 28 February 1977, p. 1.

48. *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 23 November 1976, p. 1. Article by the Great Criticism Group of the Ministry of Education.

49. *Ta-kung pao*, 16 January 1977, p. 2. Article by the eminent physicist Dr

Since the ultra-leftists apparently believed that the introduction of foreign technology would strengthen directly the authority of scientists, engineers and managers and indirectly the political position of the veteran Party leaders who supported the latter, they opposed this policy in the name of the principle of self-reliance. They opposed the export of crude oil in order to obtain foreign exchange to finance the import of technology. The export of oil depended on the rapid expansion of oil production, which would strengthen the hands of the experts and the veteran Party leaders. The ultra-leftists charged that the export of oil and other raw materials represented nothing less than selling out "national sovereignty" and giving away precious resources to please foreign nations at the expense of domestic consumption.<sup>50</sup> They further condemned the export of oil as a measure which would help the developed world and hurt the Third World. When the export of oil and raw materials were combined with the importation of advanced technology and plants China would return to the status of a semi-colonial country. They put the 19th century label "foreign affairs faction" on the veteran political leaders in an attempt to discredit them.

### III

While the ultra-leftists were formulating the theory of "bourgeois right" and "all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie," the veteran Party leaders pre-occupied themselves with the solution of the concrete problems of industrial management and production, science and technology, education, and foreign policy and trade. While they did not oppose the restriction of "bourgeois right," they tended to adopt a gradual approach. In this respect, Teng Hsiao-p'ing, the newly appointed vice-premier and vice-chairman of the Party, probably went further than most other leaders. In his usual forceful and outspoken way, Teng was reported to have said on 5 March 1975: "[I]n order to limit bourgeois right, there must be a material foundation. Without it, how can we limit bourgeois right?"<sup>51</sup> Teng said in June: "[N]ow, everything is called bourgeois right. A greater amount of reward for a greater amount of labour is a correct principle. How can we call it bourgeois right?"<sup>52</sup> At one time or another, he also said that to use revolutionary measures to limit bourgeois right was a policy "funda-

Chou Pei-yuan. Science and higher education by their very nature contain an element of elitism. In the name of checking and destroying elitism, the ultra-leftists were also destroying science and higher education.

50. One of the most revealing articles giving a retrospective account of the attacks by the ultra-leftists is Kuo Chi, "Foreign trade: why the 'gang of four' created confusion," *Peking Review*, 25 February 1977, pp. 16-18.

51. Kung Hsiao-wen, "Teng Hsiao-p'ing and the twenty articles," *Hsueh-hsi yü p'i-p'an*, No. 6 (1975), p. 15.

52. *Ibid.* p. 16.

mentally divorced from reality" and tantamount to an attempt "to establish Communism now."<sup>53</sup>

Apparently taking advantage of Mao's refusal to back the ultra-leftists' designation of empiricism as the principal danger and of Mao's reiteration at a Politburo meeting on 3 May 1975 of the need for unity,<sup>54</sup> Teng directed his subordinates to push forward the drafting of a document entitled, "Certain problems in accelerating industrial development."<sup>55</sup> On 18 July Teng appointed Hu Yao-p'ang, the former general secretary of the Communist Youth League who fell from power during the Cultural Revolution, to be vice-president of the Academy of Sciences. Hu, with the support of Teng, completed on 11 August, a first draft of another important document, entitled, "Outline report on the work of the Academy of Sciences." At the "report meeting," Teng implied that this document was applicable to the scientific and technological personnel of the whole country.<sup>56</sup> An un-named top official in the Ministry of Education began preparation in early October to draft an outline report in the field of education along the same line as that for the Academy of Sciences.<sup>57</sup> Most importantly, Teng's subordinates followed his suggestions and basically completed a draft of a document entitled, "On the general programme for all works of the whole Party and the whole nation."

On the basis of the ultra-leftists' attacks on these three documents,<sup>58</sup>

53. Article under the by-line of Chuang Nan, *ibid.* No. 3 (1976), p. 6.

54. According to the retrospective account after the purge of the "gang of four," Mao reiterated the basic principle of "three do's and three don'ts," i.e. "[P]ractice Marxism-Leninism and not revisionism; unite and don't split; be open and above board and don't intrigue and conspire." He added a warning to Chiang Ch'ing and her followers: "[D]on't function as a gang of four, don't do it any more, why do you keep doing it?" This account also quotes Mao's instruction that "if this problem of functioning as a gang of four is not settled in the first half of this year, it should be settled in the second half; if not this year, then next year; if not next year, then the year after." Joint editorial, 25 October 1976, transl. in *Peking Review*, 29 October 1976, p. 15. See also *Ch'i-shih nien-tai* (Hong Kong), February 1977, p. 10.

The Chinese sentence can be rendered as either "should be settled" or "can be settled." If the latter translation is used, it suggests that Mao was trying to counsel restraint on the veteran Party leaders while issuing a warning against the "gang of four." At that time, Mao's view on unity is expressed in *Hung ch'i*, No. 6 (1976), pp. 1-9. Apparently, Teng was also taking advantage of the severe criticism of Chiang Ch'ing at the Politburo meetings during July-September of 1975 for her interview with Roxane Witke in 1972 to push forward his programme. *Ch'i-shih nien-tai*, March 1977, p. 7.

55. The process of drafting this document lasted six months with the final draft completed 25 October. It was intended to be discussed at a national conference at the end of October. But the conference was never held and the draft was stillborn. See Kung, "Teng Hsiao-p'ing and the twenty articles," p. 19.

56. Article under the by-line of Kang Li and Yen Feng, *Hsueh-hsi yü p'i-p'an*, No. 4 (1976), p. 24. See also *Ch'i-shih nien-tai*, March 1976, p. 12.

57. *Hsueh-hsi yü p'i-p'an*, No. 4 (1976), p. 25.

58. For a detailed report of the contents of these three documents, see the article by Ch'i Hsin, in *Ch'i-shih nien-tai*, March 1977, pp. 9-12. This article

the following points should be noted. First, Teng and his subordinates indirectly criticized their opponents' programme as a case of "Leftist opportunism," like that advocated by Wang Ming, and as "ultra-Leftism" like that of Lin Piao.<sup>59</sup> This designation stands in sharp contrast to the line adopted after the purge of the "gang of four" according to which they are "ultra-rightists." The political meaning of this contrast is explained later.

Secondly, Teng raised Mao's directives on unity and stability and on the development of the national economy to the same level as his directive on the study of the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He designated them together as forming the general programme for all works in the Party, army, and nation not only at the present time but also in the next 25 years. This definition of the general programme downgraded the importance of the "study of the theory" which had contributed to the increased influence of the ultra-leftists. He also tried to limit the applicability of the theory of class struggle by an interpretation of Mao's 1962 slogan regarding the three great movements of class struggle, struggle for production, and struggle for scientific experiment. One passage of "On the general programme . . ." reads:

Even if we have truly grasped the characteristics and laws of class struggle and solved the specific contradictions in class struggle, this is not tantamount to having grasped the characteristics and laws of the struggle for production and the struggle for scientific experiment, nor to having solved the specific contradictions.<sup>60</sup>

Thirdly, Teng and his subordinates attacked the ultra-leftists for separating politics and economics, revolution and production from each other, talking only about politics and not about economics, only about revolution but not production. Finally, Teng and his followers confronted realistically the "crisis" in the sphere of science and technology, education, and industrial management.<sup>61</sup> "They" were reported to have said that if their proposed programmes were not adopted, "all of us would one day be all finished."<sup>62</sup> Thus, they expressed a willingness to "risk their old age" in order to work out and implement their programme. They boasted that they had put aside all worldly considerations, that they did not fear being labelled

was written on the basis of the documents circulated in China after the fall of the "gang of four." The full texts of the "General programme," and "Certain problems in accelerating industrial development" are reproduced in the appendix of Ch'i Hsin, *Ssu-jen-p'ang ssu-chien tan-so* (Hong Kong: The Seventies Publishing Company, 1977), as are excerpts from the "Outline report." *Ming pao* published a text of the twenty articles, by instalments, on 21–29 May 1977.

59. *Ibid.* pp. 147–48.

60. Hsueh-hsi yü p'i-p'an, No. 4 (1976), pp. 16–17; see also Ch'i Hsin, *Ssu-jen-p'ang ssu-chien tan-so*, p. 151.

61. For a vivid description, see *ibid. passim*, particularly pp. 194–200.

62. Hsueh-hsi yü p'i-p'an, No. 4 (1976), p. 21.

“ [landlords’] contingents returning to their own villages,”<sup>63</sup> or “royalists attempting a restoration,” and that they were not afraid of being overthrown.

Teng’s and his followers’ concrete programmes were relatively straightforward. In the sphere of economic development they advocated the introduction of advanced technology, machinery, and equipment from foreign countries. To accelerate the development of coal and oil they would use deferred or instalment payment and sign long-term contracts with foreign countries under which the latter would supply a fixed number of coal and oil fields in China with complete sets of modern equipment suitable to China’s needs and China would repay them with coal and oil. In industrial management, they advocated the re-establishment of the “responsibility system” under which every kind of work and every post, as well as every cadre, every worker, and every one of the technical personnel, would have clearly defined responsibility and this would find expression in the system of rules and regulations. They sought to establish a strong and independent management and command system to run production with the Party committee exercising only general unified leadership over important policies and refraining from the direct handling of matters large and small. They opposed “absolute egalitarianism” and underscored distribution according to labour. They proposed the implementation of “a system of regular promotions and increase in wages.”

This clear emphasis on rapid sustained economic growth is supplemented by an equally strong stress on the rapid development of science and technology. To justify this policy, they quoted or misquoted Marx to the effect that the “productive forces consist, in the first instance, of science and technology.”<sup>64</sup> They also cited the view that “philosophy cannot replace natural science.”<sup>65</sup> They suggested that in the field of science and technology, the dictatorship of the proletariat should not be mentioned.<sup>66</sup> If non-scientists were put into positions of leadership in research institutions, they ought to be those who were enthusiastic about scientific research. The Party secretaries in research institutes who did not understand the professional work involved were encouraged to follow the advice of the directors of the institutes. Teng was reported to have said that, “[W]hy should we fear the presence of a few white experts? They should be protected and praised.”<sup>67</sup> The intellectuals “are also labourers.” “In a state, science and technology should take the lead.” All these slogans, policies

63. According to Ch’i Hsin, what Teng actually said was “the proletariat’s contingent returning to their own villages,” *Ch’i-shih nien-tai*, March 1977.

64. Article under the by-line of Yen Feng, in *Hsueh-hsi yü p’i-p’an*, No. 2 (1976), p. 3.

65. *Hsueh-hsi yü p’i-p’an*, No. 4 (1976), p. 23.

66. *Ibid.* p. 24.

67. *Ibid.*



and remarks were directed at a "crisis" situation in which "the role of the specialists is underestimated," people "do not dare" to study technology, to read works in foreign languages, and to read professional literature. In some institutes in the Academy of Sciences, scientists could do research work "only four half-days out of a six-day work week."<sup>68</sup> In addition to the implementation of the reforms to overcome the crisis in science and technology, Teng and his subordinates also proposed rectification in the fields of industry, agriculture, communication, and transportation, finance and trade, culture, education, health, literature and arts, army and the Party.

It is clear that by mid-October 1975, the reform programmes of Teng and his subordinates were running into trouble. The December issue of *Hung ch'i* published a lead article entitled, "The direction of the revolution in education must not be tampered with." It criticized the idea that in the field of natural sciences, the best students should be selected to go to college directly without first working two years as workers and peasants. It attacked the view that transmission and development of knowledge should have the highest priority in education. It repudiated the charge that the revolution in education had been carried to excess and that the quality of university education was not as good as that of the technical middle schools in the past.

The nearly fatal blow against Teng was dealt by Mao himself in a statement cited in the 1976 New Year's Day editorial by the *Jen-min jih-pao*, *Hung ch'i*, and *Chieh-fang-chün pao*. Mao said: "Unity and stability do not mean writing off class struggle; class struggle is the key link and everything else hinges on it."<sup>69</sup> After the death of Premier Chou En-lai on 8 January Hua Kuo-feng was nominated personally by Mao as the acting premier and was also put in charge of the works of the Politburo.<sup>70</sup> Apparently, Teng no longer functioned as vice-premier, but Chang Ch'un-ch'iao was also passed over in favour of Hua, who maintained a close relationship with the veteran Party leaders and had serious conflicts with the "gang of four."<sup>71</sup> In the next two months, Teng's programme in education, science and technology, industrial development and foreign trade, etc., were roundly criticized without naming him. The widely publicized and unprecedented demonstration in the memory of Chou En-lai on 5 April led to the dismissal of Teng from all posts both inside and

68. Ch'i Hsin, *Ssu-jen-p'ang ssu-chien tan-so*, p. 195.

69. *Hung ch'i* No. 1 (1976), p. 6; *Peking Review*, 2 January 1976, p. 9. The limitation of space does not allow me to mention other statements.

70. *Jen-min* editorial, reprinted in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 22 December 1976, p. 1.

71. Hua Kuo-feng's important speech at the Conference to develop Tachai-type counties held from mid-September to mid-October 1975, was not printed in *Hung ch'i*. It is now charged that Yao Wen-yuan was responsible for this decision and that the ultra-leftists criticized Hua's speech as placing too much emphasis on production and as having a touch of revisionism. Chang's disappointment and resentment were expressed in a poem widely publicized now.

outside the Party, and the appointment of Hua as first vice-chairman of the Central Committee and premier of the State Council. The anomaly of allowing Teng to keep his Party membership while defining his problem as one of antagonistic contradiction did not escape the notice of outside observers.

Two points of theoretical interest emerged during this period of criticism of Teng. First, Mao himself used the term “bourgeois right,” which had been popularized by the ultra-leftists in their interpretation of these directives. Instead of saying that there were representatives of the bourgeoisie in the Party, he now asserted that “The bourgeoisie are right in the Party.” This statement reads in full:

With the socialist revolution, they themselves [Teng and people like him] come under fire. At the time of the co-operative transformation of agriculture, there were people in the Party [who] opposed it, and when it comes to criticizing the bourgeois right, they resent it. You [referring to Party members] are making the socialist revolution and yet do not know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right in the Communist Party – those in power taking the capitalist road. The capitalist roaders are still on the capitalist road.<sup>72</sup>

The key sentence, “[I]t [the bourgeoisie] is right in the Communist Party – those in power taking the capitalist road,” can be interpreted in two different ways with very different political implications. As the veteran political leaders were to insist, the sentence should be read as a whole. The term “bourgeoisie” merely refers to “those in power taking the capitalist road” and its meaning is specified by the latter phrase. Thus interpreted, it is not different in meaning from the frequently used phrase “the representatives of the bourgeoisie.” In contrast, the ultra-leftists often use the first half of the sentence (“The bourgeoisie is right in the Communist Party”) alone without the specifying phrase.<sup>73</sup> It is now alleged that in a publication controlled by the ultra-leftists there is the following statement: “Chairman Mao says that the bourgeoisie is right in the Communist Party; we believe that the term refers to class as an entity.”<sup>74</sup> This concept of a bourgeois class existing within a Party as an entity is an anomaly, as it is now pointed out. But it does not necessarily conflict with the prevailing and accepted point of view that in certain conditions the superstructure can play the principal and decisive role and that the ideological and political line decides everything. It thus became an additional block in the theoretical edifice of the ultra-leftists. It was

72. *Hung ch'i*, No. 4 (1976), pp. 1, 15. The dash in the English version is a comma in the Chinese.

73. For example, in the important joint editorial by the *Jen-min*, *Hung ch'i*, and *Chieh-fang-chün pao*, *Hung ch'i*, No. 7 (1976), p. 3.

74. Hsiang Chun, “The complete reversal of the relations between the enemy and ourselves,” *Jen-min*, 4 March 1977, p. 1. The theoretically interesting article by Chih Feng, *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 9 May 1977, p. 2 arrived too late to be included in this article.

used as the term of ultimate opprobrium applied to the veteran political leaders. To outside observers, it is clear that in the interpretation given by the ultra-leftists, the word "bourgeoisie" was transformed from a term with fairly clear empirical referents within a given theoretical tradition into a condensation symbol with intended political impact on the mass mind.

Secondly, Mao's statement using the phrase "the class of bureaucratic officials" was published officially in its entirety for the first time and with an important twist in the joint editorial on 1 July 1976, commemorating the 55th anniversary of the founding of the Party.

The order of the three paragraphs of Mao's comment made in 1964 on a report was changed so that the second paragraph of one sentence became the first paragraph. This twist highlighted the sharp opposition between the bureaucratic officials on the one hand and the working class together with the poor and lower-middle peasants on the other rather than the questions of management and socialist education. Then, in explaining Mao's statement that the bourgeoisie exists "right in the Communist Party," the joint editorial reads:

In 1964, Chairman Mao pointed out in a directive concerning the socialist educational movement: "The class of bureaucratic officials on the one hand and the working class together with the poor and lower middle peasants on the other are two classes sharply opposed to each other." Chairman Mao further pointed out, "Management itself is a matter of socialist education. If the managerial staff do not join the workers on the shop floor, work, study, and live with them and modestly learn one or more skills from them, then they will find themselves locked in acute class struggle with the working class all their lives and in the end are bound to be regarded as the bourgeoisie and overthrown by them. If they do not learn any technical skills and remain outsiders for a long time, they would not be able to do management well either. Those in the dark are in no way to light the way for others." Chairman Mao also stated: "Those leading cadres who are taking the capitalist road have turned or are turning into bourgeois elements sucking the blood of the workers; how can they possibly realize fully the imperative need for socialist reform? These people are the target of the struggle, the target of the revolution, and we must never rely on them in any socialist educational movement. We can rely only on those cadres who are not hostile to the workers and are imbued with revolutionary spirit."<sup>75</sup>

75. *Hung ch'i*, No. 7 (1976), p. 6. In the official translation, the phrase, "the bureaucrat class," is used rather than the words, "the class of bureaucratic officials," which has narrower empirical referents than the former. The official translation uses the phrase "sharply antagonistic" rather than the words "sharply opposed," which is the more literal translation of the original Chinese phrase, and which connotes a more moderate tone. The officially published Chinese version includes two changes from the unofficial version distributed by the Red Guards. "Those persons" is changed to "[T]hose leading cadres who are taking the capitalist road." And, the phrase "the imperative need for socialist revolution," is added. These two changes add to the radicalism of Mao's statement.

Just a month before, another three statements by Mao were cited in *Hung ch'i*. More than any other statements by Mao, they clarified Mao's common-sense view that political power itself is a source of conflict and a cause of revolution in socialist China, not only at the present time, but also in the remote future. They explain why Mao rejected Marx's utopia. Mao said:

After the democratic revolution, the workers and the lower middle peasants do not stand still; they want revolution. On the other hand, a number of Party members do not want to go forward; some have moved backward and opposed the revolution. Why? because they have *become high officials and want to protect the interests of high officials*.<sup>76</sup>

Mao also said:

Will there be a need for revolution a hundred years from now? There will always be need for revolution. There are always sections of the people who feel themselves oppressed; junior officials, students, workers, peasants, and soldiers do not like bigshots oppressing them. That is why they want revolution. Will contradictions no longer be seen ten thousand years from now? Why not? They will still be seen.

Earlier, Mao had said: "[W]ithout struggle, there is no progress"; asking, "[C]an 800 million people manage without struggle?"

Mao's comments on the "class of bureaucratic officials" were published and used in the joint editorial on 1 July, at a time when Mao's health was deteriorating rapidly<sup>77</sup> and when Yao Wen-yuan controlled, or at least dominated, two of the three editorial departments. This altered quotation from Mao served the ideological polemics of the ultra-leftists well. Not only were the bureaucratic officials labelled a "class," but they were also implicitly equated with "those leading cadres who are taking the capitalist road" and then identified as "bourgeois elements." They were designated unequivocally the target of the revolution and "in the end were bound to be overthrown. . . ."

From a theoretical perspective, the publication of Mao's comments enabled the ultra-leftists to round out their theory of the existence of the bourgeoisie in a socialist society and the theory of the struggle between two antagonistic classes which calls for the "all-round dictatorship" of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie in the continuing revolution. The theory developed by the ultra-leftists can be systematized as follows: the bourgeoisie has its source in both the economic base and the superstructure of the socialist society in China. Defined solely in terms of the relations of production (thus excluding forces of pro-

76. Editorial Departments of the *Jen-min jih-pao*, *Hung ch'i*, and *Chieh-fang-chün pao*, "The Great Cultural Revolution will shine forever," *Peking Review*, 21 May 1976, p. 7. Emphasis added.

77. See the picture of Mao in his meeting with Prime Minister Lee Kuan-yew of Singapore in *Peking Review*, 14 May 1976, p. 3. This picture caused a great deal of speculation abroad. Mao died less than four months after the appearance of this picture.

duction), the economic base has three components: the ownership of the means of production, the form of distribution, and the relations between men. In certain conditions, the form of distribution and the relations between men rather than the ownership of production play a principal and decisive role in determining the nature of the society and its further development into a higher form or its retrogression back to an earlier form.

In the system of distribution in China, particularly commodity exchange, money economy and the eight-grade wage system, "bourgeois right" continues to be the predominant feature, in spite of the change of the system of ownership of the means of production. As defined by the ultra-leftists on the basis of selected passages from Marx and Lenin, "bourgeois right" is fertile ground for the emergence of "new bourgeois elements" or simply "the bourgeoisie." Here, the ultra-leftists went further than Lenin; for Lenin believed that in a socialist society, bourgeois right exists but not the bourgeoisie.

The relations between men also constitute a fertile ground for the emergence of "new bourgeois elements" or "the bourgeoisie." The relations between men is defined not exclusively as relations between economic classes. They include the relations of exchange of "commodities" broadly defined to include political and social favours granted and received. They also encompass power and personal relations between the superiors and subordinates. In other words, they are analogous to what we call patron-client relations from which a power structure both inside and outside the formal organizations and institutions can be built. To make the picture more complete, the ultra-leftists did not ignore the remaining though, minor, forms of private ownership of means of production, particularly the private plots. Nor did they fail to observe that collective ownership in the vast agricultural sector is still not ownership by the whole people (*i.e.*, the state).

The extensive presence of "bourgeois right" in China's society leads to the emergence of "new bourgeois elements" among Party members, government officials and even workers and peasants. Thus an explanation in terms of "the economic base" is found for the emergence of "the class of bureaucratic officials," "the bourgeoisie." Instead of envisaging the gradual disappearance of "bourgeois right" after the nationalization of the means of production, the ultra-leftists insisted that they must be rigorously restricted by political action. Ominously, the ultra-leftists likened "bourgeois right" to the fortified villages" during the civil war period, implying that it can only be eliminated by physical violence.<sup>78</sup>

The economic base is only one source of "new bourgeois elements"

78. Mao said that "bourgeois right can only be restricted." This is a clear difference in emphasis from the position of the ultra-leftists. All the recent articles published in China confirm this interpretation of the meaning of the term "fortified villages."

or "the bourgeoisie." More important and perhaps decisive is the superstructure. The political structure is the direct source and foundation of the class of bureaucratic officials and the "leading cadres who are taking the capitalist road." Moreover, the power of leadership and the ideological and political line followed by the leaders can have a decisive effect on the content of the system of ownership of the means of production as distinguished from its form. This conclusion is a startling revision of Marxism and goes much further than anything said by Mao. At this point, we quote once more Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's extraordinary statement:

The correctness or the incorrectness of the ideological and political line and the control of leadership in the hands of one class or another decide which class owns a factory in reality.

When this sentence is read in the light of Mao's 1964 remarks now officially published and widely publicized, the "class" in Chang's sentence can easily be interpreted as the "class of bureaucratic officials," "the bourgeois elements" who would be overthrown by the working class. Thus, a fairly complete and sophisticated theory, by the standards of Chinese polemics, is rounded out. This theory was used to arouse public support for the ultra-leftists, and to legitimize actions to attack the leading cadres at all levels, including the top level veteran Party leaders. This theory was further supported by the old notion that the influence of the ideas of the overthrown landlord and bourgeoisie remains strong and that it penetrates the Party and turns even top level leaders into the spokesmen and representatives of these old classes. The abstract ideas organized by this theory contributed to the views that the reactionary forces are everywhere and that ruthless dictatorial actions must be taken to suppress them, whatever the cost to economic progress and political stability. They also contributed to the sense of righteousness, invincibility, and approaching triumph on the part of the ultra-leftists which made them arrogant and blind to political and economic realities. Hence, their rigorous actions in pushing their programme, in gaining power, and in fomenting disorder to overthrow the veteran Party leaders led only to a sudden and complete disaster for themselves.

#### IV

As the history of the Chinese Communist movement and regime shows, Mao's reformulated thesis of historical materialism, that in certain conditions, the superstructure, theory, and relations of production rather than the economic base, practice, and forces of production play the principal and decisive role in social change, resonates almost invariably with the revolutionary impulse and frequently with the revolutionary situation in 20th century China. This



thesis is usually thrust into prominence by those, including Mao himself, who are pushing for rapid change and revolutionary policies. The relationship of this thesis to the notion of unity of theory and practice is on one level complementary and on another level antithetical. The notion of unity of theory and practice can be viewed as the epistemological principle with which Mao's reformulated thesis of historical materialism is arrived at or justified. It frequently acts as a principle of prudence to guide and control the revolutionary impulse, the formulation of revolutionary programmes, and revolutionary actions themselves which stem from the revolutionary situation but are structured or rationalized by the reformulated thesis of historical materialism. But the notion of unity of theory and practice is also antithetical to Mao's reformulated thesis of historical materialism because the form gives the primary place to practice whenever the latter assigns the principal and decisive role to theory. Both as a principle of prudence and as an antithesis of the latter, it is given saliency when realistic political and military strategy and tactics, carefully regulated social change, well thought out reforms, and planned economic growth are desired. This relationship between policy-choices and theoretical tenets, or, if you will, the political use of ideological symbols, is brought out more clearly in the struggle between the "gang of four" and the veteran leaders than in most other intra-Party struggles.

The rapid destruction of the "gang of four" as a political force following the death of Mao confronts the veteran leaders with both a challenge and an opportunity to work out a mix between revolutionary change and modernization and to adopt Mao Tse-tung thought to such a programme or (allow me the luxury of anticipating a possible formulation some years hence) "to combine Mao Tse-tung Thought with the concrete practices of revolutionary modernization in China" in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Naturally, the first and most fundamental step is to elevate once again to its rightful place Mao's notion of unity of theory and practice and his personal example in applying it.<sup>79</sup> Thus, Mao's departure from the Bolsheviks' path to power and Lenin's departure from the theory of Marx and Engels have been underscored. The "gang of four" have been attacked for using such words as "forever" and "everlasting" to describe Mao's ideas as guides to action. In Hua Kuo-feng's speech to the second conference on learning from Tachai in December 1976, "integrating theory with practice" was listed ahead of "forging close links with the masses" and practising "criticism and self-criticism" as the three major features of the Party's "fine style of work." The ultra-leftists' "so-called opposition to empiricism" is

79. For a more detailed discussion of the various points in this section, see the up-dated version of the Conference paper, dated 19 May 1977, which will appear in Japanese in *Ajia Kuotari*.

attacked as being in reality "opposition to giving first place to practice," and "opposition to integrating Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution."<sup>80</sup>

The next step is to refute the exclusive emphasis made by the ultra-leftists on Mao's reformulated thesis of historical materialism in the making and appraisal of policies, programmes, and institutions. This theoretical task is done much less satisfactorily and elegantly. The Chinese theoreticians now argue that even when superstructure, theory and relations of production play the principal and decisive role, these principal aspects of the contradictions cannot exist without the opposite, though admittedly secondary, aspects of the contradictions – i.e. the economic base, practice, and the forces of production. The principal aspects should receive emphasis but the secondary aspects should not be neglected. To emphasize only one aspect is an expression of "metaphysical" thinking and does not conform to reality. These ideological arguments enable the Chinese to agree with Mao's reformulated thesis and still to push forward vigorously a programme of developing the forces of production and strengthening the economic base by practical actions.

Not unexpectedly, the current leaders launched a strong attack on the ultra-leftists' interpretation of Mao's statement that the bourgeoisie "is right in the Communist Party – those in power taking the capitalist road." Using the interpretation mentioned above, Hsiang Chun accuses the "gang of four" of "completely ignoring the minimum common sense of Marxism."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Chiang Ch'ing's thesis that 75 per cent of the "democratic faction" will turn into the faction of capitalist roaders was refuted by noting the leadership role of the Communist Party in the New Democratic stage of the revolution. The re-emphasis on the notion of unity of theory and practice and the refutation of the charges of "empiricism" have served to underscore the value of the "experience" of the veteran leaders and the validity of their ideas and policies which grew out of revolutionary practice. As to the question of bourgeois right, it is now argued that it can only be limited and cannot be eliminated in one morning and that "as to how and to what extent it is to be restricted, this depends on the material and spiritual conditions at the time."<sup>82</sup>

The characterization of the "gang of four" as ultra-rightists rather than ultra-leftists has puzzled many outside observers and has been criticized by foreign radicals. From the viewpoint of the new leadership, this characterization can be explained and justified in the following

80. *Jen-min*, 14 November 1976, p. 2, article by Tien Ching; *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 15 November 1976, p. 3, article by Chün Ping; *Jen-min*, 17 November 1976, p. 1; Hua Kuo-feng's speech to the Second Conference on Learning from Tachai, *Peking Review*, 1 January 1977, p. 40; *Hung ch'i*, No. 2 (1977), p. 15; and *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 14 November 1976, p. 1, article by Kao Ning.

81. *Jen-min*, 14 March 1977, p. 1.

82. *Hung ch'i*, No. 2 (1977), p. 16.

two ways. First, the ultra-leftists advocated a programme so completely divorced from reality and from the demands and sentiments of the masses that its implementation would cause a total and rapid collapse of the regime, or at least political chaos and economic set back. As Edward Friedman observes "the programme of the Left does not summarize or synthesize or reflect the real needs of the citizenry. It is idealism."<sup>83</sup> This could soon lead to an ultra-rightist reaction. In this way, the ultra-leftists are "objectively" ultra-rightists. Furthermore, the ultra-leftists and ultra-rightists have one thing in common. Both are divorced from reality and the masses. Both approaches are therefore "metaphysical."

The second explanation is more pregnant with political significance. Although the ultra-leftists adopted revolutionary phrases and advocated revolutionary programmes in the field of economics and social arrangement, they were using ultra-rightist political methods, adopting an ultra-rightist style of life, and invoking "feudal" ideology to legitimize their attempt to gain power. All the detailed exposures of the political actions, designs, and private life of the "gang of four" are aimed at driving this point home to the masses.

Space does not allow us to document this explanation. But it is important to analyse the political meaning of this characterization. First, it is possible that by characterizing the "gang of four" as ultra-rightists rather than ultra-leftists, the new leaders would find it easier than otherwise to retain specific parts of their ideas which are also Mao's, and which the new leaders consider correct and useful in the new situation. The publication in April 1977 of the fifth volume of Mao's *Selected Works* furnished the occasion for emphasizing the "great theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" which Mao "founded by systematically summing up" historical experience at home and abroad. The prominence given to this theory stands in contrast to its omission in the available version of "On the general programme for work of the whole Party and the whole nation." This contrast may or may not reflect a basic difference between the current leadership and Teng. But it suggests that Hua Kuo-feng is very careful in preserving the revolutionary tradition while he is vigorously pushing ahead with economic reconstruction.

In his extremely important report on 4 May 1977 at the National Conference to Learn from Taching, Vice-premier Yu Ch'iu-li went out of his way to reaffirm the following points:

It is not enough to have only a revolution in the system of ownership of means of production. The socialist revolution on the political and ideological fronts must continue to be carried out thoroughly. Those parts of the relations of production which do not fit the forces of production and those parts of the superstructure which do not fit the economic base must also be reformed without interruption. If revolution in these spheres is not carried

83. Communication from Edward Friedman.

out, socialist institutions cannot be consolidated and publicly owned enterprises would degenerate, change their character, and become capitalist enterprises under the signboard of socialism.<sup>84</sup>

In returning to these ideas of Mao while rigorously pushing forward a programme of rapid industrialization, Hua, Yu and other leaders are re-establishing the vital linkage between politics and economics which was partially severed in the concrete programmes pushed by the ultra-leftists through their cavalier dismissal of the importance of economic growth. The reaffirmation of these Maoist ideas also suggests that the new leadership is trying to find a proper mix between rapid economic growth and continued revolutionary change, so as to maintain and further develop the patterns of Chinese development in which the achievement of a greater degree of economic quality and the expansion of participation have gone hand in hand with a respectable rate of economic growth. It also reflects a determination that China should not and would not become another Soviet Union.

The second and equally important point is the following. By characterizing the "gang of four" as ultra-rightists in their political method and programme, the new leaders can find an explanation for the disruption of China's political system since the Cultural Revolution. They can also justify a programme of rebuilding the battered political system. The new leaders admit that the system of democratic centralism, as well as many other rules, regulations and traditions has been disrupted by the methods and conspiratorial activities of the "gang of four." They stress that these must be rebuilt. In the next few years, one would expect to see the revival of many of the Party traditions which were destroyed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In this way, the new Chinese leadership attempts to fulfil Mao's wish and to speed up a recurrent pattern in Chinese history that "great disorder across the land leads to great order."

84. *Ta-kung-pao*, 9 May 1977, p. 4.