The Limits of Cataclysmic Change: Reflections on the Place of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" in the Political Development of the People's Republic of China

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Few episodes in history have been the object of such widely divergent interpretations as the events of Mao Zedong's last decade. For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to the movement launched in 1966 by the name Mao gave it, but disputes have raged since the beginning as to whether it was in fact either cultural or revolutionary, let alone proletarian.

Was it in reality an attempt to transform patterns of thought and behaviour of the Chinese people, or was it essentially a struggle for power? Mao himself always insisted that the Cultural Revolution was, in more or less equal measure, about both "line" and "headquarters."[1] Nevertheless, there were many in the west who held that it was all about creating a new moral and social order, and others who saw it as a naked intra-elite conflict with no real ideological content at all.[2]

Another hotly-contested issue was whether the Cultural Revolution constituted the handiwork of one man, or whether it reflected rather certain deep-seated tendencies within Chinese society. Mao's central and crucial role in bringing it about is not subject to discussion, but there were those who argued that he was merely the instrument, or the catalyst, of objective forces rooted in Chinese history, and/or in the logic of a western-inspired revolutionary process. Others saw it as an arbitrary charade resulting from the caprice of an ageing and despotic ruler.

These questions can still be asked today, and in principle better answered in the light of the much more abundant information now available. I shall address them here. But, apart from the old questions, it should be possible to raise new issues, because the phenomenon of communist rule in China now spans not 17 years, but nearly four decades, and includes many more contrasting phases, after as well as before 1966.

One new perspective, in particular, which can be explored today, is that evoked by the four dates 1956, 1966, 1976 and 1986. These can be taken to symbolize respectively de-Stalinization and the Hundred

1. See, in particular, his conversation with an Albanian delegation, 1 May 1967, *Wan-sui* (1969), pp. 673–79; translated in *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought* (Arlington, Va.: Joint Publications Research Service, 1974), pp. 456–61.

2. In this short piece, I shall on the whole not include references to the writings of other foreign scholars, either while the Cultural Revolution was going on, or in recent years. I have, of course, benefited greatly both from interpretations which I found convincing, and from the challenge of views I rejected. Such debts will no doubt be obvious to the reader.

Flowers; the Cultural Revolution; the end of the Maoist era; and the new upsurge of political reform and ideological debate since the spring of 1986, linked to the launching of the Seventh Five-Year Plan and the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the "two hundreds" slogan in May 1956.

The above periodization raises by implication the problem of whether cultural change is more effectively fostered by debate, and the gradual dissemination of new ideas, or by mass mobilization. Such a formulation is, of course, the more relevant, and the more piquant, because *both* approaches were promoted in turn by Mao Zedong himself. More broadly, the sequence 1956, 1966, 1976, 1986 poses the question of the place of the Cultural Revolution in Mao Zedong's political heritage, and the significance of that heritage for the present and for the future.

Manifestly, the Cultural Revolution, and the Maoist era as a whole, must be viewed as a segment of the larger process of China's modern transformation. I will not deal here at any length with that context, to which I have already devoted an article in this journal.[3] In a word, the fact that the Cultural Revolution fits into the century-and-a-half of change which has followed the Opium War means it is in some way related to two concerns which rapidly became dominant in Chinese political discourse after 1840: on the one hand, to master the techniques of the west in order to resist western domination, and on the other, to draw on elements of western culture in striving to create a new Chinese civilization. Both of these aspirations were clearly perceived and constantly reiterated by Mao Zedong. With the rise of the Chinese Communist Party the means employed were modified and re-defined; "building socialism" on the Soviet model became the principal method of economic development, and Marxism–Leninism became the chief vehicle of westernization. The basic dilemma created by the contradiction inherent in learning from the west in order to overcome the west remained, however, substantially intact.

What did alter fundamentally in 1949 was the political framework within which both economic and cultural change were pursued. The methods for involving the people in their own affairs symbolized by the formula of the "mass line" had always been heavily tilted in the direction of Leninist elitism, but prior to the conquest of power, substantial account had to be taken of popular sentiments if the communist movement was to survive.[4] When the Chinese Communist Party, as it is put in China today, "became a ruling Party" (*biancheng zhizheng dang*), it became by that very token an oligarchy for which "participation" could easily be transformed into manipulation. And

3. Stuart R. Schram, "To utopia and back: a cycle in the history of the Chinese Communist Party," *The China Quarterly*, No. 87 (September 1981), pp. 407–439.

4. On the "mass line" in general, see my discussion in Stuart R. Schram, "Mao's Thought to 1949," *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 821–22, 862–70.

within such a system, the role of the leader took on a different character, with different overtones, and the mechanisms of intra-Party conflict also assumed greater importance.

In tracing developments in this respect, the year 1956 is an appropriate starting-point not only because it saw the beginnings of de-Stalinization and the Hundred Flowers, but also because of another episode which is well known, but has not perhaps been sufficiently stressed. I am referring to the appearance in June 1956 of the article in *People's Daily* opposing adventurism (or "blind advance," *maojin*). Mao had tacitly acquiesced in the publication of this article, drafted under the guidance of Zhou Enlai, but he was never really in agreement with it, and never subsequently able to forget nor to forgive those responsible. Indeed, from the standpoint of relations within the leadership, some Chinese well-informed about these matters go so far today as to characterize the episode of the article on "opposing adventurism" as the first decisive step on the road to the Cultural Revolution.[5]

Apart from the inter-personal aspect, the fact that such an instance of intolerance on Mao's part could occur less than two months after he had launched the "two hundreds" slogan illustrates the ambiguity of his attitude and approach, which I have already underscored. During the ensuing year, from mid 1956 to mid 1957, the interplay of contrasting elements in Mao's thinking was not, of course, the only factor shaping events. In addition to developments in Poland and Hungary, and the emergence of dissident views within China, Mao's own radicalism, buoyed up by the "socialist high tide" he had promoted in the countryside beginning in July 1955, did, however, undoubtedly contribute decisively to the turn to the left in the summer of 1957. The "Anti-Rightist" movement launched then, when the policy of "blooming and contending" was turned inside out, inaugurated an emphasis on class struggle which was to persist in varying degrees for two decades. This political leftism of the summer of 1957, as well as the renewed economic leftism which emerged during the winter of 1957–58, planted the seeds of the drama to come.

In previous writings, I have emphasized rather the differences between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.[6] These are real, and should not be underestimated. The continuities between Mao's last two major initiatives, and the chain of causality linking the one to the other, are, however, equally significant, and should not be neglected.

This point has been developed in recent Chinese writings on the

5. This view was expressed by Gong Yuzhi in a conversation of 24 April 1986. On the circumstances in which the editorial, published in *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) on 20 June 1956, was written and revised, see Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution. 1. Contradictions Among the People, 1956–1957* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 86–91. MacFarquhar correctly concludes that the main responsibility for the article lay not with Liu Shaoqi, as alleged during the Cultural Revolution, but with Zhou Enlai. This fact is taken for granted in China today.

6. See "To utopia and back," p. 420.

subject. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether or not the current official assessment of the Cultural Revolution is fair or adequate, Chinese analyses of the origins of this upheaval are of considerable interest. A relatively early and extremely cogent presentation of most of the themes subsequently elaborated in many specialized articles can be found in Liao Gailong's talk of 4 December 1980 at a meeting on Party history convened under the auspices of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.[7]

Posing the question of why the Cultural Revolution broke out, and of how such an "outstanding revolutionary leader as Comrade Mao Zedong" could commit such grave leftist errors in his later years, when his thought was marked by broadening the scope of class struggle, and by excessive impatience for economic results, Liao blames in the first instance (like the Resolution of 27 June 1981) the arrogance engendered by the overwhelming prestige conferred on Mao by the successes achieved down to 1956 in building socialism. More sharply than the Resolution, however, he underscores how Mao detached himself both from the masses and from the collective leadership:

> Thus he became . . . the source of correct thought, he placed himself above the Central Committee of the Party, he no longer participated in collective political life, and harmed, or even sabotaged, the Party's system of democratic centralism. As he said himself to Snow, "I am a monk with an umbrella – subject neither to Heaven nor to the Law (*wufa wutian*)."

In Liao's view, such withdrawal of Mao Zedong from normal political life made it increasingly difficult for him to correct his errors, because not being in contact with reality he could no longer "seek the truth from facts" even if he had wished to. The roots of Mao's personal rule Liao traces not only to China's "feudal" tradition, but to the "excessive emphasis on centralism" in Lenin's theory of the Party, and the "excessive emphasis on violence" in Lenin's theory of the state, assimilated by the Chinese from the "Soviet model of bureaucratic absolutism."

Liao also stresses, like most recent Chinese authors, the influence of the "petty-bourgeois and conservative peasants," who not only worshipped authority, but corrupted the Party with their egalitarian thinking. He goes farther than most in spelling out the impact of this social environment on Mao himself:

> For a long period, Comrade Mao Zedong lived in China's backward countryside, he did not understand modern socialized (*shehuihua de*) large-scale industry, and to an even greater extent this caused him to sink, with

7. Liao Gailong, "Guanyu dangshi he dangshi ziliao de mantan" ("Chat on Party history and materials on Party history"), in Liao Gailong, *Dangshi tansuo* (*Explorations in Party History*) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1983), pp. 366–411. The section on the Cultural Revolution appears on pp. 402–409.

regard to questions of socialist economic construction, into subjective utopianism marked by impatience for quick success.[8]

This paradoxical linkage between a traditional, backward-looking, and hence conservative approach to his own role as leader, and a radical or leftist line on class struggle and matters of economic development, is of decisive significance in understanding not only Mao's decision to launch the Cultural Revolution, but his behaviour during the whole of his last two decades. Because Mao tended increasingly to define class in ideological terms, and to make loyalty to himself the touchstone of authentically "proletarian" ideas and policies, the more he encountered resistance, the farther left he moved. Conversely, the more acutely he perceived, from his leftist perspective, that China was going revisionist, the more he sought to impose his own will, and the more autocratic he became.[9]

A decisive stage in the unfolding of this dialectic was, of course, the Lushan conference of 1959 and the confrontation with Peng Dehuai. I cannot review at any length this dramatic episode, about which so much has been written.[10] A few points must, however, be made. The first and most important one concerns the personal and psychological dimensions of the gathering. This meeting had originally been convened for the purpose of carrying further the process of retreat from the excesses of the Great Leap in the aftermath of Mao's March 1959 decision to decentralize management in the communes, and of the Shanghai Plenum of April 1959. The atmosphere in early July, when the delegates first arrived on Lushan, was relaxed and cordial, as befitted an informal encounter among old comrades. A protocol which was expected to form the basis for an agreed policy line was elaborated without undue delay. Brusquely, by his reaction to Peng Dehuai's criticisms, Mao Zedong transformed the atmosphere to one of sharp confrontation. That much is well known. What needs to be underscored here is the manner in which Peng's intervention, and the speech of Zhang Wentian, which made similar criticisms in more systematic and theoretical form, brought into play precisely the duality of authoritarian leadership style and leftist orientation on Mao's part evoked above.

While not defending the original Great Leap policies, Mao felt that the explicit recognition of errors would diminish the enthusiasm necessary to rapid economic advance. He was, however, even angrier

8. *Ibid.* pp. 406–408.

9. For a more detailed discussion of this mechanism, including references to recent Chinese articles putting similar arguments, see my essay "Party leader or true ruler? Foundations and limits of Mao Zedong's personal power," in Stuart Schram (ed.), *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies; Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, forthcoming, spring 1987).

10. The most comprehensive and judicious account is that of MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 2. *The Great Leap Forward 1958–1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 187–251.

at the suggestion that he was trying to create in the Party a situation in which only one man dared open his mouth (*yiyantang*).[11]

Even though other top leaders, including in particular Liu Shaoqi, supported Mao Zedong in the ensuing confrontation, culminating in the destitution of Peng Dehuai, it was Mao's reaction which had turned the meeting into a life and death struggle and a test of loyalty. The scratches thus created on the minds of his comrades were never to be effaced in Mao's lifetime.

Of the several turning-points between 1959 and the launching of the Cultural Revolution itself, I shall mention only two: the Central Work Conference of January–February 1962, and the 10th Plenum in September of the same year. It was widely believed during the Cultural Revolution, and has often been argued since, that Mao Zedong clashed head-on with Liu Shaoqi at the former gathering, and that this led to his subsequent turn to the left, as well as to his decision to destroy Liu. It is entirely possible that Mao did not particularly appreciate the negative tone of Liu's oral report of 27 January 1962, which has now been published in full, even though Wang Guangmei states that Liu had informed Mao the evening before of the gist of his remarks.[12] It is, however, the view of Chinese with first-hand knowledge that Mao was perhaps even more annoyed by the lack of enthusiasm for the spirit of the Great Leap displayed by the whole group of 7,000 middle and upper rank cadres who constituted the bulk of the attendance on this occasion. This impression strengthened his view that the Party as a whole was infected with revisionist and bureaucratic tendencies, thus inspiring the shrill clarion-call in favour of class struggle at the 10th Plenum, and other well-known statements and measures regarding the threat that the Party might "change colour."

Such was the matrix of events from which the Cultural Revolution emerged, at the level of intra-Party relationships. But what was the essential nature of this movement, and did it reflect any deeper forces or laws?

Like Stalin's purges of the 1930s, the Cultural Revolution was marked both by extreme violence against those who opposed, or were

11. For a somewhat more extended discussion of these events, see "Party leader or true ruler?". Zhang Wentian's speech at Lushan is now available in his *Collected Works: Zhang Wentian xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985), pp. 480–506. A vivid account of the changing atmosphere is contained in Li Rui, "Chong du Zhang Wentian tongzhi de 'Lushan fayan'" ("Re-reading Comrade Zhang Wentian's 'Speech at Lushan'"), in *Huiyi Zhang Wentian* (*Remembering Zhang Wentian*) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1985), pp. 289–302 *passim*. Also, conversation of 18 April 1986 with Li Rui, who was one of the six members of the drafting committee of the "Summary decisions" which, in the end, were not adopted. The composition of this group makes plain how wide was the apparent consensus in July; the others were Hu Qiaomu, Zhou Xiaozhou, Mao's secretary Tian Jiaying, Tan Zhenlin, and Zeng Xisheng of Anhui.

12. For the texts of Liu's written and oral reports on this occasion, see *Liu Shaoqi xuanji* (*Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi*), Vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985), pp. 349–443. For Wang Guangmei's account of the circumstances, see her article in *Renmin ribao*, 13 December 1985.

accused of opposing, the leader (seen as the incarnation of the Party), and by gross disregard for the truth about the historical record. This has led some observers to argue that the events of this period were simply another instance of a revolution devouring its own children, in the peculiar form assumed by this phenomenon in communist party states. But while the existence of certain clear parallels between events in Moscow during Stalin's last two decades, and the corresponding period of Mao's life, cannot be denied, the differences, both of form and of substance, were equally important.

The lies about the past proceeded in both cases from the same root: the concept of the Party as the unquestioned and infallible vanguard of the working class and of historical progress. In the light of this hypothesis, anyone who places himself at any time in opposition to the line of the Party must have been a traitor from the beginning, and all words and actions of the leader not in harmony with the current understanding of the truth must be denied and effaced. Thus the victims of the Cultural Revolution became "feudal sons of the landlord class" who had long been in collusion with the Kuomintang, just as Trotsky was accused of being an agent of the British Intelligence Service from before 1917.

When we come to the violence, on the other hand, the differences between the Cultural Revolution and Stalin's purges are immediately apparent. They lie not so much in the amount of killing and cruelty as in its mode and rationale. Though the evidence is strong that Mao Zedong never forgave an injury, however much he claimed he had, and though he must bear substantial responsibility for some of the deaths during the Cultural Revolution, he does not appear to have revelled, like Stalin, in blood for blood's sake.[13] The important point, however, is not that Mao was a more human figure than Stalin, but that, however misguided his methods during the Cultural Revolution, he had in view wider aims than simply the destruction of his adversaries.

These goals have been summed up so often that it would be pointless to do so here at any length. In essence, they were to combat bureaucracy, to transform human nature, and to build a new society and develop the economy through popular participation. Such a statement immediately raises the central problem of the relation between the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong's political heritage as a whole. For was this not precisely what Mao had been trying to do since the winter of 1957–58 at least?

The answer is, of course, "yes" and "no." In attempting to come to grips with the problem of whether the Cultural Revolution constituted, in the main, simply another bold step farther along the same road, or a fundamentally new departure, a useful way of putting the issue is perhaps to ask: does open-endedness mean formlessness?

13. For a somewhat more detailed statement of my position on this question, which is not really central in the present context, see Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983), p. 73.

In the editorial of 5 April 1956 "On the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat," the view had been put forward that contradictions would persist not only under socialism, but under communism,[14] and in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mao repeatedly stated that nothing in this world was ever definitive, whether it be communist society, or even the human race itself.[15] But did this open-ended philosophical vision merely imply that structures – political, social or economic – were subject to change and adjustment, or did it in fact mean that structure as such was anathema to Mao, for whom there was only revolutionary process as the ultimate reality?

As far as the political system was concerned, Mao Zedong very rapidly made it plain, after perhaps a brief period when he toyed with "great democracy" and the Paris Commune model, that there must be a clearly defined leadership structure. "There will always be heads," he told Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan in February, adding in a revealing comment: "Communes are too weak when it comes to suppressing counter-revolution."[16] In other words, despite the initial reliance on the Red Guards, and the maintenance, throughout the whole of the Cultural Revolution decade, of a façade of doing things by and through the "masses," the power of the leader, and the control of the security services, were preserved intact. In this respect, the Chinese political system remained in essence Stalinist.

And what of society and the economy? If political power remained firmly in the hands of a fluctuating but none the less clearly defined elite, were the people able freely and spontaneously to shape their lives in other respects? As far as economic status is concerned, the answer is clearly "no." One of the most sympathetic observers who have written recently on the subject concludes that the Cultural Revolution, and the whole Maoist experiment, did not and could not reduce either urban–rural inequality, or the disparities between different areas.[17] "Self-reliance" meant that those with more to rely on did better. As for the urban–rural dichotomy, it is appropriate to recall Mao's injunction of 1956 that the peasants should not be given "too hard a time" (*gaode tai ku*).[18] Patterns of socialist economic

14. Responsibility for this *Renmin ribao* editorial is now attributed to Mao. Mao himself said, in his speech "On the 10 great relationships," that "we" wrote it. *Selected Works*, Vol. V, p. 304.

15. See, e.g. his philosophical conversation of August 1964, in Stuart Schram (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 220–21, 227–29, etc.

16. S. Schram, *Mao Unrehearsed*, pp. 277–78. See also the rather different text of these conversations in *Wan-sui* (1969), pp. 667–72, translated (badly) in *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought*, pp. 451–55. For my own comments on the role of organization in Mao's thinking during the Cultural Revolution, see my article "Decentralization in a unitary state: theory and practice 1940–1984" in S. R. Schram (ed.), *The Scope of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies; Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1985), pp. 107–115.

17. See M. Meisner, *Mao's China and After. A History of the People's Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 442–43, though the conclusion here is partly contradicted by the analysis on pp. 376–79.

18. "On the 10 great relationships," text as circulated in 1965, in S. Schram, *Mao Unrehearsed*, p. 70; Chinese in *Wan-sui* (1969), p. 48.

organization may well have been for Mao and the Shanghai leftists, as some western scholars have argued, a matter for continual improvisation, but the logic of industrialization, as understood by Mao, fixed the overall framework.

There remains the realm of culture, both in the broad and in the narrow sense. Did the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" change ways of thinking? Did it change attitudes towards authority? Did it root out selfishness in the heart of man? *Was* it after all a cultural revolution, the logical and legitimate continuation of the May Fourth Movement, as Han Suyin and so many others argued at the time?

This is, plainly, the most distinctive aspect of the Chinese experience, as compared to that of the Soviet Union and other countries ruled by communist parties. It is also the most difficult to evaluate for those who did not live through the years 1966–76 in China themselves.

Some aspects of the context are easily sketched. To begin with, the cultural and intellectual transformation which must accompany any industrial revolution (and about which Lenin wrote at length) was complicated, and its nature changed, by the dilemma of acculturation and of anti-western westernization evoked at the beginning of this article. Secondly, Mao Zedong's consistent stress on the importance of conscious activity, subjective forces, and the superstructure is well known. In his reading notes of 1959–60 on the Soviet textbook of political economy, he put together his insights regarding the dialectic between revolution and culture in the following terms:

> All revolutionary history shows that the full development of new productive forces is not the prerequisite for the transformation of backward production relations. Our revolution began with Marxist–Leninist propaganda, which served to create new public opinion in society, and thereby to push forward the revolution. Only after the backward superstructure had been overthrown in the course of the revolution was it possible to destroy the old production relations. After the old production relations had been destroyed, and new ones established, the way was cleared for the development of new social productive forces . . .
>
> It is a general rule that you cannot solve the problem of ownership, and go on to develop the productive forces in a big way, until you have created public opinion and seized political power.[19]

This statement is characteristic – but it is also characteristically ambiguous. Was Mao thinking already of "seizing power" from "capitalist roaders" in the Party? Probably not. But how was propaganda to be conducted, and public opinion to be created? By intellectuals, whose role Mao Zedong, in true Chinese fashion, had long prized so highly? "The whole of the Chinese revolutionary

19. Mao Tsetung, *A Critique of Soviet Economics* (transl. by Moss Roberts) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), pp. 51, 66–67; translation modified on the basis of the Chinese text, *Wan-sui* (1969), pp. 334, 347.

movement found its origin in the action of young students and intellectuals who had been awakened," he declared in 1939 in a passage subsequently removed from his speech on the anniversary of the May 4th Movement.[20] Or by the people themselves, without, in spite of, or even against the intellectuals?

Thus we come back to the question I posed at the outset, about the agency of cultural transformation, and the relation between incremental and cataclysmic change. The experience of the years 1958–60 had abundantly demonstrated that a great leap forward in production was impossible, and the attempt to achieve it led only to confusion and mass starvation. But could there be a great leap forward in culture, or in moral values?

In some respects, it is flagrantly obvious that the Cultural Revolution failed to achieve such a breakthrough. The enthusiasm with which a high proportion of the Chinese peasantry have responded to the invitation, in recent years, to enrich themselves and their families, amply demonstrates the fragility of the new collectivist consciousness which, according to many observers, had been established once and for all by the early 1970s. This does not mean that it is impossible to foster a sense of concern for, and responsibility to, society as a whole. Indeed, such values have, of course, been insistently preached in the 1980s, simultaneously with the call to "get rich first." Apart from the unedifying spectacle of the behaviour of the activists who wielded power during the Cultural Revolution, however, and apart from any doubts which may be entertained about the possibility in principle of such a radical change in human nature, Mao's last battle to "smash selfishness" demonstrated once and for all the futility of attempting through a collective act of will to create cultural patterns entirely unrelated to the material foundations of the society in question.

Does this mean that the Cultural Revolution, apart from the human tragedies it brought and the deep personal bitterness it has left behind, has totally evaporated, leaving no lasting imprint on Chinese society? Manifestly not, for if that were the case, the repeated calls in recent years for the "complete and thorough negation" of the Cultural Revolution would be unnecessary and irrelevant. To the extent that these denunciations of the past are directed against crass egalitarianism and contempt for knowledge and talent, they are entirely justified, and widely acceptable. To the extent that they consist in the criticism of attacks on a "new bourgeoisie" or a "bureaucratic class" by Mao and others during the Cultural Revolution years, the position is more complex.

Not only was Mao Zedong himself, as I have already noted, of two minds about the need for administrators; the notion that "real" socialism implies the elimination, or emasculation, of the state

20. S. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, rev. edit. (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 354–55; *Mao Zedong ji*, 2nd edit., Vol. 6 (Tokyo: Sōsōsha, 1983), p. 331.

apparatus, so that the "masses," or the "workers," can run their own affairs, is utopian nonsense. The real problem is how, and to what degree, citizens can influence the way in which political power is exercised. And here, while the forms of the Cultural Revolution have rightly been discarded, something of its anti-bureaucratic spirit may not be wholly irrelevant.

It is of this dimension of the problem that many Chinese, especially among the young, are thinking when they challenge the official call for the "negation" of the Cultural Revolution. To begin with, they regard it as contrary to dialectics to suggest that any historical phenomenon can be simply effaced. But more particularly, they say they have learned from the experience of the years 1966–76, not necessarily to reject authority, but to query its pronouncements, and to think for themselves.

That in itself is not altogether in conflict with the political climate in China at the present time. Responding to Hu Yaobang's call not to fear "contradictions within the Party" resulting from differing views, and not to fear democracy,[21] and to the appeal of the Head of the Propaganda Department, Zhu Houze, to make new "breakthroughs" (*tupo*) in theory, in order to promote reform,[22] the "Hundred Flowers" policy has recently been taken, on the 30th anniversary of its proclamation, a step farther than Mao ever envisaged.

Yu Guangyuan has recalled that when he first put forward the "two hundreds" slogan ("Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend"), Mao Zedong remarked that, at present, the "hundred schools" amounted in fact to only two schools – the bourgeois school, and the proletarian school.[23] In other words, the idea of genuine pluralism *within* the proletarian or socialist camp was totally foreign to Mao. Today, Su Shaozhi has pointed out that the abolition of the "two hundreds" slogan was, historically, the result of the action of the Qin autocracy, with its goal of "uniformity of thought" (*sixiang yizhi*).[24] Spelling out the implications of this rejection of the monolithic unity long regarded as a socialist ideal, Su went on in another article to stress that different individuals, groups or strata naturally had differing interests and differing ideas, and that elected officials should represent these diverse constituencies, instead of simply repeating the views contained in such and such a leader's report.[25]

The political context within which trends such as this are emerging is, of course, an extremely complex one, which I cannot even begin to

21. *Renmin ribao*, 24 April and 1 July 1986.
22. *Renmin ribao*, 25 April 1986.
23. Yu Guangyuan, "Shuangbai fangzhen tichu sanshi nian" ("The 30th anniversary of the putting forward of the two hundreds policy"), *Renmin ribao*, 16 May 1986.
24. Su Shaozhi, "'Shuangbai' fangzhen sanshi nian" ("Thirty years of the 'two hundreds' policy"), *Renmin ribao*, 15 May 1986.
25. Su Shaozhi, "Zhengzhi tizhi gaige yu fandui fengjianzhuyi yinxiang" ("Reform of the political structure and opposition to feudal influences"), *Renmin ribao*, 15 August 1986.

discuss here.[26] I venture to suggest, however, that such erosion of the monistic ideal of traditional Chinese political culture may, in the long run, result in a more thoroughgoing and lasting revolution in attitudes than the cataclysm of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution."

As for the broader context of Chinese history and society, and the approach to revolution which flows from it, Mary Wright wrote in the early days of the Cultural Revolution:

> The Chinese revolutionary movement, from the very beginning and on all fronts, was enormously ambitious and proudly unrealistic... about what could be accomplished overnight by a mighty effort of the human will. Once Chinese decided that they had to enter the world of the modern great powers, they decided that they could and would leapfrog over the stages of the development of other countries. If this is true... then the extreme voluntarism that has characterized Chinese Communist theory and been epitomized in action by the Great Leap Forward must be seen in a new historical perspective.[27]

Mao himself, while maintaining his belief in the efficacy of "a mighty effort of the human will" both to conquer nature and to transform human beings, had by the mid 1960s ceased to assert that this could be accomplished overnight. In a passage added to Zhou Enlai's report of December 1964, he wrote: "The great Chinese revolutionary, our precursor Mr Sun Yat-sen, said at the beginning of the century that in China there would come a Great Leap Forward. This prediction of his will certainly be realized *within a few decades.*"[28]

Not so long ago, some western scholars produced exceedingly detailed and ingenious arguments to demonstrate that Mao's Great Leap policies were "rational." In China they no longer think so. But this does not mean that the proud ambitions evoked by Mary Wright, and echoed by Mao in the passage just quoted, have been abandoned. A situation of economic backwardness and political weakness for China remains as intolerable to Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues as ever it was for Mao. The methods for redressing the balance have changed, from splendid isolation to joining the world and learning from it, but the goal remains the same. China's declared aim of reaching world levels in high technology, and not simply developing old-fashioned heavy industry, which have been derided by some western observers as wasteful and misguided, can be seen as the symbolic expression of this ambition. Thus, while the old, voluntaristic Great Leap and Cultural Revolution are no more, the process of cultural change and adaptation to the modern world which began with the May Fourth Movement is still very much on the order of the day.

26. I offered an interpretation of developments from 1978 to 1984 in my article "Economics in command?", *The China Quarterly*, No. 99 (September 1984), pp. 417–461. For an account of the ensuing two years, see my article "Tō Shōhei wa, Mō Takutō o norikoeru ka" ("Has Deng Xiaoping gone beyond Mao Zedong?"), *Chuō Kōron*, No. 10 (October 1986), pp. 222–37.

27. Mary C. Wright, "Introduction," in M.C. Wright (ed.), *China in Revolution: The First Phase 1900–1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 60.

28. S. Schram, *Mao Unrehearsed*, p. 231 (italics added).