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# *Mao Tse-tung's Materialistic Dialectics*

By VSEVOLOD HOLUBNYCHY

THE thesis of this article is that Mao Tse-tung's materialistic dialectics has a definite place of its own in the realm of the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist philosophy. Although it is undoubtedly consanguineous with the dialectics of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and the modern Russian and other Communist philosophy, it is also discernibly different. In addition, it is also somewhat related to the dialectics of classical Chinese philosophy. One demonstrable reason for all these relationships is that Mao Tse-tung's readings in Marxian classics were not very extensive, possibly less extensive than his readings in Chinese classics. The rest of the differences and peculiarities came from his own thinking.

There is evidence that Mao has practised his dialectics in his policies. His writings on the theory and methods of cognition and practice appear to describe and rationalise much of his personal experience. Hence, learning Mao Tse-tung's philosophy may, perhaps, provide the reader with some clues to his way of thinking and to his and the Chinese Communists' political behaviour. (There is no pretence in this article, of course, that Mao's dialectics explains everything about him.)

What this paper undertakes is the following.<sup>1</sup> After an introduction to the subject of dialectical materialism in general, it delineates the scope of Mao's contributions by relating them to their sources of origin and to their immediate frame of reference. Subsequently the article defines Mao's dialectical materialism on its own premises by identifying

<sup>1</sup> This article, written in November 1963, is in part a condensation of the author's earlier monograph, *Der dialektische Materialismus Mao Tse-tungs im Vergleich mit den Klassikern des Marxismus-Leninismus, untersucht als Faktor zur Beurteilung der chinesisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen*, which was first published in September 1962, in the quarterly report of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bonn, Germany (*Der Ostblock und die Entwicklungsländer*, Nos. 8-9, 1962). The parts of the original paper that are here largely omitted contain, in particular, more details on the comparison of Mao's dialectics with that of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and modern Russian philosophers; a discussion of interpretations of Mao's philosophy in China, the U.S.S.R. and the West; a survey of the preceding literature on the subject of this paper; and some specific examples of the relation of Mao's dialectics to the development of the CCP's ideological conflict with the CPSU prior to 1962. A shorter German summary of the original paper appeared also under the title "Der dialektische Materialismus Mao Tse-tungs" in *Merkur, Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* (München), XVII, No. 185, July 1963.

In referring to the Chinese language sources I was aided by my wife, Mrs. Lydia Holubnychy.

main features of its epistemology (theory of knowledge) and by summarising its ontological (theory of being) and ontogenetic (theory of the development of the individual) postulates concerning the nature and laws of development of reality and of truth. The article is based for the most part on Mao's three main philosophical essays, *On Practice*, *On Contradiction* and *On Dialectical Materialism*.

#### WHAT IS "MATERIALISTIC DIALECTICS"?

Dialectics, like logic, has two different, though closely related, meanings. One describes it as a way of thinking and a method of reasoning, of argumentation and demonstration of the validity or erroneousness of mental truths; the other interprets reality and human consciousness in terms of this method and thus makes out of it a part of philosophy.

In popular use and sometimes even in the interpretation of scholars, logic is often thought of as the only "correct" way of thinking. And there is, of course, nothing "wrong" about this way of thinking as long as it suits best the particular purpose of thinking. However, the modern linguistic school in philosophy, whose best known exponent was the late B. L. Whorf, has recently demonstrated that different cultures, because of the difference in languages, have considerably different ways of thinking best suited for some particular purposes. It has also demonstrated that some basic differences among the major philosophical views of the world stem largely from the differences in the structure of languages, which determine the differences in thinking.

In particular, it has been demonstrated that dialectics is especially inherent in the Chinese way of thinking merely because it arises from the different and unique character of the Chinese language and culture, just like our Western logic arises from the peculiarities of our languages and cultures. One of the earliest discoveries of this fact is contained in the 1939 paper by an eminent Chinese philosopher, Chang Tung-sun, who identified himself as a Kantian and Spenglerian, and definitely not a Marxist. He wrote:

. . . Aristotelian logic is based on the structure of the Western system of language. Therefore, we should not follow Western logicians in taking for granted that their logic is the universal rule of human reasoning. . . . Because the verb "to be" has the meaning of existence [in all Western languages], the "law of identity" ["A is A," the first law of logic] is inherent in Western logic; without it there can be no logical inference. Western logic, therefore, may be called "identity-logic." . . . In Chinese there is no verb "to be" comparable to the English form. The colloquial *shih* does not convey an idea of existence. The literary *wei* on the other hand conveys an idea of *ch'eng* which means "to become." But in English "becoming" is exactly opposite to "being." . . . Chinese thought puts no emphasis on exclusiveness

[like the Western "either—or," the third law of logic]; rather it emphasises the relational quality between above and below, good and evil, something and nothing. All these relatives are supposed to be interdependent. . . . [Hence], we have a logic of a quite different nature. . . . It may be proposed to call this type of logic "correlation logic" or "the logic of correlative duality." . . . Should we wish to adopt a terminology much in vogue, we might call this way of thinking an illustration of "dialectical logic." . . . It is true that Marxism [like Chinese dialectical logic] has done away with the law of identity, and has advocated the law of opposition. . . . But its difference from Chinese thought lies in the fact that while Marxism puts emphasis on opposition and thus class struggle, Chinese thought puts emphasis on the result or adjustment of such an opposition. . . . In contradistinction to the Chinese logic of correlation, the Marxian type of logic may be called the "logic of opposition."<sup>2</sup>

A good deal of accurate observation in this early statement has since been amplified by new research, though much still remains to be done.<sup>3</sup> For example, in addition to an exhaustive and critical treatment of the Chinese meanings of "being," A. C. Graham has recently explored a number of other linguistic peculiarities of the classical Chinese philosophy (most of which are still valid in modern Chinese).<sup>4</sup> In place of the Western logical judgments, "this is right" or "this is wrong," Chinese philosophers used merely implicit, to them self-evident, identifications, "this is this" (*shih*) or "this is not this" (*fei*). They also had one single word, *yu* (negative, *wu*), for our two entirely different words, "have" and "there is." As a result, instead of our "There are horses in the world," they would say, "The world has (contains) horses." The

<sup>2</sup> Chang Tung-sun, "A Chinese Philosopher's Theory of Knowledge" (in English), *The Yenching Journal of Social Studies*, 1, No. 2, January 1939, pp. 164, 168, 169, 171, 184. An even earlier paper in Chinese is also known, but it was not available: Chang Tung-sun, "Ts'ung Yen-yü Kou-tsao Shang K'an Chung-hsi Che-hsüeh Te Ch'a-i" ("Sino-Western philosophical differences as seen through the structure of language"), *Tung-fang Tsa-chih* (*Eastern Miscellany*), XXXIII, No. 7, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Needham, who touches upon "the extent to which the structure of the Chinese language itself encouraged [China's] ancient thinkers to develop an approach to the type of thinking usually called Hegelian." Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China, II: History of Scientific Thought* (London: Cambridge Univ. 1956), p. 77 *et passim*. See also Mei Tsu-lin, "Chinese Grammar and the Linguistic Movement in Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics* (New Haven, Conn.), XIV, No. 3 (55), March 1961. A short and still uncertain step in this direction was also taken in Communist China; see Wang Teh-ch'un, "Discussion Pertaining to 'The Relationship of Language with Thinking' and 'The Relationship of Language with Politics,'" *Wen-hui Pao* (Shanghai), August 19, 1959 (translated in *Survey of the China Mainland Press* (Hong Kong: U.S. Consulate-General), No. 2105). Some parallel comparisons between philosophical terms of clearly religious origin in Russian and the peculiarity of their uses in Lenin's philosophy can be found in this writer's German monograph, cited in Note 1. A different hypothesis concerning the importance of connection between the Chinese written language (hieroglyphs) and Chinese thought is in John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1958), pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. Graham, "Being' in Western Philosophy Compared with *Shih/fei* and *Yu/wu* in Chinese Philosophy," *Asia Major* (London), N.S., VII, Parts 1-2, 1959.

ultimate in this type of thinking was reached in the well-known *Essay on the White Horse*, by Kung-sun Lung (ca. 300 B.C.): There where a Westerner would have said, "A horse is not necessarily a white horse," Lung concluded unequivocally that "A white horse is not a horse."

Everyone who knows the difference between logic and dialectics as methods of reasoning will undoubtedly notice that, while "being" and "a horse is a horse" lead straight to the laws of logic, such meanings implicit in Chinese words as that "something is becoming, or became what it is" (it was not always that), or that "something has (contains) something else in itself," or that "white horse is no longer just a horse because it is white," all correspond exactly to the laws of dialectics.

This does not imply, however, that all Chinese language and thought are dialectical, as it is also not true that the Western languages and thought are not at all dialectical. Dialectics as a method of reasoning and disputation was also developed in ancient Greece. Hegel borrowed it from the Greeks and developed it into an intricate method of studying "spirit" (*Geist*) in history. Subsequently, however, dialectics has failed to be isolated into a pure method and has never attained such a degree of refinement, formalisation and practical usefulness as, for example, symbolic logic has achieved nowadays.

Like logic today, dialectics was once also a part of philosophy concerned with ontology (the theory of being) and epistemology (the theory of knowledge). It is unfortunate that our standard philosophy textbooks and encyclopedias refer while discussing dialectics as a rule only to a few Greek dialectical philosophers and to Hegel, but seldom display any awareness of the existence of the ancient Chinese (Taoist and Mohist, for example) and ancient Indian (Buddhist or Mādhyamikan) dialectics. The latter, being quasi-religious or purely religious philosophies of nature and of the universe, were actually much more comprehensive in their purposes than the Greek discussions or even Hegel's ideology of history.

In this paper, however, I shall deal with a meaning of dialectics entirely different from that usually given in our philosophy courses or dictionaries; namely, with the one that was for the most part developed by Frederick Engels and shared by Karl Marx.<sup>5</sup> Engels defined his "materialistic dialectics" as the science of general laws of motion of everything, of nature, human society, history, scientific research, and of human thinking as such.<sup>6</sup> In this sense dialectics is clearly much more

<sup>5</sup> Marx had died before he could read Engels' two main contributions to materialistic dialectics, *Dialectics of Nature* and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of the Classical German Philosophy*. Marx himself did not contribute much to dialectics *per se*; rather, his contribution was to materialism, materialistic epistemology, and to the criticism of idealistic dialectics.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Chap. XIII of Part I in any complete edition. The same definition appears also in *Ludwig Feuerbach, etc.*, Chaps. I and IV.

comprehensive than logic, and is not merely a method of reasoning, but an all-embracing system of abstract philosophical postulates and views concerning fundamental laws of human life and physical nature in their totality.

This is not to say, however, that materialistic dialectics has been developed as a body of literature to anything comparable to its lofty claim of being a universal philosophy. On the contrary, as a body of literature it is meagre, and a good part of it consists of desultory writings of political revolutionaries who were too busy with putting their philosophy into practice than onto paper in a scientific manner. In fact, Mao Tse-tung's writings in this field stand out among the best, comparable only to such masterpieces of exposition of the basic ideas of this philosophy as, perhaps, Marx's famous preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*.

The method of materialistic dialectics in the purely formal sense is similar to that of other dialectics. It rests on a body of axiomatic laws, comparable but opposite in their meaning to the laws of formal logic. The first law of logic is the Law of Identity. It expresses any thought's identity with the object of thinking, or the absence of difference between them: A is A and cannot be anything else. The first law of dialectics is the Law of Development Through Contradictions, as Engels put it. It is also known as the Law of the Negation of Negation. It says that A can be A only if it is not a non-A; or, in other words, for A to be an A the presence of a non-A is a *conditio sine qua non*. Therefore, the starting axiom of all dialectics is the rejection of the logical Law of Identity and the acceptance that A can be both A and a non-A at the same time. The remaining laws of dialectics can be deduced from the first. According to Engels, they are: The Law of Mutual Interconnection (Complementarity) of Opposites; The Law of Transformation of Opposites into their own Opposites when Brought to an Extreme (this law is also known as the Law of the Transformation of Quantity into Quality); and the Law of the Spiral Form of Development of Things. In the case of this fourth law, as it will be shown below, materialistic dialectics significantly differs from the classical Chinese dialectics, which recognised only the circular form of motion.

What distinguishes materialistic dialectics as a philosophy from other dialectical philosophies are its different ontological and epistemological postulates. According to materialistic dialectics, external reality (nature, society, etc.) exists independently of its knowledge by man. Whether man is aware of it or not, reality exists. Therefore, reality ("being") precedes and dominates consciousness and thinking. The process of

knowledge goes from reality into the mind and then back to reality as a reflected thought of it. In the idealistic dialectics (e.g., in Hegel) this process is opposite: it assumes that man first conceives an idea about reality, then sends it as a thought to reality, and reality bounces it back into the mind. Furthermore, according to materialistic dialectics, not only the nature of human thought, but also the nature of reality itself is dialectical. It postulates that dialectical laws operate in reality, in physical nature, in society, everywhere. Man has to discover these laws, but if he does not, they operate nevertheless and man sees at the end only their effects.

It must be said that, partly because much of the basic sources on materialistic dialectics are non-scientific in their form, and also because they were translated into various languages and published interruptedly, after long intervals, much confusion, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their meaning, purpose and significance has been evident not only in the objective, academic literature, but also among the dialectical materialists themselves. What has been summarised above was the state of materialistic dialectics at the time of Engels's death.

Lenin came to be a great practitioner of dialectics in politics in the last decade of his life, but as a writer on the subject he failed to make any significant contribution. In fact, he confused some of the most important postulates. Contrary to many explicit statements by Engels, Lenin (1) believed in the existence of an "absolute truth" and in man's ability to discover it; (2) recognised the first law of logic and believed in the identity of thought and reality; and (3) understood the theory of reflection in mechanistic terms, comparing it to photography and believing that the image in the mind exactly coincides with the object of observation. Why Lenin differed with Engels so markedly has not yet been established, but at least two reasons can be suggested. First, he expressed these ideas in his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (cf. especially Chap. 2), in 1908, when he still was not acquainted with dialectics as a method, and when Engelsian writings did not yet exert the authority in the social-democratic movement they came to possess later, after the formation of the Communist parties. Second, Russian cultural backgrounds, with their peculiar Greek Orthodox religious overtones, the language pattern of thought, and Lenin's legal education, undoubtedly played some role in his inclination to straight logical thinking and a strong belief in that what he saw, thought, or learned.

Lenin began to study dialectics seriously only in 1914-15, mostly on the basis of Hegel's writings. As he admits repeatedly in his fragmentary *Philosophical Notebooks*, much of it, and particularly the laws of the Negation of Negation and of the Transformation of Quantity into

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Quality, he found obscure and unpalatable, and never accepted them. Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* Lenin did not come to read at all, for it was published only in 1925, after his death. The influence of Hegel's idealistic dialectics on Lenin came to be especially fateful in his *Philosophical Notebooks* in case of his identification of dialectics with logic and epistemology in general ("They all mean the same thing," he wrote) and in his confused pronouncement that opposites within a contradiction are "identical."

Engels left materialistic dialectics as a more or less developed philosophy, but not a science or a formal scientific method. Yet, in the twenties, Russian Communist "believers" tried to force dialectical method on all sciences, including the natural sciences.<sup>7</sup> The attempt failed dismally, and dialectics became seriously compromised as a result. Tacitly, the Russians concluded that it was of little practical value in education and that it should be replaced by the study of traditional logic. Lenin's dictum that they meant the same thing came especially handy for such a transition. In deference to Lenin's misunderstanding of Hegel's dialectical laws, Stalin omitted all formal laws from his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, published in 1938. As a result, Stalin's dialectics appeared to be some apocalyptic *deus ex machina* that uninterruptedly pushed the history of nature and of society along a one-way road of progress. Why the mechanism worked exactly that way and what set it into motion remained unanswered. Stalin merely declared that to think otherwise would be "metaphysics." Since the late thirties, Soviet philosophers have gradually eliminated dialectics from all serious philosophical discussions and research. Today it is confined merely to the primary courses in political science, and even there it is mutilated to fit the basic revisions introduced into it by Stalin (*cf.*, for example, *The Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism: Manual* (Moscow: 1959), which is also available in English). So much have the Russians neglected dialectics that it was Mao Tse-tung personally who reminded them of it at the 1957 world Communist conference and insisted that it be practised. It was only "as a result of the common efforts of the delegations of the CCP and the other fraternal parties," castigates the official Chinese disclosure of September 6, 1963, that the Russian draft of the 1957 Moscow Declaration was changed; the "main additions" included "the formulation on the importance of applying dialectical materialism in practical work."<sup>8</sup>

Marxist-Leninist philosophy first appeared in China through a

<sup>7</sup> Cf. David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and Natural Sciences, 1917-1932* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1961).

<sup>8</sup> Editorial Departments of *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) and *Hongqi* (Red Flag), *The Origin and Development of the Differences between the Leadership of the CPSU and Ourselves* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), p. 22.



few translations around 1925–27, but spread very quickly thereafter.<sup>9</sup> At the time of Mao Tse-tung's writings (1937), it had already passed through a turbulent history of polemics and internal struggle with several schools of thought, for the most part under the influence of similar debates in the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> The works of the leading Soviet philosophers of the time (A. Deborin, M. Mitin, M. Rozentel) were available either in complete translations or in summary form in Chinese journals. By 1937, in terms of the issues debated by the Chinese Communists and pro-Communist philosophers, dialectical materialism in China attained the level of the official Stalinist philosophy in the Soviet Union. In 1935–36, for example, lively polemics took place between the Chinese followers of A. Deborin, led by Yeh Ch'ing, and the party-line philosophers, headed by Ai Szu-ch'i.<sup>11</sup> Chinese translations of the primary Marxist-Leninist sources were scarce, however, and this fact seems to have played an important role in the appearance and development of the indigenously Chinese current of Marxism-Leninism.

#### THE FRAME OF REFERENCE OF MAO TSE-TUNG'S WRITINGS

As far as is known now, Mao Tse-tung has published three explicitly philosophical<sup>12</sup> treatises. They are:

1. *On Practice*;
2. *On Contradiction*; and
3. *On Dialectical Materialism*.

Of these the first two have appeared in many editions, translated into many languages. The piece *On Dialectical Materialism* has never been reprinted, however, and for unknown reasons is not being mentioned in China today. One instalment of it was discovered in 1960 in a rare copy of the Shanghai magazine, *Min-chu (Democracy)*, Vol. I, No. 2,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. O. Brière, "L'Effort de la philosophie marxiste en Chine," *Bulletin de l'Université l'Aurore* (Shanghai), Série III, Tome VIII, No. 3, 1947. Cf. in addition his "Les courants philosophiques en Chine depuis 50 ans (1898–1950)," *ibid.* Tome X, No. 40, 1949. His earlier work on the subject, "Philosophie marxiste en Chine," *Dossiers de la Commission synodale* (Peking), Tome XIII, 1940, was not accessible.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* and also Kuo Chan-po, *Chin Wu-shih-nien Chung-kuo Ssu-hsiang Shih (Intellectual History of China of the Last Fifty Years)* (Peking: Jen-wen Shu-tien, 1935), Chap. VIII and the appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Brière, "L'Effort . . .," pp. 322, 327–331.

<sup>12</sup> It is, of course, true that Mao "has not claimed to be a philosopher, and he has not been labelled as such" even in Communist China, as witnesses Wing-tsit Chan, "Chinese Philosophy in Communist China," *Philosophy East and West* (Honolulu), XI, No. 3, October 1961, p. 115. Some three articles on philosophical subjects are too modest an output for a professional philosopher. However, Wing-tsit Chan agrees with many other writers in the West that these articles are philosophical in their contents, method and purpose. Others, of course, may call them ideological rather than philosophical, reserving the term "philosophy" only for pure metaphysics, logic, ethics and aesthetics.

1940, in the East Asian Library of Columbia University. It appeared in that magazine under Mao's signature and under the title *Pien-cheng-fa Wei-wu Lun (II) (On Dialectical Materialism)*, indicating that it was the second part of a longer article.

Examination of references and quotations in these three works by Mao and comparison with bibliographies of the Chinese translations<sup>13</sup> of primary Marxist-Leninist sources available in China at that time<sup>14</sup> reveal that Mao's readings in these sources included the following: (a) Engels' *Anti-Dühring* and (b) *Ludwig Feuerbach*; (c) Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*; (d) Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, which was available, however, in only an abridged edition<sup>15</sup>; and (e) two portions from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* that were available in Chinese as separate brochures. In total, this includes about one-third of what Engels and Marx wrote on dialectical materialism, and about four-fifths of what was written on the subject by Lenin. Nowhere in these or any other of his writings does Mao refer, for example, to Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*, the *Capital*, or to Marx's and Engels' *The Holy Family*, all of which contain important passages on materialistic dialectics, and which are known to have been accessible in Chinese at the time.<sup>16</sup> Marx's and Engels' *The German Ideology*, which also is not referred to by Mao, was not translated into Chinese until 1940.<sup>17</sup> Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which include his revealing critique of Hegel's dialectics, presumably are not available in Chinese even today.<sup>18</sup> The evidence concerning Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* remains inconclusive: according to what is presumably the most complete of the Chinese Communist bibliographies, it was not available

<sup>13</sup> It is well known, of course, that Mao does not read in any foreign language.

<sup>14</sup> Main bibliographies of the pre-1949 Chinese translations of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin are: Chang Ching-lu (ed.), *Chung-kuo Ch'u-p'an Shih-liao Pu-pien (A Supplementary Collection of Historical Materials on Publishing in China)* (Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chü, 1957), pp. 442-475; Hsia Tao-yüan and Kao Ning-che, "Publication of Writings of the Classics of Marxism-Leninism in China" (in Russian), *Voprosy Istorii KPSS (Problems of History of the CPSU)* (Moscow), No. 4, 1957, pp. 133-139; Chang Yun-hou, "Dissemination of V. I. Lenin's Philosophical Writings in China" (in Chinese), *Che-hsueh Yen-chiu (Philosophical Research)* (Peking), Nos. 11-12, 1959, p. 26; G. Y. Smolin and I. I. Tutov, "Publication of the Works of Marxist-Leninist Classics in China" (in Russian), *Voprosy Istorii (Problems of History)* (Moscow), No. 10, October 1954, pp. 180-187; V. M. Alekseyev, "V. I. Lenin in Chinese" (in Russian), *Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSSR (Newsletter of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences)* (Moscow), No. 1, 1933, pp. 13-20.

<sup>15</sup> Its complete translation was made only in 1957 (cf. *Jen-min Jih-pao (People's Daily)*, October 22, 1959). All thirty-eight volumes of the 4th Russian edition of Lenin's works were translated and published in China only during 1955-59.

<sup>16</sup> Chang Ching-lu, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> This thing was also unknown to Lenin, by the way. The latest advertisement on the back cover of the *Ching-chi Yen-chiu (Economic Research)* (Peking), No. 1, 1963, announces that thirteen out of the planned thirty volumes of the 2nd Russian edition of the works of Marx and Engels were translated and published in China by the end of 1962.

before 1940,<sup>19</sup> whereas a Russian source maintains that it was translated into Chinese in the thirties,<sup>20</sup> and Father Brière has it in his bibliography, but without the year of publication.<sup>21</sup> In any case Mao does not refer to it and does not display any evidence that it was known to him when he was writing on materialistic dialectics.

Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* appeared in Chinese translation in 1939,<sup>22</sup> that is, after Mao had written his first two treatises. However, in this connection several interesting problems arise concerning Mao Tse-tung's writings. It is stated in the official introductions to all the presently available editions of *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* that they were written in July and August 1937, respectively, and delivered as lectures at the War College in Yen-an. As far as is known, however, nowhere is it stated when or where these articles were first published.

The Party Central Committee's Commission on the Publication of the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung has stated in the foreword to the first official four-volume edition of Mao's *Selected Works*, in 1951, that previous editions of Mao's selected writings did not include a number of articles which have been included in the present edition, but it failed to specify these particular articles.<sup>23</sup> In at least one of the earlier editions of Mao's works studied so far, his philosophical articles were not found.<sup>24</sup> Early post-war Chinese Communist propaganda pamphlets on the subject of Mao Tse-tung's thought did not mention his philosophical writings either.<sup>25</sup>

All this provides, therefore, some ground for contemplating a hypothesis that both *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* were not published immediately after they had been written, and that it is possible that they first appeared only after the war, namely, in the *People's Daily*, of December 29, 1950, and April 1, 1952, respectively, and at about the same time in Volumes I and II, respectively, of the first official edition of Mao Tse-tung's *Selected Works*.

<sup>19</sup> Chang Ching-lu *et al.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> *Kratkiy Filosofskiy Slovar (Concise Philosophical Dictionary)*, ed. by M. Rozental and P. Yudin, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1952), p. 558.

<sup>21</sup> Brière, "Les courants . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 638. Lately the writers in China refer to the 1955 edition of *Dialectics of Nature*, published by the Jen-min Ch'u-pan-she.

<sup>22</sup> Chang Ching-lu, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Mao Tse-tung Hsuan Chi (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung)* (Peking: Jen-min Ch'u-pan-she, 1951), I, pp. 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Mao Tse-tung Chiu-kuo Yen-lun Hsuan-chi (Mao Tse-tung's Selected Speeches on National Salvation)* (Chungking: Hsin-chih Shu-tien, 1939).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hsiao T'ang (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung Ssu-hsiang Ch'u-hsueh Ju-men (Beginner's Introduction to the Thought of Mao Tse-tung)* (Tientsin: Tu-che Shu-tien, 1949). Part One of this book deals explicitly with Mao's dialectical materialism, but all quotations and references stem from his political and military writings only. Cf. also Anna L. Strong, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, Chefoo News Co., 1947; and her article, "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung," *Amerasia* (New York), XI, No. 6, June 1947.

## MAO TSE-TUNG'S MATERIALISTIC DIALECTICS

If this hypothesis is correct, then it is obvious that Mao had plenty of time to take into consideration, if he wanted to, not only Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* but also his *Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics*, which was published early in 1950, and which further revised Engelsian dialectics by postulating that not all contradictions were antagonistic and not all transformations of quantity into quality were accompanied by a violent "revolutionary leap."<sup>26</sup> Yet although it is explicitly stated in the official foreword to Volume I of the Chinese edition of Mao's *Selected Works*, and also in the introduction to *On Contradiction*, that "the author has made certain additions, deletions and revisions" in his texts, there is no unequivocal evidence that he ever took any of Stalin's writings on dialectics into consideration.<sup>27</sup> Conceptually, Mao's and Stalin's works are entirely different, and at no place does Mao quote from Stalin's philosophical writings directly or indirectly. (He does quote from Stalin's early political writings, but that is irrelevant here.) It is possible, on the other hand, that Stalin's example of speaking out on philosophical questions inspired Mao to publish his own, independent and different writings in 1950-52.

If *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* were not published when they were written, then, as far as is known now, Mao's first certainly published philosophical work was the above-mentioned little-known article, *On Dialectical Materialism*, of 1940. Of interest, perhaps, is the fact that the second instalment of this article bears an unmistakable resemblance to *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*, so much so that

<sup>26</sup> However, as far as this article of Stalin is concerned, no evidence has been found that it was translated into Chinese before April 1952, when the last of Mao's articles appeared. Moreover, the translation and publication of the thirteen volumes of the last Russian edition of Stalin's works were completed in China in 1958, but it did not include *Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics*.

<sup>27</sup> To be exact, in his *On Contradiction*, Mao speaks at two places of the "different forms of leap" and of "non-antagonistic contradictions"; cf. his *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1954), II, pp. 38 and 50-51. However, he does not explain there what he means by "different forms" of the qualitative leap, and while speaking of the "non-antagonistic contradictions" he says explicitly that they may appear "in a socialist country and in our revolutionary bases." If the "revolutionary bases" are not a 1952 insertion into the 1937 text, then these words evidently mean that Mao thought of the notion of "non-antagonistic contradictions" before Stalin. That this may be so is suggested by the fact that Mao explicitly postulates an obviously non-Stalinist proposition that "based on the concrete development of things, some contradictions, originally non-antagonistic, develop and become antagonistic, while some contradictions, originally antagonistic, develop and become non-antagonistic" (*ibid.* p. 50). Neither Stalin nor Lenin assumed anything similar. That this particular postulate of Mao's dialectics is not only non-Stalinist but also anti-Stalinist has recently been pointedly stressed by a Yugoslav professor, Predrag Vranicki, in his *Historija Marksizma* (History of Marxism) (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1961), pp. 512-514. Vranicki also points out that while writing again on the subject of non-antagonistic contradictions in his 1957 paper, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, Mao assumed the possibility of non-antagonistic relations even among the classes of exploited and exploiters under the particular conditions of a socialist régime (*ibid.* p. 514).

several phrases in it appear to have been directly transferred or copied from the latter two writings.

At the same time, however, the available instalment of *On Dialectical Materialism* does not at all resemble in any concrete way Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. This again raises the question why Mao ignored Stalin even as early as 1940. There is some evidence, however, that the omission might have been entirely unintentional. Chen Po-ta, Mao's close collaborator in ideological work, relates that because of the Trotskyite "sabotage" as well as "language difficulties":

many comrades in our Party who were actually leading the Chinese revolution did not have an opportunity to make a systematic study of Stalin's many works on China. It was only after the rectification movement of 1942 that Stalin's numerous works on China were systematically edited by our Party.<sup>28</sup>

If this was so, then it should not be surprising if the Chinese Communists, and Mao among them, did not read Stalin's philosophical pronouncement either. (Therefore, it is possible that for a similar reason Mao differs also with Lenin and Engels, as will be demonstrated below.)

In addition to those writings of Lenin, Engels and Marx which Mao refers to, the second source of reference in his philosophical writings is the ancient Chinese literature. In *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*, it consists for the most part of legends, short stories and novels, but also of several historical and military treatises. There are no direct references to any of the classical philosophical works, however. Only in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (1957), while introducing his extremely dialectical statement on the possible "good" outcome of another world war, does Mao explicitly refer to Lao Tzu. It seems significant that it is in the non-philosophical Chinese literature that Mao finds a source for his philosophy. "There are numerous examples of materialistic dialectics in *Water Margin*," he assures the reader,<sup>29</sup> although *Water Margin* is merely a novel, attributed to Shih Nai-an, a fourteenth century A.D. writer and not a philosopher. Similarly Mao finds convincing examples of dialectics in military writings of Sun Tzu, in the *Tale of the Three Kingdoms*, in the *Book of Mountains and Seas*, in the monkey's seventy-two reincarnations in the Buddhistic *Pilgrimage to the West*, and

<sup>28</sup> Ch'en Po-ta, *Stalin and the Chinese Revolution* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1953), pp. 24-25. In fact, subsequently, on p. 27, Ch'en implies that Mao read Stalin's *History of the CPSU Short Course*, which contained the *On Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, only in 1942.

<sup>29</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 27.

even in the ghost stories of *Strange Tales from the Carefree Studio*.<sup>30</sup> The importance of all this lies in the fact that Mao is able to find a source for his dialectics even in the comparatively simple and popular products of the Chinese thought and culture, so much are they really dialectical.

The connexion of Mao's philosophy with classical Chinese philosophy, however, is evident in many of his specific postulates, which are discussed below. He himself explicitly points out that the "dialectical world outlook had emerged in China" earlier than in ancient Greece (and of course before Hegel's writings),<sup>31</sup> a fact which by now is already well established in literature.<sup>32</sup> In 1940, in his *On New Democracy*, Mao called explicitly for taking over and using ancient Chinese philosophical literature, and culture in general, for the purposes of developing a national Chinese brand of Marxism. A year before that, Hsiang Lin-ping, a Communist philosopher, published his *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*,<sup>33</sup> which seems to have been the first Chinese<sup>34</sup> Communist study that discovered and hailed materialistic dialectics in Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, several Confucian and Mohist writers, as well as in several writers of the Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> In 1940, another Communist writer, Sung Wu, published a book, *The Philosophy*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. in particular Siegbert Hummel, *Polarität in der chinesischen Philosophie* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1949); and his *Zum ontologischen Problem des Daoismus (Taoismus)* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1948); Derk Bodde, "Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy," in A. F. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: Chicago Univ., 1953), especially p. 59; H. G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago: Chicago Univ., 1953), pp. 63-65; Liu Pai-min, "The Epistemology of the Great Appendix of the *Yi-ching*," *Journal of Oriental Studies* (Hong Kong), II, No. 2, July 1955, pp. 215-259; Joseph Needham, *loc. cit.*, pp. 518-582 *et passim*; D. C. Lau, "The Treatment of Opposites in Lao Tzu," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, XXI, Part 2, 1958, pp. 344-360. Of great interest is also Tang Chün-i, "A Comparison between the Hegelian Metaphysics of Change and Chuang Tzu's Metaphysics of Change" (in Chinese), *Chung-shan Wen-hua Chiao-yu Kwan Chi-kan* (*Quarterly of the Sun Yat-sen Institute for Culture and Education*), III, No. 4, 1936, pp. 1301-1315.

<sup>33</sup> Hsiang Lin-ping, *Chung-kuo Che-hsueh Shih Kang-yao* (*Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*), (n.p.): Sheng-huo Shu-tien, 1939), 662 pp.

<sup>34</sup> The first non-Chinese Communist study of the classical Chinese philosophy was that of A. Thalheimer, *Einführung in den dialektischen Materialismus* (Vienna: Verlag für Politik und Literatur, 1928). A leading German member of the Comintern for a while, Thalheimer discusses on pp. 153 *et seq.*, Lao Tzu *et al.* But finds that the latter "can be designated as an objective or absolute idealist" (p. 166).

<sup>35</sup> Today, of course, this is a widely-held view among the communist philosophers in China. See, e.g., Chang Tai-nien, *Chung-kuo Wei-wu Chu-i Ssu-hsiang Chien-shih* (*A Short History of the Chinese Materialistic Thought*) (Peking: Chung-kuo Ch'ing-nien Ch'u-pan-she, 1957). Also Hou Wai-lu, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1959). In some cases their views are not unanimous, however. For example, in 1959, there was a discussion held in Peking on the nature of Lao Tzu's philosophy. Some interpreted it as idealistic, others as materialistic. Feng Yu-lan, whom many know in the West, interpreted *Tao* as a "material substance." Cf. Feng Yu-lan, "Two Questions About the Philosophy of Lao Tzu," *People's Daily*, June 12-13, 1959 (English in SCMP 2048).

of *New Democratism*, in which he came to explicitly advocate a merger of the Marxist dialectical materialism with the native Chinese philosophy.<sup>36</sup> All this clearly points out the intellectual atmosphere in which Mao wrote his philosophical treatises. Today, both Chinese Communist<sup>37</sup> as well as Western writers<sup>38</sup> often stress that the connexion between Mao's way of thinking and the traditional Chinese philosophical thought does exist, although his philosophical writings have not yet been systematically compared with the latter.

From nature all people are alike; it is their education and experience that make them different. This aphorism, attributed to Confucius, can well be made into a method of study of different individuals, if only enough of the necessary data were available. In Mao's case some such data are available. In particular, he seems to be especially fond of meticulously quoting his readings. The study of references and quotations in all four volumes of his published works reveals an interesting picture of his probable reading habits and of possible sources as well as limits of his erudition. The resulting approximate classification of his references is presented in the table below.

| References to, or quotations from                     | Percentage of references in all 4 volumes |
|---|---|
| Confucian and Neo-Confucian writings .....            | 22  |
| Taoist and Mohist writings .....                      | 12  |
| Folklore legends, pure belles lettres .....           | 13  |
| Other Chinese and foreign writers, unclassified ..... | 7   |
| Marx and Engels .....                                 | 4   |
| Lenin .....   | 18  |
| Stalin .....  | 24  |
| Total .....   | 100%                                      |

<sup>36</sup> Brière, "L'Effort de la philosophie marxiste en Chine," *loc. cit.*, p. 322.

<sup>37</sup> "With the spread of Marxism in China, Mao Tse-tung, inheriting the excellent tradition of Chinese philosophy, developed Marxism . . .," Hou Wai-lu, *op cit.*, p. 3 of the foreword. See also Feng Yu-lan, "Mao Tse-tung et la philosophie chinoise," *La Pensée* (Paris), No. 55, May-June 1954. Cf. also "Philosophy in New China According to Feng Yu-lan," *East and West* (Rome), III, No. 2, July 1952.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. among others, H. G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung*, *loc. cit.*; J. R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley: California Univ., 1958); H. G. Callis, *China, Confucian and Communist* (New York: Holt, 1959); G. Debon and W. Speiser, *Chinesische Geisteswelt von Konfuzius bis Mao Tse-tung* (Baden-Baden: Holle, 1957); D. S. Nivison, "Communist Ethics and Chinese Tradition," *Journal of Asian Studies* (Ann Arbor), XVI, No. 1, November 1956; Étienne, "New China and Chinese Philosophies," *Diogenes* (Chicago), No. 11, 1955; R. Thomas, "La Philosophie classique chinoise et sa valeur de résistance au marxisme," *L'Afrique et l'Asie* (Paris), No. 38, 1957; Masamichi Inoki, "Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's Ideology," in K. London (ed.), *Unity and Contradiction: Major Aspects of Sino-Soviet Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1962); Yuji Muramatsu, "Revolution and Chinese Tradition in Yen'an Communism," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics* (Tokyo), III, No. 2, June 1963.

Mao's references and quotations undoubtedly indicate what he most probably read.<sup>39</sup> They do not indicate, of course, that this was all that he read; but there seems to be no immediately obvious objection to taking these references of Mao as a probably representative sample of his readings. If so, then the resulting frequency distribution in the above table suggests some interesting possibilities.

First, it appears that Mao was primarily a student of the ancient Chinese books, on the one hand, and of the writings of Lenin and Stalin, on the other, while his readings in Marx and Engels seem to have played a comparatively lesser role in his self-education. Second, from the specific titles and authors to which he referred it is possible to conclude that he had read almost all Confucian writings generally available in China, and a sizeable portion of those of Lenin and Stalin, but only a very small portion of the works of Marx and Engels. He never refers, for example, to any of the economic writings of Marx, except once to one of the introductions to *Capital* and twice to the well-known preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which both existed in separate pamphlet form in Chinese.

To some extent these findings are also corroborated by Mao Tse-tung himself, in his 1936 autobiography dictated to Edgar Snow. There Mao relates that in his youth he studied a great many of the Chinese classics and learned parts of Confucius by heart. For an ordinary peasant lad this probably was a mind-moulding introduction to the world of learning of permanent significance. Mao first came to read Marxist literature in 1920, when he was already twenty-seven years old. The extent and level of his initiation are evident from what he says himself:

I had eagerly sought out what little communist literature there was available in Chinese. Three books especially deeply carved my mind, and built up in me a faith in Marxism, from which, once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history, I did not afterwards waver. These books were *The Communist Manifesto* . . . ; *Class Struggle*, by Kautsky, and a *History of Socialism*, by Kirkupp.<sup>40</sup>

#### MAO TSE-TUNG'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MARXIST-LENINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

From the time of the publication of Mao's philosophical articles Chinese Communist sources have been expounding the line that "Mao

<sup>39</sup> Explanatory footnotes and references to foreign sources in the foreign language translations of Mao's works are, of course, not his but those of the Party Central Committee's Commission on the Publication of Mao's works. For the study of Mao's references only the Chinese edition of his writings is suitable.

<sup>40</sup> *The Autobiography of Mao Tse-tung*, 2nd rev. ed. (Canton: Truth Book Co., 1949), pp. 4, 6-7, 11. See also Emi Siao, *Mao Tse-tung: His Childhood and Youth* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1953). Also Howard L. Boorman, "Mao Tse-tung: the Laquered Image," *The China Quarterly*, No. 16, November-December 1963, pp. 4-11.



Tse-tung has further developed the dialectical materialism of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.<sup>41</sup> Some non-Chinese sources have agreed with this thesis,<sup>42</sup> others have not.<sup>43</sup> So far, however, neither in China nor abroad has it been established in a systematic manner how, to what extent and why Mao developed Marxist-Leninist philosophy.<sup>44</sup> Inasmuch as this paper happens to be among the first on the subject, the reader should therefore be on critical guard against possible errors in interpretation and emphasis.

In his writings published so far,<sup>45</sup> Mao Tse-tung does not contribute anything new to the materialistic ontology, but only to the materialistic epistemology (or gnoseology, as Marxists prefer to call the theory of knowledge) and to the dialectical interpretation of ontology which follows from his materialistic epistemology. Nowhere does Mao discuss at sufficient length what "matter" is in itself, but in general it appears that to him matter means everything that does not belong to human consciousness, thinking, ideas, concepts and theories. "To recognise that matter is separated from human consciousness and exists independently in the outer world is the basis of materialism,"<sup>46</sup> is sufficient to him. When taken literally, this statement can be criticised on the ground that human mind too, according to materialism, consists of matter, thoughts are quanta of certain energy and so forth. What Mao probably wanted to stress was that matter exists whether man knows

<sup>41</sup> Editorial in *People's China* (Peking), No. 9, May 1, 1952, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Cf., for example, P. Vranicki, *Historija Marksizma (History of Marxism)* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1961), pp. 504, 516. Also L. Althusser, "Sur la Dialectique matérialiste (De l'inégalité des origines)," *La Pensée* (Paris), No. 110, July-August 1963, pp. 26-30.

<sup>43</sup> Soviet philosophy has never conceded anything to Mao, for example. In fact, it never discussed Mao's contributions in any other form but in reviews of individual volumes of his writings as they appeared in Russian translation. There the Russian reviewers unanimously insisted that Mao merely "followed" Lenin and Stalin, was their "pupil," etc.

<sup>44</sup> The only partial exception encountered so far was Ai Szu-ch'i, who came to be specific in saying that Mao "added new elements to" and "developed in particular" (a) the Marxist-Leninist epistemology, especially the methods of discovery of dialectical laws in objective reality, and (b) Lenin's theory of the unity of opposites within a contradiction. Cf. Ai Szu-ch'i, "Ts'ung 'Mao-tun Lun' K'an Pien-cheng-fa Te Li-chie Ho Yün-yung" (Comprehension and use of dialectics according to *On Contradiction*), in Hsueh-hsi "Mao-tun Lun" (The Study of *On Contradiction*), a collection of articles, Hsin Chien-she Tsa-chieh She Ch'u-pan, 1952, Vol. I, pp. 1-5.

<sup>45</sup> In addition to *On Practice*, *On Contradiction* and *On Dialectical Materialism*, several other of Mao's writings of political, military and ideological nature contain important passages of epistemological and dialectical character. Among them of particular interest have been found the following writings: *On Rectification of Incorrect Ideas in the Party* (1929); *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* (1936); *On the Protracted War* (1938); *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* (1939); *On New Democracy* (1940); *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art* (1942); *Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong* (1946); *The Present Situation and Our Tasks* (1947); *The Bankruptcy of the Idealistic Conception of History* (1949); *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (1957).

<sup>46</sup> Pien-cheng-fa *Wei-wu Lun (On Dialectical Materialism)*, *Min-chu (Democracy)*, I, No. 2, 1940, p. 24.

it or not. However, the fact that he posited matter into the "outer world" without any ontological discussion, and in such an over-concrete manner, places him clearly into the pattern of the non-European, particularly Chinese ontological tradition, which of course is not surprising.<sup>47</sup> As the Chinese philosophical thought takes objective reality and nature, so also did Mao take matter as something self-evident whenever referred to, something given exogenously ("toujours déjà donné,"—always present or given, as one French writer has aptly conceptualised it<sup>48</sup>) and existing independently of man's will and knowledge. Probably because of this Mao concentrated all his philosophising on man's knowledge *per se*, and especially on the relationship between knowledge and practice. This interest of Mao's, it must be stressed, is novel in relation to the pattern of the traditional Chinese philosophical interests, which did not pay much attention to the nature of knowledge and to its methods.<sup>49</sup> It is undoubtedly one of the results of the influence of Marxism-Leninism on him. On the other hand, his particular interest in the relationship between cognition and action may also have arisen precisely because the traditional Chinese thought failed to solve this problem to his satisfaction. Chinese thought developed such notoriously fatalistic concepts of the preference for inaction and passivism as the Taoist *wu wei* principle, its elements in Confucian conservatism and even in the ordinary peasant's thinking as depicted in Lu Hsun's "Ah-Q-ism."<sup>50</sup>

Mao Tse-tung's epistemology is characterised by the following six features. (1) Extraordinary distrust and dislike of everything purely ideological. (2) At the same time, an obvious innate belief that his own philosophy is not just another ideology but rather a well balanced

<sup>47</sup> Chang Tung-sun says: "Western thought is consistently based on the idea of substance. Consequently there is the need for a substratum, and the final result of this trend of thought gives rise to the idea of 'pure matter.' . . . There is no trace of the idea of substance in Chinese thought. . . . In China there is no such word as substance. . . . It makes no difference to the Chinese mind, whether or not there is any ultimate substratum underlying all things." Chang Tung-sun, "A Chinese Philosopher's Theory of Knowledge," *The Yenching Journal of Social Studies*, I, No. 2, January 1939, pp. 173-174. Joseph Needham, *loc. cit.*, pp. 199-200, also remarks: "At any rate, Chinese thought, always concerned with relation, preferred to avoid the problems or pseudo-problems of substance, and thus persistently eluded all metaphysics."

<sup>48</sup> L. Althusser, *loc. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> On Chinese epistemology cf. Chang Tai-nien, "Chung-kuo Chih-luen Ta-yueh" (Outline of the Chinese theories of knowledge), *Tsing Hua Hsueh-pao (Tsing Hua Studies)* (Peking), IX, No. 2, April 1934. Also C. Chang, "Is There No Epistemological Background for the Chinese Philosophy of Reason?" *Oriens Extremus* (Wiesbaden), I, No. 2, December 1954.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. this opinion: "Sur la Pratique apporte une solution scientifique à un important problème traditionnel de la philosophie chinoise, le problème des rapports entre la connaissance et l'action." Feng You-lan, "Mao Tse-toung et la philosophie chinoise," *La Pensée* (Paris), No. 55, May-June 1954, p. 80.

reflection of objective truth.<sup>51</sup> (3) A typically Chinese and at the same time Marxian dialectical view of truth as non-absolute, never static or constant, always new and different, always coming from inside of the external reality and always containing contradictory aspects within itself. (4) An incessant urge to practise and experiment, innate need to search continuously for truth because it is never absolutely certain. (5) A belief that practice is the only road to truth and that practice contains truth within itself. (6) Acceptance of the limits of practice and experiment only in the form of the utterly impossible.

As such, some elements in Mao's epistemology—namely, (1), (4) and (5)—may appear pretty similar to the basic postulates of aposterioristic pragmatism and to the usual requirements of any “scientific” view of the world. Perhaps a better study of China's intellectual environment at the time of the formation of Mao's philosophy may, indeed, establish some connection between Mao's thought and pragmatism, for example, via polemics of the left-wing Chinese philosophers against Hu Shih and the fashion of “scientism” in China at the time. Such a study has not yet been undertaken, however. Nevertheless it is certain that Mao's epistemology cannot be isolated from his dialectics and from his Marxism in general, and therefore his philosophy of knowledge cannot be classified as pragmatism.

The starting point of Mao's philosophy, his initial solution of what Marxists consider to be *the* main problem in all philosophies *viz.*, the question of what comes first, being or thinking, matter or idea, is quite Marxist and fully materialistic. Even in the sequence of his writings the piece *On Practice* precedes that *On Contradiction*.<sup>52</sup> “Knowledge starts with experience,” Mao declares. “This is the materialism of the theory of knowledge. . . . Knowledge starts with practice, reaches the theoretical plane via practice, and then has to return to practice.”<sup>53</sup> This is of course an accurate rendering of Marx's

<sup>51</sup> Sceptics should better beware at this point, however. There is really nothing unusual about this belief of Mao, for the same innate belief is evident in pronouncements of all other philosophers. One of the most amusing experiences is to watch, for example, our Anglo-American pragmatism as it denounces and spurns all ideologies in devout belief that they are all useless and foolish, without realising at the same time that it too is nothing else but another ideological creed.

<sup>52</sup> It is undoubtedly “logical” to think as the editors of the valuable volume of the *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1960), p. 894, did when they said that, inasmuch as *On Contradiction* “is of a more general nature” than *On Practice*, it should have preceded the latter in the course of writing and publication. But this is exactly what is not logical about materialistic dialectics, but dialectical: in it, practice is more important than generalisations, and only those generalisations are good which arise from practice.

<sup>53</sup> *On Practice*, pp. 291–292. The edition quoted here and subsequently is the English translation of Mao's *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1954), I. The original edition was: Mao Tse-tung, *Shih-chien Lun* (Peking: Jen-min Ch'üpan-she, 1951).

*Theses on Feuerbach*, except, perhaps, for the typically Maoist stress on the "has to return to practice."

Mao's stress on the need to practice all theories, including of course Marxism,<sup>54</sup> probably originates in his undoubtedly genuine repudiation of idealism and abstractionism. A splendid example of the latter is contained in his *On Dialectical Materialism*, in the discussion of the origins of idealism in epistemology—a subject that in itself has not frequently been touched upon in the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist philosophy:

When men use concepts for thinking, there arises a possibility of slipping down into idealism. When men are reasoning, it is impossible for them not to use concepts. This, then, easily causes our knowledge to split into two aspects. One aspect consists of things of some individual or particular character. The other aspect consists of concepts of general character (as, for example, the judgment "Yenan is a city"). The particular and the general are, in fact, mutually connected and inseparable. If we separate them, we part with objective truth, for objective truth manifests itself always as a unity of the general and the particular. Without the particular the general does not exist; without the general one also cannot have the particular. To separate the general from the particular, that is, to consider the general as an objective noumen (a thing in itself) and to consider the particular merely as a form of the existence of the general, this is precisely the method adopted by all the idealists.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps to some readers it may appear paradoxical that the man who holds abstract generalisations in such contempt should at the same time write philosophy; to others, on the other hand, this may appear as proof that Mao is a pragmatist. But such views would display a misunderstanding of Mao's method.<sup>56</sup> Note that he prefers neither induction (from the particular to the general) nor deduction (from the general to the particular) as methods, but dialectics, which unites the general and the particular, the abstract and the concrete. Being a

<sup>54</sup> He says: "What Marxist philosophy regards as the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thereby becoming capable of explaining it, but in actively changing the world by applying the knowledge of the objective laws. . . . Marxism emphasises the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action. If we have a correct theory, but merely prate about it, pigeon-hole it, and do not put it into practice, then the theory, however good, has no significance." *On Practice*, p. 292.

<sup>55</sup> *Pien-cheng-fa Wei-wu Lun*, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> A similar method called "ascending from the abstract to the concrete" was also used by Marx in his *Capital*. It also has been widely misunderstood, especially by all those who think they saw a contradiction between the first and the third volumes of *Capital*. However, Marx explained this method in the first draft of *Capital*, called *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf)* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1953), pp. 21–22, which has not been translated into any other language. The fact that Mao uses a very similar method can probably be explained only in terms of an independent convergence, however amazing it is. In Mao's case this method probably arose from the typically Chinese objectivisation and concretisation of reality.

materialistic dialectics, it postulates the particular to be dominant over the general. To Mao, the general is merely an aspect of the particular, and moreover an aspect that originates in man's mind and is not part of external, material reality. The particular on the other hand is the whole, multi-aspect, real, material. Accordingly, it is the particular that is the goal and the end-result of the process of cognition, not the general. It is the cognition of reality that matters to Mao, not the cognition of concepts and theories *per se* even if they concern reality. Theories and concepts are but means and tools of cognition of reality, and therefore they ought to be used and practised in the process of learning reality.

Marxism as theory, too, has merely a utility value to Mao, and is not an *a priori* good thing in itself. It is a tool in learning and changing reality, and it is good only as long as it is practised. However, Marxism in Mao's view, which is somewhat different to that of Lenin and Stalin, is not a "guide to action" in the sense of a complete textbook of ready-made receipts of methods of action. Rather, Marxism teaches only "how . . . to find the methods" of acting on your own.<sup>57</sup> It has "in no way summed up all knowledge of truth, but is ceaselessly opening up, through practice, the road to the knowledge of truth."<sup>58</sup> And from this, obviously anti-doctrinaire, attitude towards Marxism<sup>59</sup> stems one of the basic characteristics of Maoism as a whole, namely, its stress on the peculiarity, specificity, "different roads" to truth:

The use of different methods to solve different contradictions is a principle which Marxists-Leninists must strictly observe. The doctrinaires do not observe this principle. . . . On the contrary, they uniformly adopt a formula which they fancy to be unalterable and inflexibly apply it everywhere, a procedure which can only bring setbacks. . . .<sup>60</sup>

It is most probable that Mao's anti-idealistic and anti-doctrinaire epistemology stems from his innate, and to that effect typically Chinese, relativistic and dialectical ontology. To Mao, knowledge and truth are of course merely ideas which reflect in the mind a certain objective, that is, external reality. However, the picture of an external thing or phenomenon in man's mind does not exactly coincide, and is therefore not absolutely identical with the thing or the phenomenon itself, in

<sup>57</sup> *On Contradiction*, p. 18. Quoted here and subsequently in the translation of *On Contradiction* in Mao's *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1954), Vol. 2. The original edition is entitled: Mao Tse-tung, *Mao-tun Lun* (Peking: Jen-min Ch'u-pan-she, 1952).

<sup>58</sup> *On Practice*, p. 296.

<sup>59</sup> Mao Tse-tung's anti-doctrinairism was recognised even by some Russian writers in Stalin's times. Cf. A. I. Sobolev, "Vydayushchiysya obrazets tvorcheskogo marksizma" ("An outstanding example of creative Marxism"), *Voprosy Filosofii (Problems of Philosophy)* (Moscow), No. 6, 1952, p. 195, which is a review of the Russian edition of Vol. 2 of Mao's *Selected Works*.

<sup>60</sup> *On Contradiction*, p. 25.

Mao's view. Reality is much more complex than man's impressions of it. Consciousness as well as all its products—thoughts, ideas, impressions, theories—are all “limited” and “restricted by matter,” according to Mao.<sup>61</sup> And by this he means more than is immediately implicit in the well-known Marxist proposition that consciousness is “determined” by being. For Mao, since matter is all the reality outside of man's mind, it is much larger than man's thought is able to grasp at one sight, and it is in this sense that man's ideas are restricted, bounded and enclosed by matter.<sup>62</sup>

“Because of the vastness of the scope of things and the limitlessness of their development,” reality has a dialectical nature for Mao. For example, “what in one case is universality is in another changed into particularity. On the other hand, what is in one case particularity is in another changed into universality.”<sup>63</sup> And accordingly, only a dialectical method of knowledge is capable of cognition of dialectical reality:

Our thought is not able to reflect in one single instance an object as a whole; it has to create a dialectical process of active cognition, *viz.*, a multifarious process of innumerable aspects of nearing to reality.<sup>64</sup>

At another place he repeats this view of his epistemology:

Man's knowledge always proceeds in the cyclical, recurrent manner, and with each cycle (if it strictly conforms to scientific method) man's knowledge can be advanced and become more and more profound.<sup>65</sup>

These postulates of Mao's ontology and epistemology appear to be much more Engelsian and, in a way, Chinese Taoist, than Leninist. His implicit definition of the dialectical method as a sort of iterative process of approaching closer and closer to reality and truth, and yet, presumably, never reaching and grasping them absolutely and completely, is strikingly modern, if one recalls the essentials of the present-day epistemologies of Whitehead or Russell, a fact that was already noted in a slightly different connection.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Pien-cheng-fa Wei-wu Lun*, p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> As Engels used to say: “Being, indeed, is always an open question beyond the point where our sphere of observation ends.” *Anti-Dühring*, end of Chap. IV, Part I.

<sup>63</sup> *On Contradiction*, p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> *Pien-cheng-fa Wei-wu Lun*, p. 23. In this connection, on p. 24, *ibid.*, Mao criticises “mechanistic materialism” for having attributed only a “passive role” to thinking and for “regarding the thought as a mirror that reflects nature.” In view of this criticism of the “mirror” one must wonder whether Lenin's “photography” was also not pure “mechanistic materialism” to Mao.

<sup>65</sup> *On Contradiction*, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Needham noted recently that the classical Chinese philosophy came “not only to the type of thinking usually called Hegelian, or approximating to that of Whitehead, but even more fundamentally or exactly, to what is now being investigated under the head of combinatory logic.” Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, *loc. cit.*, II, p. 77.

At one place, however, Mao refers to Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* allegedly to agree with him that something called "absolute truth" does exist in reality. Yet, this is how Mao sees it:

The Marxist recognises that in the absolute, total process of the development of the universe, the development of each concrete process is relative; hence, in the great stream of absolute truth, man's knowledge of concrete process at each given stage of development is only relatively true. The sum total of innumerable relative truths is the absolute truth.<sup>67</sup>

In connection with the last sentence Mao refers to Lenin, and it is, indeed, Lenin's sentence, but with one typically Maoist insert that completely changes its original Leninist meaning. Namely, Lenin did not use the word "innumerable." Moreover, partly because of this and partly because of the peculiarities of Lenin's epistemology in general, "absolute truth" in Lenin's view existed in man's mind, rather than as an objective process in external reality.<sup>68</sup> To Lenin a "sum total of relative truths" was in fact a sum total like  $2 + 2 = 4$ . To him truth appeared completely numerable, finite and *therefore* absolute, like, for example, the truth that "Paris is in France," which he actually cited as an example of absolute truth in the book quoted,<sup>69</sup> despite the fact that Engels called precisely this same example "pretty banal and, in addition, pretty barren."<sup>70</sup> Can an "innumerable," that is, an infinite number of relative truths add up to a sum total that could be an absolute truth because it would be finite, complete and exact? Or, conversely, can Mao's "innumerable" "sum total" be anything as absolutely cognisable as Lenin's absolute truth was supposed to be? Obviously, not. In the process of infinite iterations one can have a cumulative sum total of an infinite series, which, it seems, Mao had in mind, but such a sum total would change all the time *ad infinitum* and one would sooner arrive at one's wit's end than at the ultimate end of such a total.

We do not know whether Mao referred in this case to Lenin by misunderstanding, or just to indicate a similarity, rather than identity, of their semantics; both explanations are possible. But it is obvious that Mao regards all concrete truths as relative, while his understanding

<sup>67</sup> *On Practice*, p. 296.

<sup>68</sup> Here are Lenin's words, quoted in full from the place to which Mao made his reference: "Thus, in accordance with its nature, man's thinking is capable of giving and gives us an absolute truth, which adds up as a sum total of relative truths." V. I. Lenin, *Materializm i empiriokrititsizm (Materialism and Empiriocriticism)* (Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1951), p. 118, or in Chap. 2, Section 5, of all other editions.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116.

<sup>70</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, beginning of Chap. IX, Part I. In principle, Engels classified truths according to their scientific exactness, starting with what he called "eternal truths" of the platitude type and going up to more and more complex but inexact truths. *Cf. ibid.*

of absolute truth is much more similar to that of Engels than to that of Lenin.<sup>71</sup> Only the total process of the development of the objective universe, the "great stream" (perhaps, the Way, the Great Tao?) is absolute for Mao.<sup>72</sup>

Lenin's belief in the absolute truth of his knowledge probably stemmed from his acceptance of the logical law of identity and from his notion of the "photographic reflection" of objective reality in man's mind, that is, from his belief in complete coincidence and overlapping of thought and reality. That Mao does not share all these prerequisites for a belief in the Leninist absolute truth is evident from many of his statements,<sup>73</sup> of which the following may serve as a typical example:

The problem of whether theory corresponds to objective reality is not entirely solved in the process of knowledge from the perceptual to the rational as described above, nor can it be completely solved in this way. The only way of solving it completely is to redirect rational knowledge to social practice, to apply theory to practice and see whether it can achieve the anticipated results.<sup>74</sup>

This clearly means that no truth contained in acquired knowledge can be absolutely trusted or for long believed in. And from this it is also clear why practice is a necessity to Mao: because he does not believe in truth *a priori*, without seeing whether it really can lead to anticipated results. His basic distrust of ideas and theories only spurs his innate urge and need to experiment:

Generally speaking, whether in the practice of changing nature or of changing society, people's original ideas, theories, plans, or programmes are seldom realised without any change whatever. . . . Original ideas, theories, plans and programmes fail partially or wholly to correspond to reality and are partially or wholly incorrect.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> To Engels "nothing remains as absolutely universally valid except motion." *Dialectics of Nature* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p. 317. "The whole vast process goes on in the form of interaction [and within it] everything is relative and nothing absolute." Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: F.L.P.H., 1953), p. 507. "Dialectical philosophy dissolves all conceptions of final, absolute truth. . . . For it nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher." (*Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, beginning of Section I.)

<sup>72</sup> Perhaps it may be worth mentioning here that the Yugoslavs, too, have recently concluded that the Chinese do not recognise Lenin's conception of the absolute. Cf. Edvard Kardelj, *Socialism and War* (Belgrade: International Affairs, 1960), pp. 39-40. It thus appears that all "Greek Orthodox" Marxist-Leninist "believers" are united in the incompatibility of their way of thinking with that of the "Taoist" Marxist-Leninist "practitioners." This may sound, of course, as a joke, but there is something serious in it too.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. also a revealing discussion that took place in China, beginning with the paper by Shih Ch'eng, "Is the 'Identity of Thought and Existence' a Materialistic Principle?" *Che-hsueh Yen-chiu* (*Philosophical Research*) (Peking), No. 11-12, December 14, 1959. English in JPRS, *Communist China Digest*, No. 38, April 18, 1961.

<sup>74</sup> *On Practice*, p. 293.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 294.



Noteworthy is the use of the term "original" in this case. It clearly implies the presence of the flow of time between knowledge and practice, during which knowledge becomes obsolete, while reality undergoes a change. Knowledge thus lags behind the developing reality. This in itself makes new practice and experimentation necessary because practice for Mao is not only the criterion of all mental truths but also a source of all truths. In the typically Chinese *yu* (have) sense, truth is contained in objective reality as if in a nutshell, and it is practice alone that is capable of cracking that shell and revealing the truth into the open. Truth is (exists) only in *ch'eng* sense: it "becomes," comes into being, develops as a result of practice and experiment:

If you want to obtain knowledge you must participate in the practice of changing reality. If you want to know the taste of a pear you must change the pear by eating it yourself. If you want to know the composition and properties of atoms you must make experiments in physics and chemistry to change the state of atoms.<sup>76</sup>

An important question arises at this point: When does one stop experimenting and changing reality, when is one satisfied that the acquired knowledge is sufficiently complete at least for the time being, when is one convinced that this *is* reality, that this is *the* truth?

In general Mao's answer is, never. "There can be no end to it," that is, to man's learning; "The process of change in the objective world will never end, nor will man's knowledge of truth through practice."<sup>77</sup> However, in every particular case Mao sees an objective limit to learning the truth in arriving at certain objective laws which make further experiments either impossible or unnecessary. Mao postulates this extremely important element of his epistemology as follows:

If man wants to achieve success in his work, that is, to achieve the anticipated results, he must make his thoughts [*sic!* not actions—V.H.] correspond to the laws of the objective world surrounding him; if they do not correspond, he will fail in practice. If he fails, he will derive lessons from his failure, alter his ideas, so as to make them correspond to the laws of the objective world, and thus turn failure into success. This is what is meant by "Failure is the mother of success," and "A fall into the pit, a gain in your wit." . . . In many instances, failures have to be repeated several times before erroneous knowledge can be rectified and made to correspond to the laws of the objective process, so that subjective things can be transformed into

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 288. In this connection a hypothesis may be tendered that, unlike to the modern Russian metaphysical "dialectics," it ought to be easy for the Chinese dialectical materialism to accept the "indeterminacy principle" of modern nuclear physics and chemistry, since it recognises the change in the state of matter resulting from an experiment.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 295-296.

objective things, viz., the anticipated results can be achieved in practice.<sup>78</sup>

It follows from this, first of all, that objective laws mean something entirely different to Mao than they did, for example, to Stalin and to modern Russian philosophy which is completely permeated with Stalinist voluntarism. To Mao these laws are an utter deterministic *force majeure*, very much like they were to Marx, on the one hand, and to many contributors to the classical Chinese philosophy, on the other,<sup>79</sup> while to Stalin, who came to recognise them for the first time only near the end of his life, they still were more or less subject to man's will, could be "conquered" and changed to serve humanity.<sup>80</sup>

This observation is, however, of secondary importance. What is more important is the fact that to Mao these laws are the ultimate determinants of success or failure of man's practice. In cases of failure, in particular, these laws appear as, so to speak, an ultimate revelation of the impossible: revelation of truth so powerful in its convincing impact on man's mind that it prevents or stops his wrong practices.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, Mao believes that practice reveals not only the correct or expected truth but also the wrong or unexpected truth. What his whole epistemology then calls for is to push practice and experimenting to the utmost—up to the brink of error and failure. If success will not reveal itself in the meantime, failure will then inevitably come into the open as an objective truth and will prohibit further practice along this wrong path as if by force of a law that absolutely cannot be trespassed. Or, to put it in simple similes, the rule of procedure is: In your search for truth, push incessantly forward until you come to the brink of some pit. That pit will inevitably reveal itself one way or another: either you will fall into it and gain some wit; or the outcome will be as in those other ancient Chinese sayings, "When the road comes to an abyss, it turns away," or "When a thing reaches its end, it turns round," and, upon seeing the pit, you will turn away from it.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 283-284 and 294.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Joseph Needham, "Human Laws and Laws of Nature in China and the West," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (New York), XII, 1951, pp. 3-30 and 194-230. Also Dirk Bodde, "Evidence for 'Laws of Nature' in Chinese Thought," *Harvard Journal of Oriental Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.), XX, No. 3-4, December 1957, pp. 709-727.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Joseph Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952), p. 7 *et passim*.

<sup>81</sup> For the fact that Mao's views in this respect are solidly shared by others, cf., for example, the following argument by Liu Shao-ch'i against the critics of the Great Leap Forward: "Some people assert that the adoption of a leap forward rate of advance will violate objective economic laws and give rise to disproportions in the various branches of the national economy. But . . . objective laws cannot be violated. . . . If those laws are violated it is impossible for the national economy to develop by leaps and bounds." Liu Shao-ch'i, "The Victory of Marxism-Leninism in China," *Peking Review*, II, No. 39, October 1, 1959, p. 13. According to this interpretation of laws, therefore, the failure of the Great Leap Forward merely proved their inviolability.

In view of all said so far, one can hardly eschew the impression that Mao Tse-tung's theory of knowledge both stems from his own practices and has guided many of his practices in its turn. Starting, perhaps, in his youth with his strong urge to study, his search for truth has led him all the way through a countless number of experiments, successes and failures, beginning with his experiences with the peasant movement of Hunan, his reorientation of the Chinese Communist Party towards peasantry, his experiments with guerrilla war tactics, local Communist bases, and so forth, which finally resulted in his major success, his victory and seizure of power in China. All these experiments by Mao were undoubtedly new, non-doctrinaire, creative.<sup>82</sup> Above everything else they clearly demonstrated his self-initiated activity<sup>83</sup> and an obvious lack of fear of making mistakes. At the same time, there is evidence that, at least in the earlier days, Mao was sufficiently self-critical to admit mistakes and to openly learn lessons from his failures. At several places in his writings he describes and analyses the Red Army's military defeats,<sup>84</sup> the Party's political errors,<sup>85</sup> and at least at one place admits that his theoretical views of such a crucial problem as the anti-colonial revolutions had to be reversed (in 1928 he believed that Communists could not come to power in any colonial country under direct imperialist rule).<sup>86</sup>

In recent times Mao has been more reluctant to openly admit his mistakes. As far as his propensity to experiment up to the brink of error is concerned, however, it not only has not declined but, on the contrary, has increased in scope and frequency. His experiments with collective farming, people's communes, joint state-private enterprises, backyard metallurgy, and the Great Leap Forward in general, to mention only the most widely known, he undoubtedly pursued in complete consistence with the principles of his epistemology described above. His insistence in 1957 that the Soviet Union should press hard against the West and see whether it can achieve anticipated results has also been clearly related to his views on knowledge, practice and truth.<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps, a concluding question may be appropriate at this place: Can one by knowing Mao's epistemology foresee the course of his

<sup>82</sup> Remarkable in this respect is his 1936 declaration that "if we copy and apply without change" the Soviet Union's revolutionary experience and strategy in China, "we shall be 'cutting the feet to fit the shoes' and be defeated." *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), p. 77.

<sup>83</sup> In Mao's view, "the initiative is not something imaginary but is concrete and material." *Ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>84</sup> *Cf. ibid.* pp. 24, 51-52.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 11 and 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Cf. Imperialism and All Reactionaries Are Paper Tigers* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961).

## MAO TSE-TUNG'S MATERIALISTIC DIALECTICS

policies? In terms of probability, the answer can be, yes. It is more probable than not that in every particular case he would be inclined to go a step farther than one would ordinarily expect and he would be disposed to explore extreme opportunities, advance radical propositions and push them hard until or unless they become utterly impossible. It is quite possible, for example, that he may push his present ideological conflict with the Soviet Union to a very critical brink in order to see what kind of revelation that nutshell contains when and if it cracks.<sup>88</sup>

### MAO TSE-TUNG'S CONTRIBUTION TO DIALECTICS

Marxist-Leninist dialectics as a method of thinking and viewing the world must have been easily palatable to Mao Tse-tung, and might have merely strengthened his conviction that his innate way of thinking, his typically Chinese common sense, was correct in itself. However, writers who studied the subject more or less closely agree in their finding that Mao "has developed" dialectics and "has added to it new elements."<sup>89</sup> This is also the conclusion of this article.

Mao Tse-tung's main contribution to the method of Marxist-Leninist dialectics is his particularly apt formulation of the Universal Law of the Unity of Opposites, or what is the same thing, the Law of the Universality of Contradiction. In Mao's formulation, all other laws of dialectics can be derived from this main law. In the form presented in *On Contradiction* this law has no precedent in Marxist-Leninist literature. Although such a law is listed by Engels among other laws of dialectics, and although for Hegel and Lenin it was the main law among a number of others, for Mao it is the only law of dialectics and the one that is sufficient for all other laws. Prior to Mao such a law was discussed in details only by Hegel. But Mao has probably not read Hegel.<sup>90</sup> As formulated by Mao, the law is clearly anti-Hegelian in its materialistic objectivisation of reality and of contradictions outside of man's mind. On the other hand, while it unmistakably resembles elements of the dialectics of Chapter 2 of *Chuang Tzu*, Chapters 2 and 42, among others, of *Lao Tzu (Tao-te Ching)*, the "Great Appendix" to *I Ching*,

<sup>88</sup> This suggestion was first made still in the summer of 1962, in the first German version of this study. Since then, of course, Mao has eaten a good bite of this particular pear to learn its taste, as he likes to say.

<sup>89</sup> Cf., for example, L. Althusser, *loc. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>90</sup> Althusser, *op. cit.*, p. 30, stresses his conclusion that Mao's dialectics does not contain "any trace of the originally Hegelian categories," such as the "division of one," "alienation," "Aufhebung," etc. Although this is undoubtedly true in the literal sense, *i.e.*, in the sense that there is indeed no connection between Mao and Hegel, still one must not disregard, as Althusser does, the fact that many of Mao's postulates and propositions lead essentially and formally to that what is meant by "alienation," "Aufhebung," etc., in Marxian dialectics.

“Expositions” to *Mo Ching* and other ancient Chinese books, it also differs from the latter very essentially.

Mao Tse-tung’s dialectical method has the following distinguishing features: (1) it is centred on the notion that contradiction is a universal characteristic of all things and phenomena in physical nature, human society and man’s thought. (2) It sees contradiction not between but rather within things, phenomena and thoughts. And (3) it sees in the complementarity of opposites a necessary prerequisite for the development of contradictions. The second and third features are especially Maoistic and derive from Chinese rather than Leninist dialectics.

Mao Tse-tung’s study of contradictions *per se* is also a novel contribution to materialistic dialectics, while his peculiar postulate of the inequality of contradictions and of the uneven and unbalanced state of the opposites inside contradictions is especially novel for post-Engelsian as well as Chinese dialectics. Mao’s view of the structure of contradictions is more complex than anything proposed in this field heretofore. Mao distinguishes between (1) universality of contradiction and (2) its particularity; or, synonymously, between the generality of contradiction and its peculiarity. Next he differentiates between (3) one principal and (4) many secondary contradictions in any given thing or phenomenon. This makes contradictions unequal and not identical in themselves as they appeared, for example, to Lenin. Furthermore, inside any given contradiction Mao distinguishes between (5) one principal, or dominant, aspect of the contradiction and (6) a number of secondary aspects. Hence, the balance of opposites inside the contradiction is not even either. And it is this imbalance inside and among the contradictions that brings all the things and phenomena into motion along a one-way spiral route. Such an interpretation of the cause of motion and of its spiral direction is a large step forward compared to Engels’ simple postulate that motion is itself a contradiction and that spiral route of development is merely a law or an axiom. At the same time, it has also set Mao’s dialectics clearly apart from the traditional Chinese dialectics, for the latter postulated a balance and harmony of opposites inside the contradiction and a repetitive motion along a circular route that derived from such a balance and harmony.

It is from the postulate of the inequality of contradictions and the unevenness of their internal components that Mao’s view of the temporary and conditional character of the unity of opposites inside the contradiction follows. Obviously, this is a more sophisticated postulate than Lenin’s simple axiom about the “struggle of the opposites,” which Mao politely quotes time and again. Yet Mao goes even farther and postulates that opposites inside a contradiction tend to transform themselves into

their own opposites when the contradiction is developed to the extreme. Bad things can turn into good things, good things can transform themselves into bad things, as Mao recites *Lao Tzu*.<sup>91</sup> Lenin said explicitly that such a transformation of opposites in Hegel was unpalatable for his mind. Unlike *Lao Tzu*, however, Mao views this transformation not as one that repeats itself as, for example, the *yin* and *yang* principles, within a circle, but as a transformation of one quality into another as a result of change in the quantitative relationship between the dominant and the subordinate aspects of the contradiction along a one-way spiral route. In this, of course, Mao's dialectics is closely akin to that of Marx and Engels. And it is probably from here, from this basically uneven, unbalanced and disharmonious view of the insides of the contradiction that Mao's peculiar epistemology, his incipient views of truth and knowledge emanate and drive him to active practice.<sup>92</sup>

Mao Tse-tung's main proposition in dialectics is this:

There is not a single thing in the world without dual nature (this is the law of the unity of opposites).<sup>93</sup>

There is nothing that does not contain contradiction. . . . Contradiction is universal, absolute, existing in all processes from beginning to end. . . . To deny contradiction in things is to deny everything. This is a universal principle for all times and all countries, which admits of no exception. . . . The law of the contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the basic law of nature and society and therefore also the basic law of thought.<sup>94</sup>

Since ontologically contradiction is thus contained in everything, dialectics is not only a theory of the laws of the development of contradictions, but also an epistemological method of discovery, study and solution of contradictions. "This is a method that must be applied in studying the process of development of all things"; and what is more, "there is no other method of study" that Mao recognises.<sup>95</sup>

The method can be summarised as follows:

(1) One starts with the axiom that whatever one studies contains one or more contradictions within it. To find a contradiction, one must find complementary opposites and grasp them as a unity. "Contradictory things are at the same time complementary"; they form "the

<sup>91</sup> *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, Section 10.

<sup>92</sup> One reader of the earlier draft of this paper has, it seems, aptly observed that there is a noticeable difference in emphasis and tone between these early views of Mao and his *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, written twenty years later. Although in this later work Mao still stresses the universality of contradictions, his long discussion of the non-antagonistic contradictions leaves the reader with the impression that now Mao tends to be more Confucian in his stress on a more balanced and harmonious unity of opposites than in his earlier days.

<sup>93</sup> *Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong*; in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, IV (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), p. 98.

<sup>94</sup> *On Contradiction*, pp. 19, 21, 34 and 52.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 21 and 34.

condition of mutual sustenance of each other's existence." "All opposite elements are like this: because of certain conditions, they are on the one hand opposed to each other and on the other hand they are interconnected, interpenetrating, interpermeating and interdependent."<sup>96</sup> That is, for example: black cannot exist without white and white does not exist without black. Without facility, there would be no difficulty; without difficulty, there would also be no facility. Without landlords, there would be no tenant-peasants; without tenant-peasants, there would also be no landlords. "Without the other aspect which is opposed to it, each aspect loses the condition of its existence" and contradiction is dissolved.<sup>97</sup>

(2) Grasped as a unity of complementary opposites, contradiction is therefore seen as residing inside a thing. Contradictions between things are not universal. They are present only when contradictory things are complementary to each other and hence constitute a contradictory unity inside a third thing or phenomenon. The black-and-white contradiction exists within colour, for example. The landlords and peasants constitute a society that is contradictory in itself. A stone cannot become a chicken, as Mao puts it, because they are not related, there is no complementary contradiction between them. Whereas between the chicken and the egg there is a contradictory complementarity, one cannot exist without the other, although they are two different things. Their unity is within the thing itself: the chick is within the egg even when the egg is within the mother-hen. To see the unity of opposites and, hence, the contradiction inside a thing, rather than between things, is a prerequisite *sine qua non* for the discovery and understanding of the self-generating motion and development of contradictions.<sup>98</sup> Those who have not mastered dialectics, says Mao, "naïvely seek outside the things for the

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 45, 44. At several places Mao uses the term "identity" here as synonymous with "complementarity." The nonsensical phrase, "identity of opposites," he took from Lenin in one of the quotations, and had to struggle with it at several instances until he arrived at the concept of "complementarity." Lenin used his "identity of opposites" in logical, rather than dialectical, sense, and also because in Russian "tozhdestvo" (identity) is synonymous with "yedinstvo" (unity) in the sense of "polnoye skhodstvo" (complete overlapping, coincidence). Lenin had never come to the idea of complementarity of opposites as the prerequisite of their unity inside a contradiction. Cf. for more details the first German edition of this paper.

<sup>97</sup> *On Contradiction*, p. 43.

<sup>98</sup> It seems that in practice Mao used the principle of the unity of opposites more than Lenin and Stalin did. For instance, Mao chose to unite "national bourgeoisie" with the CCP's revolution, while the Bolsheviks chose to alienate all bourgeoisie without exception; Mao permitted, after some time, the former rich peasants and landlords to join the collective farms, while the Russians liquidated all of them physically in advance, and so forth. Somehow it seems that Lenin and Stalin tended more to divide the opposites than to unite them, perhaps because they did not recognise complementarity of opposites, as mentioned in note 96; whereas for Mao it was easier to think in terms of unity of opposites because of its overwhelming presence in Chinese thought and dialectics.

cause of their development," they see only the "propulsion by external forces" and consequently think that things "cannot change into something different." Mao Tse-tung's dialectics "advocates the study of the development of things from the inside. . . . The contradiction within a thing is the basic cause of its development, while the relationship of a thing with other things—their interconnection and interaction—is a secondary cause."<sup>99</sup>

(3) The next among Mao's methodological postulates is that while contradictions in things are universal, each contradiction in itself is particular and concrete. The particularity of a contradiction is its unique quality. Qualitatively contradictions are not identical and not equal. "In the process of development of a complex thing, many contradictions exist; among these, one is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of other contradictions."<sup>100</sup> Hence, it is necessary to find the principal contradiction and to distinguish it from secondary ones. The principal, or basic, contradiction is always that one which "at the various stages in the long process of development assumes an increasingly intensified form."<sup>101</sup> What criteria Mao uses to measure the intensity of contradictions is not clear. Somehow the more acute contradiction must become obvious compared to the less acute ones. In the process of development, however, they may switch places: the more acute may become the less acute and vice versa.<sup>102</sup>

(4) The next step in Mao's method is to study the processes inside a contradiction. The basic axiom at this stage is that "the basic state is unevenness. Of the two contradictory aspects [inside a contradiction], one must be principal and the other secondary."<sup>103</sup> Criteria for selection are again not quite clear and are assumed to be self-evident in each particular case. The rule is that "nothing in the world develops with an absolutely all-round evenness" and that therefore "we must oppose the theory of even development or the theory of equilibrium."<sup>104</sup> What makes the principal aspect of a contradiction conspicuous is that, firstly, it is in the state of activity and, secondly, that it is, temporarily or not, predominant inside the contradiction. As such, the principal aspect of a contradiction attributes to it its quality. "The quality of a thing is mainly determined by the principal aspect of the contradiction that has won the dominant position."<sup>105</sup> Presumably, the "bourgeois society"

<sup>99</sup> *On Contradiction*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.



is called bourgeois despite the presence of the proletariat inside it, because bourgeoisie dominates it, and so forth.

(5) The last step in Mao's dialectical method is to discover the tendency of the development of the given contradiction. The rule is that "all contradictory aspects transform themselves, under certain conditions, into their opposites."<sup>106</sup> The conditions are as follows:

The movement of all things assumes two forms: the form of relative rest and the form of conspicuous change. Both forms of movement are caused by the struggle of the two contradictory factors contained in a thing itself. When the movement of a thing assumes the first form, it only undergoes a quantitative but not a qualitative change and consequently appears in a state of seeming rest. When the movement of the thing assumes the second form it has already reached a certain culminating point of the quantitative change of the first form, caused the dissolution of the unity, produced a qualitative change, and consequently appears as conspicuous change. . . . Things are always transforming themselves from the first into the second form, while the struggle within the contradictions exists in both forms and reaches its solution through the second form. We say therefore that the unity of opposites is conditional, temporary and relative, while the struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute.<sup>107</sup>

It must be said that this statement makes the traditionally abstruse dialectical law of the transformation of quantity into quality much simpler and clearer. The rule in (4) above that the internal state of a contradiction is continuous unevenness implies a continuous process of quantitative change in it, while the quality of the whole contradiction is determined by its principal (dominant) aspect until it transforms itself into its opposite, that is, until it loses its dominant position. Accordingly it can be restated that the quality of the whole contradictory thing is determined by the relative quantities of its principal and secondary aspects (parts of the whole). If and when this quantitative ratio changes, a qualitative change in the whole will result and become conspicuous. In other words, qualitative change occurs in the whole, while quantitative change takes place inside it, in the proportion of its parts relative to each other. For example, the share of the proletariat inside the bourgeois society presumably grows from a minority to a majority, revolution occurs and the quality of the society changes. "The proletariat, once the ruled, becomes the ruler, while the bourgeoisie, originally the ruler, becomes the ruled, and is transferred to the position originally occupied by its opposite."<sup>108</sup> What is to note, however, is that Mao does not say

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46. On p. 44 Mao postulates again: "Each of the two contradictory aspects within a thing, because of certain conditions, tends to transform itself into the other, to transfer itself to the opposite position."

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

that the proletariat becomes the bourgeoisie, or changes itself into the bourgeoisie, for then, of course, quality of the society would not have changed and the whole movement would have been along a circular, repetitive route.

The final question may be this: How can the quantitative change inside a contradictory thing take place? Why the ratio between the principal and the secondary parts of the contradiction changes? Mao's answer is postulative, of course: So it is, such is the basic law of dialectics; whereas in each particular case the causes of the change are concrete, and it is the task of the dialectician to find them out.

It cannot be known, of course, to what extent does Mao really use this dialectical method in his own study and practice. However, there is no doubt that in quite a few concrete cases Mao obviously did think, write and act in the manner described by his method. It even seems probable that his writing about dialectical materialism was motivated by his desire to explain and formalise his own way of thinking and acting.

How efficient is this method is another question. A Chinese Nationalist study of Mao's military strategy and tactics has arrived at the conclusion, for example, that he "succeeded in many of his battles" among other reasons because his "materialistic dialectics applied in military principles" and as a result his opponents were often unable to understand and predict many of his manoeuvres.<sup>109</sup> Some of Mao's recent moves in international politics can perhaps also serve to illustrate the efficiency of his dialectics. His completely unexpected Himalayan attack on India not only attained such immediate aims as the demonstration of China's military superiority in South-East Asia, shattered India's serene neutralism and considerably retarded her economic growth, but also created new important contradictions in the West's defence arrangements, with Pakistan breaking off from them and edging towards neutrality with China. The same move put also Khrushchev before the timely dilemma of siding either with China or with India and the West, and so forth. Mao's use of Laos as a lever on war in South Vietnam and as the source of contradictions among the major world powers may also belong to this category. In any case there is little doubt in my mind that Mao applies his dialectics in his political strategies and tactics in no lesser way than the Western statesmen apply their traditional balance-of-power calculations. In politics especially the two methods appear to be practically similar, except that the method of contradictions is dynamic, whereas the method of power balances is essentially static.

<sup>109</sup> Asian Peoples' Anti-Communist League, *A Research on Mao Tse-tung's Thought of Military Insurrection*, Taipei, October 1961, p. 28 *et passim*.

Perhaps the most intriguing and controversial problem these days is the meaning and purpose of the Chinese dialectical ("We do not want it, but neither are we afraid of it") statement on the possible outcome of the Third World War. Was it merely a foolish error, as some think, an error that cost China the Soviet Union's friendship, to suggest to the Russians that they should not be afraid to commit atomic suicide and sacrifice themselves, along with the Americans and Europeans, for Communism's post-war triumph, and perish for its sake in a thermonuclear holocaust? Or was it, as I tried to argue elsewhere,<sup>110</sup> powerful albeit cynical dialectics calculated for the times to come and aimed at ideologically disarming and knocking out the Russians once and for all from the position of the defender and leader of the revolutionary masses of Asia, Africa and Latin America? Mao's statements on the Third World War might have been really addressed not to the Russians but to the present and future guerrillas in the Vietnamese jungle, Congolese bushes, or Chilean and Peruvian Andes. The message was brutally simple: the Russians belong with the imperialists now, for they are scared to risk a nuclear war and therefore will not aid your revolutions. It is China alone who stands now on your side.

The interesting and important things to watch now are Mao's future statements on what is in his view the principal contradiction of today's world. It is certain that a few years ago the main contradiction ran between the Western capitalist and the Soviet socialist camps. Lately, however, Mao seems to believe that the principal contradiction lies between the Western imperialism and the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This leaves the Soviet Union in between and compels it to choose sides in Mao's view. Undoubtedly Mao is aware of the fact that the absolute gap between the economic, demographic, military and political potentials of the developed and the underdeveloped parts of the world is rapidly increasing. He is sure that this growing abyss inevitably portends many struggles and revolutions to come. Hence, this must be the principal contradiction to him. Furthermore, after the Soviet refusal to help make China an atomic power and after the failure of the Great Leap Forward to industrialise China by a short cut, Mao must have realised that China's place in the world is going inevitably to be among the underdeveloped and underprivileged. Hence, it must be better for China to side with the latter openly and seize in advance the opportunity of becoming their leader for the times and troubles to come. If Mao has in fact decided that the principal contradiction

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Vsevolod Holubnychy, "Maos Dialektik zum Atomkrieg," *Echo der Zeit* (Münster), No. 38, September 22, 1963, p. 10.

## MAO TSE-TUNG'S MATERIALISTIC DIALECTICS

in today's world lies now and will lie in the future in the growing gap between the developed and the underdeveloped parts of the globe, and if the USSR would not change its position, would not admit that Mao was right, and would not side with the underdog, then the present contradiction between China and the USSR would inevitably intensify to the point where the two would become the mutually excluding opposites. That point would be reached when both would declare that the other one was no longer communist and revolutionary.

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