

It should also be added that the Cultural Revolution has not been the purge that has generally been supposed. It was intended to give the country a rejuvenated Party with strengthened cadres. Care was taken to keep all those who could be won over to Maoist politics. The congress that brought it to an end gave two-thirds of the places on the Central Committee to newcomers.

1. The Roots of the Cultural Revolution in Mao Tse-tung's Ideas

I. MAO'S THOUGHT AND THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

Much of the imagery of the Cultural Revolution, the names of the Red Guard organizations and sometimes their arms—spears with red tassels, shields, and even straw sandals—were borrowed from the history of the revolutionary bases in Kiangsi and Ching kangshan thirty-five years earlier. The Ching kangshan mountains in particular, where Mao had retreated with his troops in September 1927, were given new publicity. They were a symbol, a base from which revolutionary fighters set out to conquer a recalcitrant or hostile world and within which a new society was created.

From 1966 to 1968 speeches and papers, whether or not of Red Guard origin, often drew their examples and exhortations from the experience of the areas governed by the Chinese Soviets. They were invoked in order to revive the relationship that had existed between the people, the Party and the army in the Communist zones. Coming at the time when the Thought of Mao Tse-tung was at its height, these symbols and references served to remind the people of how much Mao's thinking owed to his earliest experiences and decisions as a revolutionary leader. Moreover, the leaders of this new revolution, now being mounted by the government of the dictatorship of the proletariat, looked to past experience as their guide-line.

The Thought of Mao Tse-tung is grounded throughout on ideas formed when he took the initiative militarily and had to play the role of a leader—before long the most important one—of a revolutionary group within the Chinese Communist Party that wanted a territorial base, political power, and an army.

Ten days that shook the world

In December 1967 an article appeared which recalled Mao Tse-tung's retreat to Chingkangshan. Its title was borrowed from John Reed's book on the Russian Revolution.

'It was September 18, 1927,' it began, 'ten days after the Autumn Harvest Rising . . . ten days that shook the world.'¹ But in 1927 the world had ignored this event, concentrating instead on developments within the national government.

The national government at Wuhan² had been created after the successful offensive by the forces of the Kuomintang and the Communists, who were still allies. It soon split. Although some of the Communists were aware of the dangers that threatened them, the Soviet emissaries at Wuhan advised them against acquiring their own armed forces.

During the Northern Expedition many peasants had risen in revolt, freed themselves, and formed peasant associations in the occupied provinces. The Communist Party was divided over the question of what support the armed peasant bands could give the revolution. Mao Tse-tung was convinced that the Party should rely on them, as the movement would educate them as it freed them from ancestral tutelage, and peasant forces would ensure the Party success.

The Autumn Harvest Rising was a military defeat for

¹ *Chiehfangchun Wenyi* (PLA Literature and Art), printed in *China Reconstructs*, December 1967.

² See J. Guillermez, *Histoire du Parti communiste chinois*, Payot, Paris, 1968, esp. pp. 157 ff.

the rebels and their Communist generals.³ They committed four separate fighting units, made up mainly of peasants. Only one of these achieved some local success, but had to withdraw before reaching its principal objective. The attempt ended in failure, and it should have left nothing behind but disappointment and death. But Mao chose to back the lost cause. On September 18th he assembled the retreating insurgents in the small town of Wenchiasih and decided to lead them to Chingkangshan, the 'Ridge of Wells,' which lay in the middle of the great Lohsiao Range.

In November 1927 Mao Tse-tung was censured by the Party's Central Committee, losing his seat on the committee and his membership of the Political Bureau. But he stood by his ideas. In the summer of 1928 he was rehabilitated by the Party's Sixth Congress, which only approved of the peasant movement with reservations. Mao Tse-tung has written that the Sixth Congress was not sufficiently aware of 'the importance of the rural bases and the protracted nature of the democratic revolution.'⁴ It is our belief that in referring to the protracted nature of the democratic revolution he had in mind the task—which was even then being tackled—of teaching men to administer their affairs on land held in common.

A new society in a closed world; unified control; criticism and self-criticism

The job thus taken on was a very hard one. The men who had taken cover among the peasantry thinly scattered over this impoverished region included many derelicts, rootless vagabonds, and even former bandits. First, two small bases were formed, where two bands of local brigands were in-

³ It began on September 8, 1927, in Hunan. An unsuccessful ambush allowed news of it to escape prematurely, and one unit was destroyed through treachery. See Roy Hofheinz, Jr., 'The Autumn Harvest Insurrection,' *China Quarterly*, no. 32, October–December 1967.

⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works* (Chinese edition), vol. 2, p. 961.

corporated with some difficulty into the ranks. A shared attitude had to be found that would reduce the differences within the group and bring it together, so as to get the most from voluntary cooperation.⁵

Although the rising was a military failure, the phrase of John Reed quoted above celebrated the creation of a new society, something that went beyond the defeat. The experimental new society, though small in scale, was to be established completely free from outside interference under the protection of its own armed force.

Mao Tse-tung had no monopoly on the idea that the Party needed an army. It is an idea that crops up whenever a political revolution is in progress over a very great area; and it also draws on the old Chinese tradition of rebels—small communities of outlaws and 'honourable bandits'. Mao's originality lay in the idea, born perhaps in the little town of Wenchiasih, of bases under military protection in small and completely isolated societies where men would be trained to live quite differently from before. He also saw that such a society could last, and that people could be persuaded to live there for a long time cut off from the outside world except through fighting.

It could be said that for the next two decades Mao Tse-tung never left the little world he had created for his companions. While many of the Communist leaders lived in Shanghai, Tientsin or elsewhere during this period, making the compromises that were necessary in order to survive, Mao Tse-tung had a simpler problem: defending his ideal society with his army and educating his people.

The Party was numerically very weak in its base areas. Few Party members had accompanied the rebels to the mountains. If the Party was to play its part among the people, the army had to help. The army itself had to remain under the ruling power and respect the unity of command. In addition to protecting the frontiers of the base areas, it was also used within them, and was entrusted by the Party with guidance of the peasant Soviets.

⁵ See *Asia Keizai Jumbo*, no. 732, 1968, pp. 25–26 for the Ching kangshan Land Law of December 1928.

But it did not rule the country; it represented the unified command.

The army's role allowed the small group of political leaders—men of the people and educators of the people—to extend their rule right down to the level of local administration, although the Party had so few members. It was a case of what mathematicians call transitivity. In the Maoist system this is a property of the army, but it can be just as well applied to other institutions. Later on it will be important to understand that revolutionary committees did not have powers of direction: they embodied the unified leadership and had to be open to suggestions from above. One tendentious demand for full powers for the committees almost cost the Communist Party the successful outcome of the Cultural Revolution.

With power exercised through intermediaries, the risks of misinterpretation of policies, abuse of power, and deviation from the party line were great. In the interests of the system, criticism from the rank and file had to be allowed an expression. It was also essential that those in executive positions should be allowed to correct what faults they might have committed and be reinstated. Hence the reason for self-criticism. Criticism and self-criticism were the means whereby an illiterate populace could be educated, the cadres kept straight without recourse to sanctions, and a small number of political leaders at the top could be in a position to know everything that was going on. One of its intended aims was to make society transparent, which also seemed to have had the effect of accelerating political awareness among the people and keeping the authorities up to the mark. 'Be specially careful to sweep away any dust which might obscure them from the masses.'⁶

⁶ 'All's well with the revolutionary committee,' *Hungch'i*, March 30, 1968: 'All those involved in the work of the revolutionary committee must closely follow Chairman Mao's proletarian line, carry out his recent directives to the letter, practise severe self-discipline, and behave towards themselves and the masses with correctness. They must frequently practise criticism and self-criticism, and be specially careful to sweep away dust which might obscure them from the masses.'

Criticism and self-criticism were only useful as long as they remained a living method.

The mass line and collective education

This method, by which the masses were urged to make their criticism, and which involved washing dirty linen in public rather than carrying out a purge behind closed doors, has led recently to the reopening of the Marxist controversy on revolutionary spontaneity. Lenin doubted whether one could rely on the spontaneity of the masses, weakened by bourgeois education. Rosa Luxemburg disagreed. 'Unless the masses of the people,' she wrote, 'all participate, socialism is created by decree, bestowed by a dozen intellectuals meeting round a green baize table. . . . The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself.'⁷

Which of these views one accepts is a matter of temperament. Both reckon that 'the practice of socialism demands a complete spiritual upheaval for the masses, degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule.'⁸ But only one of the two thinkers was an optimist.

As has often been observed, Mao is an optimist at heart. He stresses his confidence in the masses, who will only discover the right policies by coming into political life. He is not afraid of provoking crises: 'Proper limits have to be exceeded in order to right a wrong, or else the wrong cannot be righted.'⁹ He urges others to organize themselves rather than simply making laws and plans about them.

But while in the Thought of Mao Tse-tung the spontaneity of the masses was a necessary prerequisite, it was not the sole one. 'Our comrades should not imagine that the masses understand nothing of what they themselves have not yet understood . . . neither should they believe that the masses understand all that they themselves

⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, Maspero, Paris.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ 'Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan,' *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 29.

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do.'¹⁰ To wish to make the masses act when they are not yet 'aware' would be adventurism, a blind alley, forcing them to do something against their wishes.

It is thus essential to know what the masses understand and want before one acts. The way of doing this is through an 'investigation.' In March 1927 Mao Tse-tung himself wrote up his investigation into the peasant movement in Hunan as an answer to the debate within the Party on whether or not it was advisable to mobilize armed peasant bands. Through investigation a planned action can be corrected or postponed if one finds that revolutionary enthusiasm has not yet been aroused. It can also hasten action when it reveals that the Party cannot see something of which the masses are already aware. This optimism has its other side. In the chaos of the Cultural Revolution all Chinese had to be guided exclusively by the Thought of Mao Tse-tung, although doubtless they did not all understand it. This was a chance for settling private scores, getting one's own back, abusing one's position, and even the pursuit of pleasure. The state lost heavily on millions of free journeys; work stopped; and cadres suffered. The cost of all this must have been heavy.¹¹ The apparent absence of any clear plan in the first months of the Cultural Revolution led several foreign observers to be critical of Mao Tse-tung.

Practice and progress

Some have seen in the Thought of Mao Tse-tung the message that the way to reform lies through sacrifice and austerity, an idea strengthened by the use of such slogans as 'building up the country through diligence and frugality' and 'relying on one's own efforts and persevering in struggle.' In fact the belief in 'self-cultivation' as a way of enabling the Party as a whole to make progress was a doctrine of Liu Shao-ch'i's group, not of Mao Tse-tung's. Maoism makes few moral homilies. Instead it encour-

¹⁰ 'On coalition government,' *Selected Works*, vol. 3.

¹¹ See Asahi Shimbun Chōsakenkyūshitsu, *Mō Takutō no Chōsen*, Tokyo, 1968, p. 17.

ages the spirit of scientific experiment that was one of the 'Three Red Flags' in the Socialist Education Campaign of 1963-64.¹² There was no question of telling the people that self-sacrifice would enable them to accept the standard of living that this century has inflicted on the Chinese; instead they had to 'acquaint the people with the facts of world progress and the bright future ahead.'¹³ The careful application of well-laid plans, and the idea that planning and execution went together, were to help the cadres to lead the masses along the hard road to a brilliant future.

Frugal use of resources is one of the conditions of progress. Relying on one's own strength is a stage of socialist transformation leading toward the withering away of the state.

There is also a spiritual element. As will be seen below, it complements dialectical materialism. Its role is not to make man stronger than material forces, but to enable man to control material forces. In the parable of 'The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains,' Mao Tse-tung puts these words into his hero's mouth:

'High as they are, the mountains cannot grow any higher and with every bit we dig, they will be that much lower. Why can't we clear them away?'

He went on digging every day, unshaken in his conviction. God was moved by this, and he sent down two angels, who carried the mountain away on their backs. Today, two big mountains lie like a dead weight on the Chinese people. One is imperialism, the other is feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party has long made up its mind to dig them up. We must persevere and work unceasingly, and we too will touch God's heart. Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people.¹⁴

¹² The two others were the class struggle and the struggle for production.

¹³ 'On the Chungking Negotiations,' October 17, 1945. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, vol. 4, p. 59.

¹⁴ *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 322.

II. MAO'S THOUGHT—THE REJECTION OF MECHANISTIC MATERIALISM—CLASS STRUGGLE

Organized disturbances

One axiom in the *little red book* (p. 222 of the English edition), infallibly attracts the reader's attention:

While we recognise that in the general development of history the material determines the mental, and social being determines social consciousness, we recognise—and indeed must—the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being, and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.

'On Contradiction,' August 1937.

The first coherent explanation of the Cultural Revolution given by those actually involved was on the need to make a revolution in the superstructure, probably because of the reverse action to which Mao Tse-tung referred. The superstructure—the sum total of all the cultural constructs above the economic base—comprised the information media, statute-law and the judiciary, education, philosophy, literature, the arts, leisure activities, social conscience, and the preferences of the intelligentsia. This is where the bourgeois spirit could entrench itself after socialist revolutionary principles had been applied to the economy but before the superstructure itself had been transformed.

The academic curricula, intellectual climate, and social structure could continue to imbue new generations with traditional, capitalistic ideas based on the conception that the fruits of progress were for the benefit of a few privileged groups. If there was any chance of reaction this would be the source of the counter-revolution. If, on the other hand, the whole superstructure became the focus

of the proletarian ideology that would in its turn affect the whole society.

This is not the only point calling for comment in the quotation cited above, which amounts to a denunciation of mechanistic materialism, and gives the mental factor a role by comparison with the material that upsets the theory of dialectical materialism. Such free thinking provoked passionate criticism from more academic Marxist theoreticians. When the Cultural Revolution developed in China, Soviet theoreticians regarded it as a distortion of materialism.

Some Red Guards were happy to take issue with them. They did not confine themselves to quoting from the Thought of Mao Tse-tung, though they doubtless claimed it as their inspiration, but applied their rationale to concrete situations, with revealing results. For instance, the Kehsuan revolutionary group in Shantung wrote a refutation of an article entitled 'Marxism and Maoism' by Fedoseyev, Vice-principal of the USSR Academy of Sciences. According to this group, Fedoseyev believed that in the last resort it is economic conditions that determine who is to have power, and that to advise violent revolution amounted to ignoring economic imperatives. But Fedoseyev, they said, was unaware that war enabled contradictions to be resolved, and did not understand the changes wrought by the passage from peace to war and from war to peace, changes that Chairman Mao had analyzed and explained. Struggle and the end of struggle created discontinuities within systems that would otherwise be determined by economic conditions.¹⁵

In this article the Maoists adduced revolutionary action to show that materialism could be turned aside from its mechanistically determined course, but they did not contrast the mental and material factors to show how they were united in the materialist dialectic. One example of an attempt to do this is drawn from an early (December 1966) poster criticizing the *People's Daily*; this was a time when all kinds of thought and criticism, even of the

¹⁵ *People's Daily*, August 29, 1967.

most official bodies, were permitted in order to get closer to the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.¹⁶

The title of the editorial, 'Grasp Revolution, Promote Production,' was one of the most enduring of all the Cultural Revolution's slogans. It meant that the political struggle to rebuild society according to the Thought of Mao Tse-tung had to go hand in hand with working hard at one's job. In the eyes of the young critics this was a revisionist editorial because it said that socialism should be built in China on two different fronts: the spiritual one, by remoulding old-fashioned ideas in order to increase the people's awareness in the socialist revolution; and the material one, through the transformation of the environment and the development of the socialist economy.

The authors of this poster were probably right in thinking that the Thought of Mao Tse-tung rejects any material-spiritual dichotomy, and they rejected it in this case. They demanded that separate teams should not be formed for running the Cultural Revolution and production, even under a unified control. They wanted the Red Guards to be free to go among the workers and peasants to reform them and at the same time their political and social world, thus provoking a disturbance that the workers and peasants themselves could exploit.

Class struggle

The main point that the revolutionaries, quoted above, had in mind when they spoke of the passage from peace to war, in contrast to the principle of pure economic determinism, was class struggle. The theme is a familiar one: class struggle is a perpetual ferment that never stops. At the time of the revolutionary bases actions required by class struggle were aimed above all at bringing new peasants, determined to fight against the landlords and the local authorities, over to the side of the Communists.

When the common people of the bases had learnt over the years to live according to the standards of a new

¹⁶ *People's Daily* editorial, September 7, 1966.

society, the scale of, and the protagonists in, the class struggle both changed. The Communist Party had won. It now occupied the vast territories of China, an area immeasurably greater than the bases. The members of the homogeneous little society found themselves in the minority amid the new mass. The consequent dilution underlined the gravity of the 'contradictions among the people,' especially as after the absorption of capitalist areas some members of the Party came under the influence of the society that now was theirs.

As the press has frequently reported, Mao urged at the Plenum of the Party's Central Committee in 1962, 'Never forget class struggle!' He was warning his comrades that if they lost the vision of a community besieged by the forces of private property, the ideal little world that had been built for them in the old days would be lost forever.

Economic development

To be ceaselessly vigilant in the class struggle, and to anticipate the reaction of the superstructure on the economic base, involved a vision of long-term evolution that had no room for the conventional development theories of professional economists. As national planners are well aware, revolutionary disturbances occurring within a given period entail the downward revision of production estimates made for that period. Such disturbances can be allowed for, but they are generally unforeseeable, and it would be arbitrary to make a 10 per cent or 20 per cent discount for work stoppages or extra consumption arising from social struggles over a period of five or ten years. Economists generally prefer to make a plan making no allowances for such risks. The simplest approach for them is to envisage continuous growth. They are optimists for technical reasons.

The political leader, who keeps class struggle in reserve as one of the methods at his disposal, naturally rejects the hypothesis of continuous growth. Po Yi-po, however, a deputy premier and head of the State Economic Commission, wanted to 'launch the incorrect policy of con-

tinuous growth' in 1960,¹⁷ and was criticized in terms of Mao Tse-tung's ideas. This condemnation showed that in Maoist thought none of the 'primacy of politics over economics,' would be conceded, even for long-term development. A development programme drawn up in such a way as to rule out interruptions by political events would create an atmosphere seriously inhibiting political action.

Po Yi-po was also accused of wanting remuneration given in accordance with work done, and of opposing Mao Tse-tung's wish that wage differences should be narrowed. He had lost the ideal of the simple living and thrift that had made the revolutionary bases a little world remembered as a golden age.

One aim of the Thought is that all sections of the population—city dwellers, country people, workers, peasants, soldiers—should eventually have similar life-styles. For the time being local collective organizations were urged to spend less state money and learn to get by on their own resources. The spirit of economy fitted in well with the need to adapt public services to the real needs of the masses, putting them on a much bigger scale and standardizing them.

One of the reasons why the older cadres enjoy poor health is because they are too well looked after as regards clothing, food, accommodation and transport. Our medical insurance is copied from that of the Soviet Union, and medical specialists work as ordinary doctors. It is bad for them not to see all kinds of disease more often.¹⁸

In his wish to have the masses educated and organized into collectives to increase production, Mao Tse-tung did not seem to have been concerned with their vast numbers and their demographic growth. Would the Cultural Revolution have been more cautiously handled if he had been

¹⁷ 'The 130 crimes of Po Yi-po' in *K'o-chi Hung-ch'i* (Science and Technology Red Flag), February 18, 1967.

¹⁸ 'Mao Tse-tung's talks with Vietnamese visitors,' June 24, 1964.

seriously worried by this situation? It does not seem very probable.

In addition to the leadership of the Party, a decisive factor is our population of 600 million. More people mean a greater ferment of ideas, more enthusiasm and more energy. Never before have the masses of the people been so inspired, so militant and so daring as at present.¹⁹

Besides, the class struggle could not be put off. Disorder was not something terrible, and good could be expected from it. Above all, the structure of production had to be transformed *before* the productive forces could be developed: this was one of the lessons of Leninism.

III. COMMUNES AND DEFENCE

The advantage of starting from scratch

Full of health and energy, Chairman Mao walked with confident steps among the poor and lower middle peasants tending the fields. Warmly he shook each one's earth-stained hand, and listened to the peasants and the cadres reporting on their work. They told him that they were planning to merge their agricultural producers' co-operatives into a big farm. It was then that the Chairman revealed his vision of the future when he said: It would be better to set up a people's commune. In this way, industry, agriculture, commerce, education and military affairs can be combined, thus making the task of leadership easier.²⁰

This episode took place at Peiyuan, in the Shantung district, on August 9, 1958. It shows that Mao Tse-tung

¹⁹ 'Introducing a co-operative,' April 15, 1958. *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung* FLP, Peking, 1967, p. 403.

²⁰ 'Tremendous Changes in Peiyuan' *Peking Review*, 1968, no. 38, p. 26.

was envisaging the transfer of economic, educational, and military functions to the level of the basic cell in the countryside. It was around this same cell that, even before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the most vigorous arguments were to rage, and the fiercest battles were to be fought, between conservatives and radicals.

The Chairman had previously initiated many projects on basic agricultural units. He expressed this eloquently in a text recently revived and reprinted in large type, filling the whole front page of a paper that was several times the Cultural Revolution's leading journal.²¹ It was a letter about an agricultural co-operative in Honan that had distinguished itself for its revolutionary spirit at the beginning of 1958. Mao Tse-tung held it up as an example to the nation.

The backward sections of the masses are exerting themselves to catch up with the advanced, which demonstrates that the economic socialist revolution in our country (in those places where the relations of production have not been completely transformed), the political revolution, the ideological revolution, the technical revolution, and the *Cultural Revolution*²² are going ahead at full speed. . . . Apart from their other characteristics, the outstanding thing about China's 600 million people is that they are 'poor and blank.' This may seem a bad thing, but in reality it is a good thing. Poverty gives rise to the desire for change, the desire for action and the desire for revolution. On a blank sheet of paper, free from any mark, the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written, the freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted.

'Introducing a co-operative,' April 15, 1958.

There is an advantage in starting from nothing. But can one imagine how many drawings have been scratched out on blank sheets of paper?

²¹ The Shanghai paper *Wenhui Pao* celebrated the tenth anniversary of Mao's letter by devoting the whole of its front page to 'Introducing a co-operative,' April 15, 1968.

²² Author's italics.

Complete autonomy for the communes to speed up socialist education

In 1958 a long war of words began when a conference, held in Chengtu under the patronage of Mao Tse-tung, issued its views on the question of agricultural mechanization. The ramifications of this question are important because here many areas of policy overlap: agricultural projects, state investment, the technical education of the masses, the centralization or decentralization of Party and government, the speed of economic development, the problem of how to divide development between town and country, and defence preparations.

The Chengtu conference recommended that the co-operatives should 'rely basically on their own efforts in mechanizing agriculture.' Specifically, it proposed that:

Multi-purpose agricultural machinery and small tractors should be purchased by co-operatives for their own use. Medium-sized tractors should be put to service in co-operatives, either as state property for the use of the co-operative, or shared among the members themselves.²³

Nine years later the Revolutionary Rebels of the Eighth Ministry of the Machine Industry²⁴ criticized the policies that had in fact prevailed. Mao Tse-tung's line on agricultural mechanization, they wrote, which had been approved by the Chengtu Conference, had simply been sabotaged by 'China's Khrushchev' and his followers, who wanted state agricultural machinery stations or specialized groups under their own control.²⁵ After the Chengtu reso-

²³ 'The need to wipe out the wicked crimes of China's Khrushchev and Co in sabotaging agricultural mechanization.' Commentary by the editors. *Nungyeh chihsieh chishu* (Agricultural Machine Technology), 1967, no. 5, August 8, 1967.

²⁴ Responsible for agricultural machinery.

²⁵ *Nungyeh chihsieh chishu*, no. 6, September 18, 1967. 'Sweep away the state monopoly and promote large-scale mechanization through relying on one's own efforts' by Revolutionary Rebels in the Eighth Ministry of the Machine Industry.

lution machines were indeed given to the communes, who owned 70 per cent of all the tractors in the country at the end of 1958. But 'China's Khrushchev' and his acolytes had maliciously exaggerated the faults of this system, which were due solely to the inexperience of the communes in their maintenance and use. They took the machines back from some communes and set up pilot centres; then transferred the control of these centres from the local offices of the Ministry of Agriculture to tripartite organs subordinate to central government ministries.

Naturally they stressed technology, the higher returns obtainable when the machines were in the hands of specialists, and the better upkeep of the equipment under the control of an industrial ministry. If this interpretation of what the Eighth Ministry's Revolutionary Rebels meant is correct, the followers of 'China's Khrushchev' wanted the system integrated into the government, whereas Mao Tse-tung wanted the units of collective agriculture to be given the greatest possible freedom. The tractor stations ended up by being treated as economic enterprises. According to the same critics:

In August 1963 the exponents of the bourgeois revisionist line in the Agriculture, Water, and Forestry Ministries proposed that in two years' time all tractor stations that had not been able to make up their losses and were still in deficit should be dissolved, while those making a profit should continue to expand.²⁶

As long as the problem was confined to agricultural mechanization, it seemed to be simply a question of professional training and investment.

The supporters of Mao Tse-tung held that people would acquire a better training if they were really responsible for everything they used in their work and life; only when peasants combined the roles of workers, administrators, and farmers would they be able to reach urban living standards. On Liu Shao-ch'i's side it was said that China was not yet rich enough to supply everyone with machin-

²⁶ *Nungyeh chihsieh chishu*, no. 5, 1967.

ery, and that the countryside would suffer from its lack of experience. Liu Shao-ch'i was attacked in the usual way:

Seeking 'theoretical' grounds for his opposition to the agricultural co-operative movement, China's Khrushchev had recourse to the out-worn weapon of 'the theory of productive forces' taken from the revisionist arsenal of his predecessors, Bernstein, Kautsky, Bukharin and their supporters. He claimed that only after the nationalization of the industry could large quantities of machinery be supplied to the peasants, and only then would it be possible to nationalize the land and collective agriculture.²⁷

Liu was worried that if collectivization took place before the mechanization of agriculture instead of at the same time, as had been intended, the considerable efforts to raise production through working collectively would give them a premature loathing for collectivization. This was what he meant by 'confusing contradictions between ourselves and the enemy with contradictions among the people.'

From the point of view of economic development, as a Western expert would see it, nothing is to be gained by increasing investment in machines if the personnel using them cannot maintain them, and the equipment has a short life. Nor is there much to be gained by sharing investment equally among all the communes. A great deal will be gained, on the other hand, by putting all investment into industrial centres and specialized groupings. In other words, development will be speeded up by putting as much as possible into the growth leaders.

To Mao Tse-tung such a policy was revisionist. It ignored the chief aim of reducing the differences between town and countryside. But what made it worst of all was that, when investments were concentrated, the chance was

²⁷ 'Conflict of Views in China's Agricultural Policy,' editorial in the *People's Daily*, *Red Flag*, and *PLA Daily*, November 23, 1967. The quotation is from a speech at a conference on propaganda work of May 7, 1951 (see *Peking Review*, 1967, no. 49, p. 14).

lost of teaching the rural communes to form themselves into small units capable of feeding, running, industrializing, and defending themselves, thus making themselves ready to answer the needs of peace as well as of war.

Military thought

Mao Tse-tung said before the Cultural Revolution that agricultural mechanization was linked to preparation for war.

At the beginning of 1966, when China's third Five-Year Plan should have been adopted, the Party leadership was divided on many issues. Chairman Mao travelled round the provinces and addressed himself to the local officials. This should have been taken as a warning that things were about to happen.

In February 1966 our great leader Chairman Mao visited several provinces, municipalities and regions to lay the foundations of a plan for five, seven or ten years based on the decentralization of activities,' reported the revolutionaries of the Eighth Ministry of the Machine Industry. The idea was to 'extend mechanization step by step, starting from a few experimental areas, and to bring about the general mechanization of agriculture over a period of twenty-five years.' In March, Chairman Mao sent a letter giving specific instructions on the methods to be used in 'decentralizing activities':

This objective should be linked with *preparation for war* and famine, as well as for the people's benefit. Otherwise it will not be carried out enthusiastically even if all the necessary conditions are there.²⁸

The question of agricultural mechanization thus involved matters even more important than centralization, mass education and economic development. In the eyes of the Chairman, who was looking for ways of giving the new five-year plan a striking appearance, the demands of over-all defence took priority over those of growth.

²⁸ Nungyeh chihsieh chishu, 1967, no. 6, *op. cit.* Author's italics.

Over-all defence is no overstatement of Mao Tse-tung's view. It was a matter of organizing the countryside for resistance. 'Not only do we need a powerful regular army,' wrote the *People's Liberation Army Daily*,²⁹ 'but it is also vital to have a militia. Thus the enemy will be without collaborators if he enters our country.' The fear of collaboration with the enemy, which it was eventually found necessary to invoke, called up the ghosts of Wang Ching-wei and of Chen Kung-po, who fought with Kuomintang and the Communist Party in the early stages, but then became puppets of the Japanese during the occupation.

The Chinese leaders indicated more than once during the Cultural Revolution to Red Guards and even to foreign visitors their anxiety at the prospect of another Wang Ching-wei emerging if China were invaded by foreign forces. If whole districts and regions were not to be abandoned to collaboration—and the danger was one to be taken more seriously in the countryside, where political consciousness was less advanced—it was necessary to reinforce morale and also provide the means with which to organize resistance.

If a country is highly centralized, the rural areas are dependent on their administrative centres, and districts are dependent on the big cities, so enemy occupation of the administrative nerve centres soon puts paid to the outlying districts' ability to operate autonomously. If, on the other hand, the whole country consists of independent units with soft tissue between them, through which the invading armies could pour, but each representing a hard nucleus with an autonomous capacity to provide food, manufacture arms, carry out hit-and-run operations against the enemy, and make occupation impossible for him, then the country could keep up a very long resistance.³⁰ Decen-

²⁹ *PLA Daily*, August 1, 1967, special supplement for the militia.

³⁰ At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution a film called *Tunnel Warfare* was distributed. This showed how, during the Japanese War, some villagers went underground to organize themselves secretly, deceive the enemy, and harass him from the rear. This was one of the few feature films, perhaps ten in all, that were shown throughout the whole movement.

tralization, industrialization spread out at the lowest possible level, and the technical training of small agricultural communes (as, for example, through learning how to repair agricultural machinery) were thus all part of the preparations for resistance.

In combating an imperialist war of aggression, no matter what weapons the enemy may use, if they dare to go deep into our country, we will enjoy the maximum initiative, give full play to our strong points and advantages, use various methods to deal them blows, vigorously demonstrate the magic power of people's war, and make sure that the aggressors will never go back alive.³¹

The people had no need to fear the enemy's weapons. Mao Tse-tung flew in the face of strategic orthodoxy, based as it has been since 1949 on the balance of terror, by refusing to be afraid of nuclear weapons. Like Clausewitz, he stressed the superiority of defence over attack.³²

The military thinking of Mao Tse-tung was placed on a pinnacle by the Cultural Revolution, especially after August 1, 1967, the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army. It has been said that Marx was the thinker who gave Marxism its basic doctrine and economic ideas, Lenin contributed the political ideas, and Mao produced the military ones at the decisive moment when the struggle between capitalism and socialism was going to take the form of extended war.

Mao's military thinking did not hold absolute sway in the Party before the Cultural Revolution. The divergences that existed can be measured by looking at the different positions taken over decentralization of command and the creation of regional forces. Liu Shao-ch'i wanted the enemy contained. 'It would be bad if the enemy broke through,' he said.³³ Lo Jui-ch'ing, still chief of the General

³¹ *Peking Review* no. 48, November 24, 1967, 'Basic differences between the proletarian and bourgeois military thought,' p. 15.

³² See André Glucksmann, *Le Discours de la guerre*, L'Herne, Paris, 1968.

³³ *Peking Review*, 1967, no. 24, 'Basic differences between proletarian and bourgeois military thought,' p. 14.

Staff at the time, reckoned that the right method was 'to dam the flood.'⁸⁴

To describe the Thought of Mao Tse-tung as one of the peaks of contemporary military thinking inevitably strikes us Westerners as surprising. The Thought of Mao Tse-tung does not seem suited to the defence of integrated twentieth-century states. The more specialized a country is in its regions, mining centres, ports and intercommunicating industrial complexes, its areas of specialized trade or single crop culture, and its administrative centres, the more its life depends on the links between the centre and the various complexes. The more integrated and vulnerable its systems, the longer the range at which its defensive weapons have to act against attacks that could paralyze at very long range the links between the systems. This is why nations of this sort provide themselves with complex weapons systems and make complex strategic dispositions, aimed at giving long-range protection.

Mao Tse-tung would seem to view the problem differently. We have seen above how he excludes polarized development on political and social grounds. If extensive integrated systems are also impossible to defend, the simplest solution is to reduce their number and size. With this simplification, the problem reverts to the organization of resistance in the smaller areas, so that they can rely on themselves in the event of an invasion and organize themselves for survival. They may be scorched by the invaders as they pass, they may suffer losses, but they will never yield.

The decentralization of industry in the countryside is essential to a strategic defence based on such a cellular structure. The North Vietnamese were to show how it could be done. In the period just before the Cultural Revolution they had not yet undergone the heavy American bombings, but later on they invented *sotanzation*, the transport of the industrial equipment of the cities to caves and to places where it had cover, albeit precarious. Thus

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the Vietnamese were able to make up for shortages in supplies of any kind and cope with cut communications.

Organs of popular participation in local affairs

Political organization below the level of the Party was logically needed to correspond to the localized organization of defence. In the Thought of Mao Tse-tung this was to be found at the level of the peasant associations. All signs suggest that the revolution has now tried to bring this about.

But the revolutionary committees of the towns have been the institutions of the Cultural Revolution longest in the news. At first the revolution stopped at the edge of the countryside, either because its abrupt introduction would have been rejected by the masses and condemned by powerful leaders, or else because the authorities did everything in their power to prevent it coming in. Rural revolutionary committees emerged more quietly than the urban ones, though they were the subject of a propaganda campaign in March 1968.⁸⁵

The press went to great lengths to underline what was different in the new formula for government: the system should not be made up of outsiders. Its members were to keep close to the grass roots and get things ready for economic development and war preparation.⁸⁶ Local revolutionary committees were made up of three elements—peasants, young revolutionaries, and cadres won over to the revolution. This was a formula for a triple alliance without the army. The place of the army itself was taken by the militia, who were not regular soldiers.

Many revolutionary committees would have been formed earlier if all the necessary elements had been present to take part. It was hard to get the revolutionary masses to participate in large numbers, as Chou En-lai himself

⁸⁵ Probably after discussions among top leaders at conferences held between February 20 and 27, 1968.

⁸⁶ See especially the April 6, 1968, New China News Agency dispatch on the P'ingku Revolutionary Committee.

complained in his speech of February 2, 1968, to representatives of committees in various sectors of government.

To bring about the representation of the revolutionary masses in local institutions, Mao Tse-tung set about reviving peasant associations in 1964, an idea that went back to the risings of 1927. The poor and lower-middle peasants' associations founded in some places in accordance with the scheme contained in the Central Committee directive of June 1964, had above all to be independent of the Party and the government.

According to Clause 3 of the scheme, all the poor and lower-middle peasants belonging to the rural people's communes who made a personal application could be members of the association if approved by a general meeting of their production team. Membership was, to this extent, voluntary. Members of the associations had full rights to elect and recall delegates to their own level and higher levels, as well as the right of making criticisms 'even in the case of mistakes and shortcomings on the part of leading members.'

One might almost be reading a document from two years later, when Shanghai and Peking wanted to form themselves into 'communes' on the lines of the 1871 Paris Commune. 'If members suffered reprisals because they had criticized actions of the production teams or brigades of the people's communes, or had criticized their leaders, they had the right of appeal to all organizations affiliated to them.'

The role of the associations was in particular to '*Respond actively to the call of the Party and Chairman Mao*'³⁷ to be exemplary in complying with and executing the policies and commands of Party and state, and to persist in the direction of socialism.³⁸

The peasant associations were thus to constitute another

³⁷ Author's italics.

³⁸ Full text in *Ajia Keizai Jumbo*, no. 681, Tokyo, 1967, p. 24ff. (Full English translation in R. Baum and F. C. Teiwes, *Ssu-h'ing, The Socialist Education Movement of 1962-1966*, Berkeley, 1968, University of California, Berkeley, China Research Monographs no. 2, pp. 95-101—translator.)

network in addition to those of the Party and the government.

It was virtually made clear that their function, apart from guiding collective agriculture forward, was to hold themselves ready to respond to appeals from Chairman Mao and propagate his thought. But by all indications these June 1964 directives never got beyond the stage of being a trial scheme. Associations of this sort were only set up in some places, notably in southern provinces, and this was not always done in the spirit in which they were originally conceived.

There is a fascinating similarity between some of the provisions of this 1964 scheme and certain propaganda documents distributed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. (Later programmes for the revolution were marked by the contradictions that developed among the people as it proceeded.) It could be said that the movement which led to the founding of the poor and lower-middle peasant associations was comparable in its organic and social aims to the Cultural Revolution, with the big difference that this time the operation was intended to proceed either with the Party's agreement or at any rate without coming into conflict with it. Is it possible that the collapse of this agreement was the reason why the Party had to be challenged directly?