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“Egalitarianism” and “Seeking the Truth From the Facts” in the People’s Republic of China

In the context of the current programme of “four modernizations,” the Chinese Communist Party leadership has focused ideologically on the deviation of “egalitarianism,” (*pingjunzhuyi*), and an informed understanding of this issue is central to the analysis of the structure of Chinese ideological perception in its distinction between socialism and capitalism.

Generally, “egalitarianism” has been once again repudiated as inconsistent with the Party’s tradition of empirical analysis and investigation, which continues today to have its theoretical expression Mao’s theory of contradictions, and its practical political expression in the Party’s mass line. Specifically, “egalitarianism” has been repudiated as inconsistent with Mao’s 1941 directive “to seek the truth from the facts” (*shi shi qiu shi*), which in the Party’s important resolution of June 21, 1981 acquired an enhanced ideological status as one of the three foundations of “Mao Zedong Thought.”¹

A quick reference to the 1979 Shanghai edition of the *Cihai*, (a standard encyclopedia), reveals that the “egalitarianism” is a deviation of thought which historically arises in an economy, characterized by small-scale production and handicrafts. “Egalitarianism,” as an attempt to level the socioeconomic distinctions between men, and as an attempt to promote an equal distribution of goods in society is described as a problem of lingering “feudalism” in modern socialist society.

Contemporary Chinese ideological controversy as to the extent to which “feudalism” persists under modern Chinese socialism is complicated further by disagreement as to what degree Lenin’s thesis in “Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder,” concerning the tendency of small-scale production to engender “spontaneous capitalism” holds true in the context of today’s China, wherein the public ownership of the means of production has been formally established. The

above mentioned resolution of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP in fact emphasizes that a distinction should be clearly made between the historical conditions of Russia in 1920 and the current conditions of socialism in China. In other words, Lenin's prognosis does not necessarily apply to China's countryside, where collectivization was successfully achieved in the mid-1950s.²

"Spontaneous capitalism" is apparently less of a problem in the countryside than is "egalitarianism". Current historiography focuses on the latter deviation, which had earlier appeared in Party history in 1927, 1941, 1947, and 1958, and which was apparently a very serious phenomenon in the late 1960s and early 1970s "... when the Gang of Four were in power.

Subsequent to arrest of this now infamous foursome, the Party charged the "gang" with the misuse of state property for their own private pleasure. Initially, they were placed on the ideological right for having plotted "capitalist restoration." They were thus denied the privilege of being on the "left." In what has surely become a classic manoeuvre in Chinese politics, the "gang" allegedly "waved Chairman Mao's banner, to strike at Chairman Mao's forces," particularly in its devious advocacy of the equalization of living standards. In this false advocacy the "gang" is said to have opposed the socialist principle of "each according to his work." Whether or not the "gang" feinted to the "left," however, has become less important than the advocacy of "egalitarianism" itself. In total disregard for China's objective economic conditions, and even while they misappropriated publicly owned property, the foursome encouraged everyone to eat from "the big public pot," and the Party has since become preoccupied with the "leftist" advocacy of the abolition of "bourgeois rights" and the complete reduction of material incentives and wage differentials.

This issue of "egalitarianism" is of course extremely sensitive as it directly relates to the Cultural Revolution attack on the Party leadership for having advocated Liu Shaoqi's "theory of productive forces." The Red Guards of the mid-1960s attacked this theory for its apparently exclusive emphasis on the relation between the advanced and backward sectors of the national economy, and its deliberate neglect of emerging class contradictions under socialism. Currently, the debate has been renewed as to how to make the distinction between production for socialism and "production for the sake of production," (*wei shengchan, er shengchan*),³ but the contemporary debate has focused on "egalitarianism," as it was asserted on the radical "left" in opposition to "objective economic law."

This latter emphasis draws attention to the unevenness of the national economy, the different patterns of regional development, and

the necessity of applying the law of value in commodity relationships both between and from within different forms of state-owned and collectively owned enterprise. In the context of China's economic backwardness, the free distribution of goods and the absolute reduction of wage differentials and material incentives, allegedly advocated by the "gang," has been ruled out for the foreseeable future.

This argument is perhaps most clearly stated in the writings of one of China's leading economists, Xue Muqiao. According to Xue, socialism should be studied, not as an "independent socio-economic formation," but as a "process,"⁴ leading to the "lower phase of communism," characterized by the public ownership of the means of production and the application of "each according to his work" in the distribution of goods. Xue asserts that the higher phase of "communism," distinguished by the principle of "each according to his needs" must rely on a "spectacular rise in both productive forces and people's communist consciousness."⁵ China, according to his analysis, is now only in a "lower phase of socialism," for even though the means of production are publicly owned, there are co-existing in the Chinese economy two basic forms of public ownership; and collective ownership is particularly extensive in China's countryside. Xue recommends that the aforementioned "process" can only be completed after several basic objectives have been met, including the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology, (i.e., the "four modernizations"), the transition of at least ninety per cent of the collectively owned economy to a system of ownership by the whole people, the abolition of rationing and the production of an abundant supply of goods, the achievement of universal secondary education and the establishment of a highly developed system of people's democracy, which will allow for popular participation in the management of state agencies and public enterprise.⁶ This listing is perhaps more specific to China than the more familiar one, outlined towards the end of the second part of Marx's "Communist Manifesto."

From within this prevailing analytical framework, the "gang" was accused of "egalitarianism," which in essence is a historically premature communism. The "gang's" apparently exclusive emphasis on "Politics in Command" ignored China's objective economic conditions and the necessity of expanding China's productive forces as a prerequisite to free distribution. In waging polemics against the influence of the Gang of Four, Party theorists deployed "seeking the truth from the facts" against the "gang's" altogether too rigorous interpretation of Mao's "theory of continuing the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Perhaps it is not surprising the "Mao Zedong Thought" is currently emphasized as "scientific method" and that this corpus of thought is

now being used in the rationalization of current economic reforms, which emphasize the law of value, commodity production and the utilization of market mechanisms as supplementary to state planning techniques.

The Party's current ideological position does raise some interesting historical issues; for example, the emphasis on Mao's having repudiated "egalitarianism" is not necessarily devoid of substance.⁷ Certainly this emphasis challenges Western historiographical assumptions about Mao as having been primarily responsible for "egalitarianism" in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. In its advocacy of "seeking the truth from the facts," the Party leadership has consciously resorted to Mao's own mass-line tradition of empirical analysis as it is explicit in his theory of contradictions. The June, 1981 resolution on Party history was not altogether uncharitable to Mao in his role in the late 1950s. Mao is seen as at the forefront of the effort in 1959-60 to correct the excesses of the Great Leap.⁸ He is said, in fact, to have supported vigorously the law of value and commodity production.

"Seeking the truth from the facts" has become a hallmark of the Deng Xiaoping regime, and one should note that it was effectively used in 1978-79 to discredit the so-called "whateverist" faction, which believed, contrary to Mao's own instructions, that every character ever written by the Chairman was an aspect of the absolute truth. The reduction of Mao's "scientific thought" to the level of "feudal" dogma was then deplored as inconsistent with Mao's own advocacy of inner-Party democracy.

"Seeking the Truth from the Facts" in Party History

The Party leadership has understood the fundamental question of "egalitarianism" to be one of correct dialectical analysis. Prior to his sudden dismissal in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident of April, 1976, Deng Xiaoping was accused of having confounded Mao's dialectical relationship of production and revolution. Deng had responded, accusing unnamed "bold elements" of having adopted the "bad aspect" of Stalin's style of work. These "elements" apparently had only understood the "clash of opposites."⁹ Unlike Chairman Mao, they had failed to appreciate the "unity of opposites." Deng argued that an understanding of both the "unity" and "clash" of opposites is necessary to "seeking the truth from the facts."

Historians might in fact wish to draw our attention to a parallel between Deng's 1975-76 position and that of Peng Dehuai, who in 1959 was cashiered as Minister of Defence for his outspoken assessment of the Great Leap Forward. Peng in his 1959 assessment focused on "petty-bourgeois fanaticism" and "left" mistakes in the Great Leap

Forward. He complained that the Party leadership had not respected Mao's instruction to combine "sky-rocketing zeal with scientific analysis." In his controversial "Letter of Opinion," Peng summed up his position in the statement: "...we forgot the mass line and the style of seeking the truth from the facts which the Party had formed over a long time."¹⁰ Peng was reacting then to what subsequently became known as the "wind of communism." The sudden creation in the summer of 1958 of public mess halls in the countryside and the radical expropriations of the property of lower-level collective organization by the communes has proved to be of seminal and lasting importance in terms of the consciousness of the entire Chinese Party leadership.

At this time, Mao obviously felt the need to rationalize his own position; for example, he clearly disassociated his concept of permanent revolution" from that of Trotsky.¹¹ Communes were only Communist "sprouts" in a period which was qualitatively "socialist." Their appearance could not be construed as marking off a new period of historical development. Despite Mao's fervent adherence to "Politics in Command," he readily conceded that Trotsky was fundamentally wrong in his assumption that stages of historical economic development could be skipped. "Striking while the iron was hot" was not the same thing as skipping stages of development.

Mao was vitriolic in his condemnation of the "egalitarianism" of commune cadres, who pushed "first equalize, second adjust, third withdraw funds." He heaped invective upon those involved in such "daylight robbery," saying: "You cannot say that what is yours is mine and just pick things up and walk off."¹² These misguided comrades had apparently carried out the "levelling of the rich and the poor," and their "egalitarianism," Mao feared, would politically "lead the peasants to the enemy."

In terms of the historical memory of the Party, the experience of the summer of 1958 was so seminal and traumatic that even Zhang Qinqiao, who later achieved infamy as the evil genius of the Gang of Four, was obliged in his power struggle with Deng Xiaoping in 1975 to disassociate himself from the "wind of communism," which he said, "...would never be allowed to rise again."¹³

Subsequent to his collapse in April, 1976 and his later return to power in July of 1977, Deng proceeded to rationalize the "four modernizations" of Zhou Enlai on the basis of "Mao Zedong Thought." Deng argued that Mao had made some rather substantive political errors, but his "thought" was, nonetheless, integral to the Chinese revolution and would serve as the ideological basis for the "four modernizations." In this assessment of Mao, Deng agreed with Zhou that any worship of Mao would be "feudal," but that Mao should be

regarded as great because he integrated Marxist-Leninist principles with the specific conditions of the Chinese revolution. The point was reiterated as Zhou's 1949 speech, "Learn from Mao Zedong" was re-circulated throughout the Party. Zhou had argued that the young of China must value this integration, and that they should strive to achieve such a dialectical understanding of reality through "seeking the truth from the facts."¹⁴

At the third session of the Tenth Central Committee meeting of July, 1977, Deng had only been rehabilitated when he went on the offensive to remind the Party to adhere to Mao's mass line and "to seek the truth from the facts." Deng set the parameters for debate within the Party, and he argued that practice is "the only criterion for verifying the truth." At the June, 1978 All-Army Conference on Political Work, he expounded upon the *classicus locus* in Mao's writings, which deals extensively with "seeking the truth from the facts."

In 1941, Mao had explained the significance of each of the four characters in the phrase, "seeking the truth from the facts" in the following way:

"The 'target' is the Chinese revolution, the arrow is Marxism-Leninism. We Chinese Communists have been seeking the arrow because we want to hit the target of the Chinese revolution. To take such an attitude is to seek the truth from the facts. 'Facts' are all things which exist objectively, 'truth' means their internal relations, that, is the laws governing them and 'to seek' means to study."¹⁵

Thus on the formal level "truth" was to be achieved on the basis of a dialectical understanding of contradictions, or the "internal relations" of things, but this conception of "truth" was put forward in the attempt to describe the Chinese revolution in terms of the synthesis of Marxism-Leninism as "universal truth" (*pubian zhenli*) with the specific conditions of China's revolution.

Mao had insisted not only in 1941, but throughout his career that the observer could only achieve such a synthesis on the basis of practice; practice was the touchstone of his epistemology. In 1941 he attacked both "dogmatism" and "subjectivism," and with respect to the history of the Chinese revolution, he pointed to the continuing importance of the May 4th Movement of 1919, which he said, had two "main streams," one negative, the other positive.¹⁶ The revolution, or "target" had benefited from the May 4th emphasis on science; it had not benefited from the dogmatic insistence on foreign learning. In 1941, Mao specifically attacked Stalin's proteges, Wang Ming, for his doctrinaire imposition of the texts of Marx on to the landscape of China. He suggested that Wang had "no intention of seeking the truth from the facts." Since Mao asserted that "without investigation there is no

right to speak," his enemies could be guilty of "subjectivism." Their approach to the "truth" was apparently characterized by "bombastic twaddle." Mao suggested that the mere "listing of 1, 2, 3, 4," was no substitute for actual scientific investigation based upon practical observation and inductive reasoning.

Basically, it was this 1941 argument, which Deng effectively used against the "Gang of Four" in 1977 and against the residual left of the Cultural Revolution, or the "whateverist faction" in 1978-79. The resolution of June 21, 1981, which definitively summed up Mao's contribution to the Party, highlighted "seeking the truth from the facts" and identified Mao's greatest contribution in terms of the integration of "the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution."

"Truth," as the outcome of a process whereby "internal relations" are studied, placed a premium on "democracy" in the form of inner-Party contention, at least on the formal level. Deng Xiaoping's supporters in 1978-79 argued that the Gang of Four mistakenly regarded their views as sacred and inviolable; they could not tolerate criticism, and they did not understand that "truth" is relative. The longstanding Party tradition of rehabilitating fallen leaders was built upon this conception of the "truth". On the formal level both Stalinist dialectics, which focused exclusively upon the clash of opposites were rejected, and the disposition to destroy all opposition were counterrevolutionary. The Gang of Four's attitude was thus identified with "Emperor worship" and "feudalism."

The Party could point to the 1959 debate concerning the problems of the Great Leap Forward, Mao had then formally taken the position: "I don't agree with the idea that the Chairman cannot be contradicted."¹⁷ Mao's pedagogy resorted to a "feudal" metaphor to explain his stand against "feudalism" on this point: "The faults of the superior man are like the eclipses of the sun and moon....when the celestial dog eats the sun and moon...he makes a mistake and everyone sees it. When he corrects his mistake all men look up to him."¹⁸ Mao's own political practice was not consistent with these thoughts. But on the formal theoretical level, Mao did understand that the deification of Mao Zedong would only constitute a victory for "feudalism." In attacking Chen Boda's "theory of genius" in the early 1970s, Mao, himself, attacked the Chinese "feudal" tradition, which was equated within an hierarchical, conception of the absolute truth, as it was manifest in the moral behaviour of the Emperor, or Son of Heaven.¹⁹

The dialectical appreciation of "truth" as relative to constantly changing social conditions has had at the formal level significant implications for the Party's conception of the nature of political lead-

ership. While the Party has consistently related to "truth" in an ideological way, and this propensity has often been highlighted in Western literature as antithetical to the process of modernization, it should be emphasized that the tradition of "seeking the truth from the facts" has implied a self-professed "rational" and "scientific" approach to ideological goals, whereby alternative variables of analysis are weighed dialectically on the basis of practical and empirical investigation.

"Egalitarianism" and the Appearance of Inequality Under Socialism

The Party's emphasis on "seeking the truth from the facts" has often been contemporaneous with an emphasis on a practical, almost conservative approach to question of economy and social inequality. Very early in his thinking, Mao Zedong, himself having gone through a phase of leftist excess in the countryside, rejected "absolute egalitarianism" (*juedui pingjunzhuyi*) as politically subversive of the Chinese revolution, and as a deviation, which was historically the "product of a handicraft and small peasant economy."²⁰ In 1929, Mao refused to consider suggestions that all men in the Red Army irrespective of differences of age and physical condition carry the same weight of rice on their backs. He stressed that under the socialism of the future there would be inequality, as material things would be distributed on the basis of "each according to his work." This is perhaps the first clue that Mao's concept of social justice might have leaned towards a more "proportionate" as opposed to an "arithmetical" conception of equality.²¹ Mao was not prepared to support that proposition that all members of society share equally the burdens and benefits of society.

Mao in 1929 further commented that while the distribution of material things within the Red Army was "more or less equal," this had to be considered as an aberration, which had originated with the circumstances of the military struggle and not as a permanent feature of the soviet economy. Also for later consideration it is important to note that the border region "public supply system" of the 1940s, which reduced the differentials in the distribution of material goods between the ranks of public functionaries was also regarded as the product of wartime circumstances. In the early 1950s the system of public supply was progressively phased out in favour of a system of graduated wages according to rank.

In discussing Mao's egalitarian goals and the phenomenon of "egalitarianism," one must point to Mao's lifelong interest in the "three great differences," particularly with respect to the perceived need to close the gap between living standards in the cities and the countryside. Mao, however, was not prepared to endorse "egalitarianism" in any premature political attempt to force the closing of this gap. In 1955,

Mao, for example, launched a counterattack against Liang Shuming, a popular "democratic personage," well-known for his pre-1949 sponsorship of rural reform. Mao rejected Liang's plan for a state-enforced redistribution of income in favour of the peasantry as politically dangerous and subversive of the worker-peasant alliance. Mao further argued that the compulsory transfer of earnings from the pocket of the worker to that of the peasant could only have the effect of destroying China's industry.²²

More importantly in terms of the rationalization of current economic reform, Mao in his 1956 dialectical analysis of the relations between the state, the units of production, and the individual producer, stressed that the peasant's income should rise in relation to increased agricultural productivity.²³ Mao would not have anything to do with the excesses of Stalinist primitive accumulation.

There is, furthermore, nothing to indicate that Mao disagreed with Zhou Enlai's rejection of "egalitarianism" in the state's system of remuneration.²⁴ The current Chinese historiographical argument that Mao repudiated "egalitarianism" and supported distribution by contribution—"each according to his work"—differs from Western historiography. The resolution of June 21, 1981, indicates that "Comrade Mao and the Central Committee led the whole Party in energetically rectifying the errors which had already been recognized." The resolution places Mao at the forefront of the campaign to rectify "left" errors in rural work.²⁵

In 1959 not only the bluff Peng Dehuai but Mao as well urged the restoration of the Party work-style based upon "seeking the truth from the facts." According to Mao, objective conditions necessitated the use of the "law of value" (*jie zhi guilu*) under socialism. The following statement by Mao regarding the "law of value" in fact sparked a major controversy in the early 1960s over the role of this law in socialist planning:

The law of value is a great school. It is of great use and if we can teach it to our several million cadres and several hundreds of millions of people, we can build socialism and communism....²⁶

Mao argued that ignoring of the law of value would precipitate a crisis in the distribution of supplies in the countryside and that this would jeopardize the political stability of the worker-peasant alliance. In broad theoretical terms Mao insisted that commodity production is not exclusive to the capitalist period of economic development.²⁷ He concluded that under socialism commodity production has a different nature. Current polemics particularly emphasize Mao's 1959 argument that the buying out of the means of production in the mid-1950s

made a crucial difference with respect to the nature of commodity production. The achievement of the public ownership of the means of production meant in effect that labour could no longer be a "commodity."²⁸

Furthermore, Mao argued that, while the "law of value" had no "regulatory function" in a socialist planned economy, it did greatly facilitate the planning process. Commodity production, he argued, was necessary to an economy characterized by the co-existence of two systems of public ownership. The commodity-money relationship would facilitate relations between the two economies. Mao elaborated by saying that commodity production was necessarily related to the forces of production.²⁹ The weak, underdeveloped state of the latter meant a continued emphasis on "each according to his work" as opposed to "each according to his needs." It would seem that Mao himself came dangerously close to advocating a "theory of productive forces." He went so far as to suggest that even when the collective economy is communized, commodity production might still be necessary in some parts of the country's economy, and contrary to the assumptions of Western historiography, Mao did *not* then advocate the "abolition" of "bourgeois rights."³⁰

Chinese Communist metaphor presently describes "egalitarianism" as a "wind of communism" which prevails in favour of free distribution and distorts the notion of class struggle. The Gang of Four's "egalitarianism" has been criticized as inconsistent with the socialist principle of "each according to his work," and some inequality in socialist society is tolerated as the historical product of a weakness of productive forces.

Mao's dialectical universe presumes more than the extreme of "egalitarianism," and there is an opposite, but perhaps equally hoary, extreme of "economism" (*jingjizhuyi*). The basic Leninist understanding of this term is still current in China. It is a phenomenon, which implies the "lagging" of leaders of revolution behind the masses. In his day, Lenin had the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party in mind; they had allegedly sacrificed the revolutionary potential of the working class in favour of legislated economic reforms. Lenin accused the "Economists" of having "learned by rote that politics are based on economics."³¹ And in the Cultural Revolution the "left" hammered away at the same point to accuse leading Party figures such as Deng Xiaoping of using wage increases and material benefits to forestall class struggle.

During the period of Deng's second rehabilitation, 1973-76, the "left" had launched a renewed offensive against "economism." Hu Qiaomu, a leading theoretician and president of the Chinese Academy

of Social Sciences, replied in 1978 to "leftist" allegations that Deng's supporters had in the mid-1970s substituted profits for politics in command.³² He reiterated Deng's argument to the effect that the "leftists" had failed in elementary dialectics when they ignored Mao's "unity of opposites." Their singular emphasis upon the clash of opposites led to a fatal misconstruction of the relationships between politics and economics and production and revolution. He pointedly rejected the argument that Deng manipulated a "theory of two points," emphasizing both the unity and clash of opposites in order to reinstate Liu Shaoqi's "theory of productive forces." Hu suggests that the "leftists" in constructing a false opposition to economics, had ignored the "productive forces" and had, thus, practiced idealism or metaphysics instead of dialectical materialism.

The "leftist" rejection of the "law of value" was treated derisively. Hu simply noted that the negation of objective economic law does not serve politics. Hu Qiaomu did say the following: "We must put proletarian politics in command of our economic work and we must do things according to objective economic laws, these two things being a unity."³³ Furthermore, Hu, himself, warned against those who would practice "economism" under the pretext of doing things according to economic laws. He specifically observed that state planning for social needs was to come before the fixing of prices.³⁴

Furthermore, the theories of Sun Yefang and Xue Muqiao have capitalized on Mao's 1959 statements on the law of value, productive forces and commodity production. In the pages of *Jingji yanjiu* (economic research), theorists have tended to criticize past assertions to the effect that to combine planning and the market would be as futile as mixing oil and water.³⁵ State planning, which makes efficient use of the law of value, and which is sensitive to market conditions and the development of the productive forces in the economy is seen as generally consistent with the larger ideological goals of social equity explicit in "Mao Zedong Thought."

"Mao Zedong Thought" is presently cited in favour of the maintenance of wage differentials, which recognize differences of skills, some of which are more important to economic construction than others. Theorists play out the dialectical balance in Mao's thought which requires a complex emphasis on both material incentives and socialist spirit in the attempt to raise worker productivity.³⁶ These theorists do seem to have a strong formal case when they argue that Mao insisted that an increase in productivity must result in an improvement in the standard of living of the workers concerned. In this respect material reward was not described in terms of "bourgeois rights."

In the context of this debate Mao's 1942 treatise, "Economic and Financial Problems," has been cited for its criticism of an "egalitarian wage system," which would obliterate the distinctions between skilled and unskilled labour and between industriousness and laziness. In 1942, "loafers" (*erliuzi*) were compelled to embrace Mao's own work ethic.

While current economic theory emphasizes Mao's original correlation of production and consumption, it does so from within the long term framework of a low-wages policy, which is regarded as only consistent with a realistic reading of China's productive forces.³⁷ Generally, policy based on Mao's position of 1956 and 1959 formally charts a middle course between egalitarianism and the inequalities, which arise with the necessary existence of "bourgeois rights."

Xue Muqiao, like many others, including his now deceased brother Sun Yefang, has attempted to negotiate Mao's "unity of opposites." He argues that "egalitarianism," meaning equal pay, stands in opposition to "each according to his work." Xue suggests that "egalitarianism" creates disincentives in production, and is, therefore, injurious to the material interests of the masses. He does not hesitate to suggest that the inequality which arises with wage differentials, should be viewed dialectically in that it plays a positive role in the strengthening of the productive forces. In *China's Socialist Economy*, Xue regrets the tendency over the last decade toward "egalitarianism," which he sees as inconsistent with the historically stronger trend in the Chinese economy to balance dialectically "each according to his work" with "the restriction of bourgeois rights." He specifically refers to the long term principle, "no raises for the upper income brackets, fewer raises for the medium income brackets, and more raises for the lower income brackets."³⁸

Xue Muqiao has also written about the broad social basis of "egalitarianism," which he describes as having "deep historical roots" in a traditional society, wherein small producers would quite naturally advocate: "If there is food, let everyone share it." Such "petty bourgeois equalitarianism or agrarian socialism" was apparently stoked up under the Gang of Four, and today "eating out of the same pot" has become synonymous with "egalitarianism."³⁹

To sum up, the present day Party leadership has argued that "egalitarianism" is inconsistent with Mao's thought and dialectics and that it must be analyzed on the scientific basis of "seeking the truth from the facts." "Leftists" in the Cultural Revolution apparently did not carefully study the "internal relations" of things; they forgot the "unity of opposites," and according to the June 21st resolution they erroneously restricted "each according to his work."

The June 21st resolution also notes that the Gang of Four's misplaced theoretical emphasis on Lenin's statement to the effect that "small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously and on a mass scale." The resolution views the peasants' private plots and sideline occupations as complementary to the publicly owned economy, and Article 11 of the new 1982 constitution confirms that the "individual economy" of urban and rural China is "a complement to the socialist sector of the economy," and as such will enjoy the protection of the law.⁴⁰

The Chinese attack on "egalitarianism" is rooted in the dialectical method of "seeking the truth from the facts," but Western research is perhaps more interested in the possibilities of "economism." Reforms in industry such as the devolution of greater responsibility for profits and losses to individual enterprises and the relaxation of state planning directives in favour of more indirect means of control through banking and credit procedures, are under close scrutiny as the ability of the Chinese to insure the integrity of state planning as against the inroads of the market is questioned.

Similarly, the emphasis at the household level in the countryside on individual initiative in production is viewed with considerable interest as it would seem to jeopardize collective organization at the team level and above. The enhanced autonomy of the household in relation to the production team with respect to decisions concerning production priorities, particularly as explicit in the "*baogan daohu*" programme in the poorer areas, once again raises the question as to whether Chinese policymakers are serious in their intention to "restrict" "bourgeois rights" and to prevent the further growth of inequality.⁴¹

"Seeking the truth from the facts", itself, would seem to pose a troublesome analytical problem with respect to these economic reforms: are the foundations of socialist equity and economy relative or absolute? Dialectics cannot tell us precisely just how much dominance on the part of the publicly owned sector of the economy is needed to insure against "economism."

Obviously, the current leadership does not see itself in terms of an inexorable drift towards "economism." In judiciously applying Mao's dialectics to contemporary economic problems, this leadership perceives itself in a struggle to redress a balance which had been tipped too far in one direction during the Cultural Revolution. It is, however, important to note that while the "unity of opposites" has been stressed, the Party continues to argue against bourgeois "pragmatism" even while it yearns for pragmatic policy based on "seeking the truth from the facts."

We are returned to the great debates of the May 4th period of 1919. The "pragmatism" of John Dewey and his disciple, Hu Shi, is in the Chinese view essentially an extension of liberalism. While there is obvious sympathy for the position that "truth" is relative, Hu Shi's "re-evaluation of all values" and his view of science as a rational self-corrective process of thought which transcends ideology is rejected in much the same language as that of Li Dazhao in 1919. Hu's pragmatism, according to Li was not pragmatic, for it assumed that political action to achieve social change was secondary to development of a scientific critical attitude, which would transcend all the flawed structures of ideological thought.⁴²

Under Mao's dialectical regime, truth is relative to the internal relations of contradictions at particular moments in time. "Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought" has attained the status of "science." Massline political traditions have been re-asserted, and it is formally agreed that "science" in order to contribute to China's modernization must have contention in order to develop.

It would seem then that as a "science," "Mao Zedong Thought" must be treated with a critical "scientific attitude."⁴³ In fact, the fifth plenary session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party dramatized this point politically by forcing the resignations of the "Whateverists," namely Wang Dongxing, Ji Denggui, Wu De and Chen Xilian.⁴⁴ They were publicly accused of not treating "Mao Zedong Thought" with a "scientific attitude." Their discomfort was the political culmination of Deng's offensive, which he had been waging in the name of "seeking the truth from the facts." To hold to "whatever" Mao instructed was viewed as "feudalism." Such "feudalism" was described in terms of a "bookworship" which had assumed the unfortunate proportions of a "religious fanaticism." In isolating and magnifying selectively comments by Mao Zedong, the "whateverists" did not "seek the truth from the facts."

In the context of the polemic against the "whateverists", "truth" was described as a relative process of cognition. Jiang Niantao, writing in the November, 1979 issue of *Hongqi* (Red flag) deferred to the authority of Mao's "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" on this question. There, Mao, who had understood the necessity of the "Celestial Dog" to admit openly to its mistakes, said:

"When something has been universally abandoned by mankind and a certain truth has been universally accepted by mankind, a still newer truth is struggling with new erroneous views. Such a struggle will never end."⁴⁵

Mao's dialectical conception of history would seem to have negated "truth" as an absolute, yet even while truth is said to be relative, there is today a neo-positivist belief that "objective laws" can always be discovered.

"Seeking the truth from the facts" favours the discovery of the internal relations of things through concrete practice, but as a methodology it seems to have acquired absolute dimensions. A *Guangming ribao* article, which anticipated Deng's speech of June, 1978, in which he explained Mao's 1941 directive in terms of "practice as the only criterion for verifying the truth," noted what appears to be a central ambiguity in "Mao Zedong Thought":

We not only hold that practice is the criterion of truth but also deal with it from the viewpoint of development. Practice is continuously developing. Therefore, as the criterion for verifying truth, it has both absolute and relative significance. It is absolute and unconditional because it verifies all ideas and theories; but it is relative and conditional because at a certain stage of development, it does not fully confirm or negate all ideas and theories.⁴⁶

"Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought" is "science," yet it is still "guiding thought." Without such "universal truth" there is only the pit of "pragmatism" and the prospect of sliding pell-mell down the slippery slopes of "economism." A commentator in *Zhexue yanjiu* (Chinese studies in philosophy) attempted to explain this ambiguity in familiar dialectical terms:

...taking Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought as an object of scientific research and taking it as a guiding thought constitute a unity of opposites embodying a dialectical relationship.⁴⁷

In more practical political terms, the dialectic most recently seems to have swung around in favour of Mao's thought as "guiding thought," particularly in light of Deng Xiaoping's emphasis on the phenomenon of "bourgeois liberalization" as a regrettable, but natural counter-reaction to the metaphysics of the Cultural Revolution. Hu Qiaomu emphasized Deng's analysis, yet he, as a leading intellectual, may have been caught up in his own contradiction, for while he argues that the Gang of Four ignored the "unity of opposites," he cajoles dissidents and implies that cadres and the masses are only free to criticize the mistakes to the "left."⁴⁸

Conclusions

The above discussion generally tends to test those underlying assumptions of Western historiography which identify Mao Zedong exclusively with the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution

and therefore as a radical egalitarian. There is on the contrary a strong historical argument suggesting that Mao struggled against "egalitarianism" and that he accepted that degree of inequality under socialism that originated as a consequence of "each according to his work." Although Mao was predisposed to emphasize politics as the key to economic development, he continuously subscribed to an analytical dialectical materialism, which recognized the weakness in China's productive forces. It was this dialectical materialism, which recognized the need for material incentives under socialism, and which tolerated the commodity-money relationship between the different forms of socialist ownership.

Mao regretted any inequalities which were generated as the result of the continued existence of "bourgeois rights," but the abolition of the latter was rejected by him as contrary to common political sense. Mao's mass line may have had some formal ideological implications of equality, which required that all individuals in society be treated with equal respect, but he was not an "egalitarian" thinker in the sense that he demanded that all social goods be distributed equally to all members of the Chinese population.⁴⁹ Mao accepted a graduated wage scale, and he accepted the differentiation of skilled and unskilled labour under socialism. His qualified acceptance of material rewards originated with a relatively sober dialectical understanding of the weakness of China's productive forces, and an apprehensive political understanding that the direct imposition of a radical egalitarian conception of social justice upon Chinese society would surely break the peasant-worker alliance.

The above historiographical question is not merely a matter of esoteric debate; it is also of immediate relevance to the critical assessment of current economic reforms in China. There is ideological continuity in current reform. Critical assessment requires an explanation of the Chinese structure of ideological perception from within which phenomena such as "economism" and "egalitarianism" are described.

The emphasis on "seeking the truth from the facts" has returned the Party membership to the original dialectical premises of "Mao Zedong Thought." These premises, however, are characterized by a central ambiguity. The "study" of "internal relations" has meant that truth must be formally regarded in terms of the relativity of the historical process. While truth may be relative, "Mao Zedong Thought" as scientific methodology is itself absolute, and it should be emphasized that there is alive in the minds of many Chinese intellectuals and Party theoreticians a neo-positivist complacency which, despite the com-

plexities of dialectical thought, presumes the easy discovery of "objective laws."

Charismatic authority is not at present a formal problem in China, as it has been vociferously rejected as an aspect of "feudalism." It is in fact profoundly distasteful to a generation of political leaders who personally suffered under the arbitrary politics of the Gang of Four era, and it has been described formally to be in contradiction with the "scientific method" of Mao Zedong.

The elaboration of such "scientific" method is not new in the context of CCP history, but the above discussion perhaps calls into question the ability of current Western theory to cope with and to explain accurately current Chinese economic reform within the context of the Chinese ideological perspective. The classical Weberian distinction between an "ethic of responsibility" and an "ethic of ultimate ends," which has so often provided the theoretical basis for the Western study of the intellectual foundations of Third World modernization, does not appear to be too helpful in explaining the Chinese preoccupation with the "rational" achievement of ends. Contemporary Weberian analysis assumes that China cannot be modern and socialist too. The prevailing view in China assumes that economic reform is a process requiring the dialectical consideration of alternatives with respect to the empirical assessment of actual economic and political conditions under socialism. The Chinese leadership are only too well aware that they have called upon the forces of "science" to converge on what is still largely a "feudal" battlefield.

NOTES

1. These foundations include the mass line, "self-reliance," and "seeking the truth from the facts." Communist Party of China, *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), p. 67.
2. See Xue Mou, "On the Party Resolution: Will Small Production Lead to Capitalism," in *Beijing Review* (formerly *Peking Review*, henceforth cited as *BR*), Vol. 25, No. 3, Jan. 18, 1982, pp. 14-16.
3. For example refer to Yu Guangyuan, *Shehuizhuyi shengchan mudi wenti di shisan bian wenzhang* (Thirteen essays on problems relating to the purpose of socialist production) (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1981), pp. 2-4.
4. Xue Muqiao, *China's Socialist Economy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), p. viii.
5. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
7. Communist Party of China, *Resolution*, p. 25.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
9. For example, see the discussion in "On the General Program of Work for the Whole Party and Whole Nation" [a document allegedly inspired by Deng], in Chi Hsin, *The Case of the Gang of Four* (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 1977), p. 223.

10. Union Research Institute, *The Case of Peng De-huai, 1959-68* (Hong Kong: U. R. I., 1968), p. 11.
11. Mao's disassociation of his concept from that of Trotsky has been documented in Stuart R. Schram, "Mao Tse-tung and the Theory of Permanent Revolution," *China Quarterly* (henceforth CQ), No. 46, 1971, 226-227.
12. Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1974), pp. 134-135.
13. Zhang Quinqiao, "On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie," *Peking Review*, No. 14 (1975), 10.
14. Zhou's 1949 criticism of the notion of "born sages" was based on the same reasoning which became explicit in the theoretical rebuttal of Chen Boda's "theory of genius," Zhou Enlai, "On Learning From Mao Tsetung," *BR*, 43 (1978), pp. 7-15.
15. Quoted in a summary of Deng's position on Party reform in *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), Nov. 2, 1981, 1.
16. Boyd Compton, ed., *Mao's China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 36.
17. Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, p. 144.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
19. In his attack, Mao noted: "Genius is dependent on the mass line, on collective wisdom." *Ibid.*, p. 293.
20. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, (henceforth cited as *SW*), Volume I (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), III.
21. Kai Neilsen includes in his discussion of what the "Left" assumes to be "social justice" an emphasis on "complete equality of the overall level of benefits and burdens of each member of that society." "Radical Egalitarian Justice: Justice as Equality," *Social Theory and Practice*, 2 (1979), 210. Mao, however, is not in this sense a "radical egalitarian."
22. Mao Tse-tung, *SW*, Vol. V (Beijing Foreign Languages Press, 1977), p. 127.
23. Mao Tse-tung, *SW*, Vol. V, pp. 289-291.
24. See Zhou Enlai, "On the Question of the Intellectuals," in Robert Bowie, and John K. Fairbank, *Communist China 1955-59* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 135.
25. Communist Party of China, *Resolution*, p. 28.
26. Sun Yefang, *Shehuizhuyi jingji di rogan lilun wenti*, (Several theoretical problems of socialist economy), (Beijing: Renminchubanshe, 1979), p. 305.
27. Mao Zedong, "Critique of Stalin's 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the Soviet Union'," in U.S. Joint Publications Research Service, *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought, 1949-68*, Part I (1974), pp. 196-97.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
30. This is a matter of significant controversy. Chiu Kongyuan in "Bourgeois Rights and the People's Livelihood in Mainland China," *Issues and Studies*, 8 (1977), 12, argues on the basis of a passage from *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* that Mao wished to dismantle the wage structure to bring back the border region supply system of the 1940s. An alternative reading of the passage concerned would suggest that Mao referred to the border region spirit of revolutionary sacrifice in order to emphasize that an *exclusive* emphasis on material incentives would constitute an erroneous economism. Professor John Starr in his recent book, *Continuing the Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 124, fn. 84, agrees with Chiu's analysis, but again his reading of the passage is selective, for Mao's statements in support of the 1956 wage reform are not taken into account.
31. V. I. Lenin, "A Talk with the Defenders of Economism," and "Two Tactics of Social Democratic Revolution," in *Lenin Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), pp. 47, 123.
32. Hu Qiaomu, "Observe Economic Laws, Speed up the Four Modernizations," *BR*, 45 (1978), 7-11 and *BR*, 46 (1978), 15-27. Here p. 7 of No. 46.
33. *BR*, 46 (1978), 22.
34. *BR*, 46: 18.
35. For example see Xiao Liang and Guang Rian, "Shilun Jiezhi guilv tong chiye dili zizhu quan di guanxi" (On the law of value and the right of enterprise to independent action), *Jingji yanjiu* (Economic studies), 5 (1979), 68-78.
36. Professor Martin Whyte in his discussion of "stratification" in China refers to the "typically dialectical formula which avoids both excessive egalitarianism and the exclusive emphasis on material rewards." See Martin Whyte, "Inequality and Stratification in China," *CQ*, 64 (1975), 684-5. Professor Christopher Howe, however, perhaps reflects the more common historiographical assumption, when he suggests the difference between "Maoist" and

- "Liuist" views was such that the "Maoist" wished to return to pre-liberation policies which were "egalitarian" in the sense of the negation of material incentive altogether and the advocacy of a return to a system of public supply. See Christopher Howe, "Labour Organization and Incentives in Industry," Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 244.
37. Premier Zhao recently confirmed the need to correlate, after a conservative fashion increases in productivity with improvement in livelihood. Zhao Ziyang, "The Present Situation and the Principles for Future Economic Construction," *BR*, 51 (1981), 28.
 38. Xue Muqiao, *China's Socialist Economy*, 79. William Parish's comments on the "functional necessity of inequality to both allocate labour and provide incentives" would appear to be quite relevant to Chinese arguments. See William Parish, "Egalitarianism in Chinese Society," *Problems of Communism*, XXX (1981), 50.
 39. In an interview with the author in Beijing on Dec. 23, 1981, Zhao Fusan, Deputy Secretary-General of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, when asked to identify the underlying social factors which gave rise to the Gang of Four, expressed his personal opinion that the main problem was that of feudalism in the countryside.
 40. See the text of the new draft constitution in *China Daily*, Ap. 29, 1982, 4.
 41. See Du Runsheng, "Good Beginning for Reform of the Rural Economic System," *BR* 48, (1981), 15-20. However, this household autonomy was described in a dialectical way with reference to the need to insure "unified management." Professor Victor Falkenheim has expressed reservations about the ability of the current organizational reform to maintain this dialectic, or "dynamic equipose." See Victor Falkenheim, "Autonomy and Control in Chinese Organization: Dilemmas of Rural Administrative Reform," Sidney Greenblatt, et al., eds., *Organizational Behaviour in Chinese Society* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), 204-205.
 42. See Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 105.
 43. For example refer to the discussion in "Conduct In-Depth Scientific Research on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought," *Chinese Studies in Philosophy*, Fall (1979), 5.
 44. For further discussion of the "whateverist" faction versus the "practice" faction of Deng Xiaoping refer to Brantly Womack, "Politics and Epistemology in China since Mao," *CQ*, 80 (1979), 271 and also to Robert Scalapino, "The Continuing Struggle over DeMaoification," *Issues and Studies*, 7 (1980), 27.
 45. Jiang Niantao, *Hongqi* (Red flag), 11, (1979), 17-19 in *China Report*, Joint Publications Research Service 74908, Jan. 11, 1980, p. 29.
 46. Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, *CQ*, 75 (1978), 695.
 47. See fn. 43.
 48. Hu Qiaomu, *BR*, 4 (1982), 17.
 49. I would note Robert Tucker's suggestion that the ideal of "distributive justice" is but "a complete stranger in the mental universe of Marxism." Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 19-20. I would like to thank my colleague, Professor Robert Ware, for drawing my attention to recent literature, which suggests that Marx's slogan, "each according to his needs" is not based on an "egalitarian" notion of equality. For example see Allen Wood, "Marx and Equality," in John Mepham and David Hillel Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, IV (1981), 211.