

'IMPERIALISM' AND 'ANTI-IMPERIALISM' IN MAO ZEDONG:  
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

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## ABSTRACT

The central question which will be considered in this thesis is how Mao Zedong formulated a concept of imperialism and resistance to it, to enable and continue the socialist revolution in China. The specific focus in this thesis is an explanation of how Mao understood imperialism in order to use it and to turn it into anti-imperialism, the origins of his ideas, his theoretical development of it and his application of this idea in practice. At the same time, it will be examined how other aspects of Mao's thinking were linked to this central, strategic concept.

The thesis begins by examining Mao's connection and indebtedness to Marx and Lenin: this has not yet been done with regard to his use of the concept of 'imperialism'. This thesis, besides being a contribution to the history of Marxism therefore, aims to fill a gap in research on Mao. It will help to establish how Mao used the concepts of imperialism and anti-imperialism. In addition, my research is part of the discussion as to what degree Marxism has been revised in the process.

The argument essentially will be that Mao, basing himself on Marx and Lenin, used their concepts to adapt Marxism-Leninism in a novel manner in Chinese circumstances, first to win the revolution, and then to construct what he regarded as socialism. Thus the thesis will do two things: a) it will clarify Mao's relationship to Marx and Lenin: Why did Mao's Marxism-Leninism take the form it did? Did Mao stand on Lenin's shoulders?; and b) it will contribute to understanding why the Chinese Communist Party won the revolution.



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# 'IMPERIALISM' AND 'ANTI-IMPERIALISM' IN MAO ZEDONG: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'imperialism', seen as an exploitative international system, has been perhaps the most widely used of all Marxist-Leninist categories, influencing not only all sections of the communist movement, but much third world nationalism as well. Little present in Marx, it was given codification in the writings of Lenin around the time of the First World War: its function was not only to explain how and why more developed capitalist countries dominated the colonial world, but also to provide an explanation for conflict in the international system as a whole and, through that explanation, to suggest a strategy for challenging capitalist rule on a global scale. It therefore became an organizing principle for communist revolutionary strategy in the first half of the twentieth century: analysis of 'imperialism' provided not only an explanation for the dynamics of international relations and for the impact of the advanced capitalist states on the third world, but also a means for opposing this system within specific countries and on the international plane. The most important of all this opposition was, of course, that of China, a country containing a quarter of the human race and where, from the 1920s onwards, a revolutionary communist movement challenged and eventually overcame its domestic and international opponents. Central to that challenge was the conception of 'imperialism' and 'anti-imperialism' developed by the leader of that revolution, Mao Zedong. It is not so much

any theoretical or analytical originality that justifies its examination in the pages which follow, but rather the means by which this concept was applied to China and the importance which it occupied in the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary strategy. The interrelationship of national and class oppression and exploitation and the forces this dialectic generates was understood by Mao and became part of his thinking and action.

### Mao and the Marxist Tradition

The central question which will be considered is how Mao Zedong formulated a concept of imperialism and resistance to it to enable and continue the socialist revolution in China. The specific focus in this thesis is an explanation of how Mao understood imperialism in order to use it and to turn it into anti-imperialism, the origins of his ideas, his theoretical development of it and his application of this idea into practice. At the same time, it will be examined how other aspects of Mao's thinking were linked to this central, strategic concept.

I will begin by examining Mao's connection and indebtedness to Marx and Lenin: this has not yet been done with regard to his use of the concept 'imperialism'. The second and third chapters therefore lay out the antecedents and theoretical framework within which Mao operated. This thesis, besides being a contribution to the history of Marxism therefore, aims to fill a gap in research on Mao. It will help

to establish how Mao used the concepts of imperialism and anti-imperialism. In addition, my research is part of the discussion as to what degree Marxism has been revised in the process.

This thesis will make clear what Mao meant by the term imperialism and how he used it. The central goal of the thesis is, therefore after providing the background in Marx and Engels, to analyze Mao's view on imperialism as manifested in his writings. While the historical context of Mao's thinking will be provided, this is not the main focus of the chapters. Imperialism is the pivotal concept, which properly understood can give a key to understanding his policies. This will then enable me to examine how other aspects (United Front, class etc.) of Mao's thinking were linked to this central, strategic concept.

This touches on the much debated issue of Mao's use of Marxism itself. Mao used - perhaps invented - the concept of 'sinification of Marxism' as any effective Marxism required national forms. Mao's idea of the 'sinification of Marxism' has been used as evidence that he subsumed Marxism within his nationalism and Chinese culture. However, the way he 'nationalized' Marxism was fashioned by Marxism, and its tasks were defined by revolutionary considerations of class and class-consciousness. Mao and his dealings with imperialism are an example of this sinification and actualization of Marxism. My argument is that, despite this sinification, Mao stands in a broad sense within a Marxist-Leninist tradition. He did not break from orthodox Marxism through his emphasis on developments within the superstructure. There are elements of

voluntarism in Mao - but, does not all actual revolutionary politics involve voluntarism? There is also at times an uncertain grasp of Marxist-Leninist theory and a lack of rigour in his analysis. But there are also significant elements of an orthodox Marxism. In addition, anybody using the concepts of class analysis in terms of a social and national revolution, discussing alliances with different groups, using the concept of relations of production, operates largely in a Marxist-Leninist paradigm.

The argument is essentially that Mao, basing himself on Marx and Lenin, used their concepts to adapt Marxism-Leninism in a novel manner in Chinese circumstances, first to win the revolution, and then to construct what he regarded as socialism. Thus this thesis will do two things: (a) it will clarify Mao's relationship to Marx and Lenin: Why did Mao's Marxism-Leninism take the form it did? Did Mao stand on Lenin's shoulders?; and (b) it will contribute to understanding why the Chinese Communist Party won the revolution. Mao agreed with Lenin's idea of political action in the interest of certain classes. He was a Bolshevik, not a Menshevik, i.e. not someone who wanted to wait until the time and production forces were 'ripe' and history had developed appropriately.

There are however, two obvious problems with this approach. First there is the problem of language. Mao wrote in Chinese but his major writings and actions are accessible. Not only do I have Mao's works, five volumes of his Selected Works in mind but also Kau's and Martin's complete works.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, numerous secondary works are available for a

serious study of Mao and his thought. I do not want to claim that there are no problems with translating a foreign language, but, at least for my purpose, it is not an insuperable problem.

If translation is no insuperable problem, then Mao's fragmentary literary output is, which is also the case with Lenin and Marx. Mao's writings can be divided by their length. He wrote numerous letters, directives, editorials, public addresses and lectures, intra-party memoranda, poems, polemical rejoinders against adversaries, and interviews with domestic and foreign correspondents; and these were often quite short. His longer writings deal with a variety of topics, but nowhere did he leave behind one detailed, comprehensive, and closely-argued document setting out in its entirety his understanding and analysis of imperialism and anti-imperialism. Mao is a political writer in the first place, he is a political figure like Lenin. "Politics", Mao asserted, "[is] the concentrated expression of economics."<sup>2</sup> This definition had been coined by Lenin, though in a different context of a polemic with Bukharin and Trotsky.<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the official version of On New Democracy that Mao used Lenin's definition of politics as 'the concentrated expression of economics', but there is no citation in the original text. He is not a theoretician such as Marx, or even Lenin, but acts of course on the basis of a certain theory.

Many of Mao's writings were produced in direct response to the ever-changing socio-economic environment. On the one hand, one should expect in these responses to the political scene, disunity and discontinuity. There cannot be unity in the sense



of an 'essential' Mao, one who would have the same assessment on different issues during the fifty years and more he wrote and was politically active. The development of Mao's thought is a response to the changing political and economic domestic and international context. Taking this into consideration, one should not be surprised to find differences and changes, even silences in his thought. On the other hand, there is of course continuity. The same can be said of many influential thinkers: discussing their work now involves reassembling it. In fact, Mao's views on imperialism and anti-imperialism are scattered throughout his writings. As a result, an exercise in exegetical interpretation is the obvious methodology. We aim to identify references to imperialism and anti-imperialism, piece them together, and analyze the picture that emerges. In so doing, I will reconstruct Mao's thoughts on imperialism and anti-imperialism and trace these to the thought of Lenin and Marx. The key point of this thesis is to elucidate the use of this concept by Mao, Lenin and Marx. The thesis is about the use of a concept, it is a thesis on political thought and it is a contribution to the history of Marxism. We will make clear the shifting meaning of the concept imperialism and its meaning in the context of Mao's thought, that is the response to imperialism, that is anti-imperialism, becomes the priority.

After a statement like this, are there any pretensions to objectivity left? The erkenntnisleitende Interesse (Habermas) could not be expressed more clearly! To avoid this subjectivity as much as possible, I have tried to let the texts speak for themselves, sometimes at great length, in the hope of making

Mao's original intention clear. Of course, an interpreter of the text is needed and this must mean an anticipatory framework. However, I have added to the exegetical methodology an openness of my theoretical premises for my interpretation. Naturally, Foucault would have never accepted that texts speak for themselves. But I would deny that any interpretation can only be the interpretation of the interpreter, not that of the authors (in this case Marx, Lenin and Mao) under investigation. One will, of course, never be able to get into the mind of Mao, but one can make an effort to get as close as possible to these authors' intent.

This does not deny the possibility that other writers, even with the same perspective, might come to a different interpretation of Mao's use of the concept of imperialism and anti-imperialism. But up to now, no one has written a detailed work on the development of the concept of imperialism from Marx to Lenin to Mao. There are writings on nationalism in all of these writers. But these works do not take the concept of imperialism as their central focus. The issue here is, how does one trace the concept of imperialism and its emphasis on anti-imperialism in Mao and Lenin and Marx? How does one understand and locate Mao, as he is not just part of a general discourse on nationalism, but derives from Marxism-Leninism? This argument might not be new, but there is no systematic and logical prosecution of this key concept in Lenin, as prepared by Marx and the development of it by Mao. In the following pages a picture of consistency and difference, contradictions and silences, and similarities and connections will be

developed. Mao's anti-imperialism is not just a product of a national response to imperialism, but is inspired by earlier concepts of imperialism in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. It is part of the discussion in Marxist theories of imperialism of the interrelationship of national and class oppression and exploitation. There is no uniform Marxist body of thought spanning continents and more than a century dealing with these issues. For this reason alone there are contradictions and silences. Marxism is an evolving body of theory and practice. Mao's conception of imperialism and anti-imperialism was part of this evolving and dynamic political and theoretical tradition.

It is a Marxist axiom that changed historical circumstances necessitate new analysis and strategies. This is exactly what Mao attempted, a logical and systematical reconstruction of this attempt will be provided.

I come to Mao's theory of imperialism by tracing it back to Marx and Lenin. Marx and Lenin are the stepping stones Mao uses to comprehend Chinese realities, or as Isaac Deutscher put it: "... Chinese communism descends straight from Bolshevism. Mao stands on Lenin's shoulders."<sup>4</sup> In this process of using Marx and Lenin the similarities and differences between these thinkers and practitioners will become obvious. Mao used, but also adapted, Marxist-Leninist concepts, and one key concept among these is imperialism. The centrality of imperialism was beyond doubt for Mao and, therefore, a proper understanding of it is central to assessing the Chinese revolution, as it was for the Bolsheviks. This centrality of imperialism was

recognized for the first time by Lenin. His model is organized around the concepts of capital accumulation, imperial expansion, interstate conflict, violence, national differences, national oppression and the national struggle; but still it is concerned to maintain the orthodox Marxist importance of class. For example, one of Lenin's adjustments to Marx's and Engels' concepts of class is the invention of the labour aristocracy. Taken together, these provided the elements for a general theory of the international system and the place of revolutionary politics within it.

Although the concept of imperialism was little used in Marx's time - he only employed it himself with reference to Napoleon III - he did address certain themes which Lenin would later take up in his characterization of the international system through a definition of imperialism. These themes are: the process of accumulation, crises of accumulation, and the geographical spread of capitalist relations of production. Marx analyzed the nature of exploitative capitalism. A crucial element in Marxist understanding of capitalism is the need to constantly accumulate and to expand to avoid a *'tendential fall of the rate of profit'*. That is why, Marx believed, industrial capitalists are in favour of free trade rather than protectionism. The world market needs to be opened up to serve as a temporary safety valve to avoid crisis in the domestic-capitalist economy. Marx's and Engel's model is one of a world capitalist system divided into social classes, particularly workers and capitalists. Nations were to them, in general, obstacles to the actual realization of this model.

Lenin was very much aware of this development of capitalism on a global level. He saw the concentration and centralization of capitalism developing before his eyes, something Marx observed only in its beginnings. Capitalism was in this process changing its nature from competitive to monopoly capitalism. Despite his emphasis on monopoly capitalism and the economic side of imperialism, Lenin never neglected its military or political facets. Inter-capitalist conflict led to the First World War. With the spread of imperialism on a world scale, Lenin, contrary to Marx and Engels, emphasized national differences, national oppression and the national struggle; but he also still emphasized the importance of class.

Mao did not provide a theoretical analysis of the inherent economic laws of imperialism, but took over a Marxist-Leninist vocabulary. He tried to understand how to resist further occupation and exploitation, and to develop from this a non-dogmatic use of Marxist-Leninist principles for China. What is interesting about Mao is what implicit theories of the interrelation of class and nation lie behind his analytical writings and his tactical positions.

### Marx and Lenin: Capitalism and its Contradiction

This introduction will establish the intellectual legacy with which Mao operated in China. The argument is that Mao used, and in some respects developed, concepts which were earlier addressed by Marx and Lenin. Mao's formulation of imperialism

and resistance to it grew out of a substantial body of debate within the Marxist tradition on the question of how capitalism became a global phenomenon and how it generated resistance to itself. Marx believed that this global development of capitalism could not substantially avoid crisis and revolution, and the eventual socialist revolution in European industrialized countries would bring with it an end to war. This development of capitalism to a new stage of monopoly capitalism, according to Lenin, had the effect of saving capitalism from revolution longer than expected by Marx. But within it, monopoly capitalism still carried the seeds of its own destruction. Domestic competition was transferred onto the global level. All advanced capitalist countries wanted to benefit from profits in outer-European regions. A desperate struggle was under way in Lenin's time to secure these safety valves. Heightened tensions and wars were the inevitable result. The socialist revolution in Europe in the meantime was postponed and capitalist nationalisms opposed each other in their attempt to occupy colonies, but colonial nationalism was also awakened to oppose the exploitation in the colonies. Lenin conceptualized these diverse developments in Europe and the colonies in his concept of 'uneven and combined development'. In Europe, some profited more than others from exploitation, e.g. the labour aristocracy, something Marx and Engels had already become aware of. In addition certain industries profited more than others: uneven growth took place in capitalist countries. In their move to the colonies capitalists were, Lenin believed, not interested in a planned

industrialization of colonies. Lenin saw clearly that there was uneven growth in the colonies. Compared to Marx this was a new element; for him, conceptualized in his 'Double Mission of Capitalism', capitalism was essentially acting positively in the colonies. It was the material preparation for socialism. On the one hand, capitalism destroyed the old traditional, feudal mode of production; on the other, capitalism would build societies in its own image. Insofar as it produced industrialization and also created the bourgeoisie and proletariat, Marx regarded it positively in the hope for an eventual transition to socialism.

Lenin observed at close quarters the uneven impact of capitalism in Russia where the unevenness of growth led to an uneven development of capitalism. It resulted in deep tensions, which he saw replicated in the colonies. This heterogeneity meant that new options for the revolution were opened. The new bourgeoisie gained from intervention; old feudal elements suffered; a working class was generated, if only in its infancy. Social tensions rose to boiling point, as the peasantry was, of course, also shaken by these developments.

Developments which occurred one after the other over time in Europe, feudalism to capitalism to potentially socialism would be combined in one phase in Russia and in the colonies, too. There was simultaneously in the colonies a struggle against feudalism and against capitalism. In Russia the divided bourgeoisie was not able to conduct a proper bourgeois-capitalist revolution. The Communist Party took over this task by leading Russia into socialism. The Communist Party was born

in the special conditions of uneven development and even though it might not consist of numerous workers, the consciousness of the people who joined was particularly high and sharpened. In these circumstances Russia could skip the distinct capitalist phase and proceed into socialism. Yet this Russian opportunity was unsustainable on its own: for Lenin the revolution in Russia was exceptional and could really only survive if virtually simultaneous socialist revolutions occurred in the heartland of capitalism - Europe.

Marx also addressed the issue of skipping capitalism to go forward to socialism. He was asked for advice by *narodniks* who believed that the traditional village community in Russia still contained all the elements necessary for an unalienated mode of production. Even though Marx was to a certain extent ambiguous in his reply, the following analysis will show that on balance, whilst there are no blueprints and iron laws in socio-economic development, avoiding the capitalist phase in Russia was out of the question.

Even though Lenin concurred with Marx concerning Russia, he believed that in the colonies the situation would be different if certain conditions were observed. Anti-imperialist struggles in the colonies were not only in the short run useful for Lenin in that they weakened imperialism, but there was now the realistic chance of national liberation leading to socialism. It was necessary for the local communist party to guide the struggle in the colonies to be allied to local bourgeois anti-imperialist forces, but without being sucked in by them. The task for the local communist party, he argued was



to continue this anti-imperialist liberation into socialism. This view of national liberation is completely contradictory to the one held by Marx and Engels. For them the European and local nationalist bourgeoisie had to destroy fully the feudal elements, build up industrialization and not be weakened in this by a local liberation movement. They feared that a liberation movement would lead to an exchange of feudal elites rather than a breakthrough towards capitalism, and thus later on socialism. They hoped for a socialist revolution in the most developed countries, not only in one, and with highly developed commodity economies. If, however, nationalist forces were led by the most conscious vanguard of the working class, one could not but grasp the opportunity to end foreign and domestic capitalist exploitation, Lenin argued. It will be demonstrated that Marx and Lenin considered capitalism to be a dynamic system continually seeking to accumulate and inevitably expanding beyond national boundaries to create an international division of labour, linking capitalist countries to the colonies. Marx developed a general conception of the inner logic of capital, and Lenin derived from it a more historically specific analysis of the operation of late nineteenth-early twentieth century capitalism and its political and military outcomes.

### 'Imperialism' and 'Anti-Imperialism' in the Chinese Revolution

Despite the many theoretical problems with Lenin's theory of imperialism, Lenin gave Mao a framework for understanding and

responding to imperialism; it gave him an understanding of the potential for socialist revolution in the colonies. After all, it is not so much the fact of the crucifixion of Jesus which is of interest, but that people two thousand years later still believe in it. In the same way it is of significant theoretical and political interest to understand why Mao used Lenin's concept of imperialism. That imperialism was central to China was not doubted by Sun Yatsen, Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong alike - the question was how to assess it and respond to it.

Mao recognized the uneven impact of imperialism on China and with it the potential for a combined development of anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist struggle in China leading to socialism. It had not created capitalist industrialization in depth, however, even though, in Mao's opinion, the sprouts of capitalism had already existed. But imperialism had accelerated this process and had brought forward the question of the national-democratic revolution which was to be followed later by the socialist revolution on the political agenda.

As Lenin had already postulated, the socialist revolution could only be successful if certain conditions were observed. Mao is the person who, using Marxist-Leninist concepts, played a key role in bringing about a successful anti-imperialist revolution in China. In the process, he changed this Marxist-Leninist framework, adapting it to a new context and a different time. As the proletariat was numerically very weak, even weaker than in Russia, and too weak for Mao to begin thinking about the early achievement of socialism, one of the

key questions for Mao was to identify the forces who would support - or not - an anti-imperialist struggle. This was the question he also addressed to international forces, in terms of the new world order offered by Lenin and the Soviet Union, by President Wilson and the United States after the First World War, and of course by Japan's co-prosperity sphere in Asia. Thus Mao was able to use imperialist countries in his resistance to Japanese imperialism in particular and imperialism in China in general. This did not mean an automatic alliance with the Soviet Union to the exclusion of imperialist countries, but at the time of Japanese aggression it involved the possibility of cooperation with less aggressive imperialist governments, e.g. the United States and Great Britain, making use of differences between imperialist countries to his advantage. This international strategy was matched by one of domestic alliances, an equally important part of the 'anti-imperialist' strategy. Here, the opportunity to make mistakes and to ally oneself in the wrong way had already been pointed out by Lenin. The Chinese Communist Party made exactly this mistake in the 1920s acting on Comintern advice not to take the leadership in the alliance with the national bourgeoisie; it needed to take this line due to its weakness, but the result was disaster. In 1927 Chiang Kaishek virtually smashed the Chinese Communist Party: the cities were occupied by the KMT, the proletariat crushed. The only practical solution was, after 1927, to take refuge in the countryside among the peasants. This move to the countryside, however, was not merely a desperate attempt to escape but a logical move in a country

where the socio-economic problems of the peasantry were massive. Mao advocated very early a re-orientation of the tactics and strategy of the Chinese Communist Party to accomodate the political and economic demands of the peasantry.

Accordingly, the peasants and the countryside became the heartland for a socialist revolution. Marx would have been utterly astonished to hear a self-declared Marxist-Leninist propose such a strategy. But, Mao argued, if this struggle in the countryside was guided by the most conscious vanguard of the revolution, the workers, or at least by peasants and intellectuals with a worker's consciousness, a socialist revolution would still be an ultimate possibility. This is made clear in many of Mao's writings from the 1927-30 period, when he was developing a strategy for rural revolution. This could only succeed, according to Mao, with working class leadership. Lenin could have only but agreed.

Through endless meanders of compromise Mao, charming and bullying, according to the audience he was addressing, led the Chinese Communist Party after 1935 (the Zunyi Conference) through what are termed the twin dangers of putschism and accommodation. It was the anti-imperialist nationalism of the Chinese Communist Party which gave it access to the broad masses of people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Even Chiang was obliged to join a Second United Front. This very close relationship between Marxism-Leninism and national struggle does not mean, in Mao's view, that Marxism is used as a convenient cover for nationalist goals, but signifies an active inter-connection between Marxism and nationalism. Marx

and Engels did not condemn all occurrences of nationalism, particularly after studying Irish and Polish nationalism. The ambiguities and inconsistencies in Marx and Lenin concerning the nationalist question opened the way for Mao to connect nationalism and the social revolution within a Marxist-Leninist framework. This interrelation of national and class oppression and exploitation is one of the main questions at issue in Marxist theories of imperialism, and will be a major pre-occupation for this thesis.

This interaction narrowed the gap between Marxist-Leninist principles and the practice of revolution in China. The struggle against Japan was not in the first place a struggle for socialism, but for nationalist independence in the bourgeois-democratic phase. This remained the case even after the defeat of Japan. To eliminate the danger of another imperialist country taking control of China, this bourgeois-democratic revolution had to be continued, but now against Chiang and the feudal elements in the KMT. Mao's view of how to accomplish the socialist revolution meant that he eventually realized that socialism was not on the agenda for decades, as he put it. What was to be done and implemented was the bourgeois-democratic revolution of the four classes under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. For him one could work together with bourgeois nationalist elements - something which led to noticeable socio-economic successes after 1949. Mao extended cooperation with the national bourgeoisie beyond anything Lenin had ever envisaged, challenging in the process Moscow's ideological monopoly. The Chinese Communist Party's

victory reinforced the belief in different conceptions of the road to socialism. One example had been the victory of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 which had been an economic and political struggle culminating in an armed uprising in the cities. The other was the Chinese road, using the countryside to surround the cities in a long-drawn out struggle.

### Summary of Chapters

Mao's concept of imperialism was a crucial part of his strategy for the success of the revolution in China. It will be retraced how he came to his concept through Marx and Lenin. Mao developed a specific way of understanding imperialism and applying it to the conditions in China. In this process he adapted the Marxist-Leninist framework by subtracting from, and adding to, it. It is these changes which enabled the continued attempts to achieve the nationalist and socialist revolutions in China.

This thesis will examine the origins of the Marxist theory of imperialism, how Mao understood the concept, how he used it, and the relationship in which he stands to Marx and Lenin. Mao attempted to restate Marxism-Leninism in China in meaningful, indigenous terms, but he did so in a way which is recognizably Marxist-Leninist. It is this purpose which the thesis will pursue, and it will do so by examining the issues covered in the following chapters.

The thesis's significance lies not only in the fact that little attention has been devoted to Mao's theory of

imperialism, but also in the fact that it provides a genealogy of the concept of imperialism in Mao's thought and it addresses the way he operationalized the concept to pursue the anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle in China.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Everybody knows that Mao only spoke Chinese. My Chinese is regrettably very limited. Can I nevertheless write a thesis about a key concept in Mao's thought? The lack of Chinese did not stop Max Weber or Karl Marx from writing about China - and at their time the availability of translations from the Chinese was indeed severely restricted. This is obviously not the case nowadays. The lack of language proficiency can only be an issue if none or only a limited number of translations exist. The question is, of course, not whether one knows how to read Chinese, but how to read the material available - how to read a body of text. In other words, what are the questions one intends to adopt. There were always two definitions of Mao Zedong's thought: (a) what he actually thought about, wrote and said during his long life, and (b) what was printed in the Selected Works. This thesis is not an attempt to compare the original, un-doctored writings of Mao with the officially sanctioned, printed material even though references to differences will be made where necessary.
2. Mao Tse-tung, Selected Works, vol. II, On New Democracy, (Foreign Language Press:Peking), 1975, p. 340.
3. V.I. Lenin, "Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin", in V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Foreign Languages Publishing House:Moscow) 1963, vol. 32, p. 83.
4. Isaac Deutscher, Ironies of History. Essays on Contemporary Communism, (Oxford University Press: London) 1966, p. 90.

## 2. MARX AND ENGELS ON IMPERIALISM

### (i) Definition of Imperialism. The Lack of Use of the Concept by Marx and Engels.

This chapter will establish the intellectual framework within which Mao operated in China, arguing that he used concepts which had been addressed earlier by Marx and Lenin. Although he did not define imperialism as Lenin understood it, Marx laid the foundation for Lenin's use of the concept by analyzing the crises inherent in capitalism which led it to expand globally. He discussed the issues of concentration and centralization of capitalism and how this led to free trade, a policy which was demanded by the most advanced groups in England in the mid-nineteenth century. The effect of capitalism on the colonies was considered by Marx to be essentially positive in that it destroyed the old feudal or Asiatic mode of production. For Lenin, however - and this is a significant difference from Marx - this move to capitalism creates an uneven development of old and new elements. Capitalism does not penetrate all layers of colonial societies, nor do people receive imperialism with open arms. Imperialism creates resistance. The effect of imperialism is so uneven that the result is a social formation with a mix of old and new, where in Russia and also in China, the possibility of a successful revolution is suddenly thrust upon the Communist Party. This situation does not reflect a textbook recipe for making



revolution, as in China workers were thin on the ground and the revolution had to re-orientate itself to the countryside and peasants which differed sharply from Marx's view of the main actor and area of revolution. Lenin realized the need for, and importance of, including peasants in the revolution, a development which was pushed even further by Mao. The resistance created by imperialism led to a fanning of nationalism and a nationalist liberation struggle. Marx had hoped that nationalism would be overcome by class-conscious workers worldwide. Lenin acknowledged the positive power of nationalism in colonialism and extended support for it. Anti-imperialist nationalism however had stirred very diverse groups of people to fight for influence. This opened the way to strengthen one's own forces - which were still quite weak in China - if one could find the right allies; but it also influenced the Communist Party away from an undiluted pursuit of social revolution. This issue was very important to Mao, and Lenin had discussed with M. N. Roy: what the role of the Communist Party in an anti-imperialist alliance should be. Eventually Mao was able to develop a United Front concept which was a symbol for his acceptance of general Marxist-Leninist ideas adapted to a specific Chinese situation. He believed strongly in the 'abstract' universal principles of Marxism-Leninism, and also that Marxism as a total ideology resulted from the union of these abstract principles and the 'laws' depicting the regularities of particular national contexts.

After establishing the basic principles of Marxism and Leninism in the treatment of capitalism and imperialism, it

will become clear how Mao took these principles and used them in the particular context of defeating imperialism and achieving the socialist revolution in China.

In commonly accepted definitions, imperialism is described as an expansionist policy of European powers to influence, exploit and dominate the people of non-European, usually weaker countries by overt or covert political military, economic and ideological means. Such an analysis distinguishes between earlier unilateral systems of market relations and today's vastly complex integrated capitalist mode of production. What is specific to the Marxist perspective, however, is that imperialism is seen not as the aggregation of an unequal flow of commodities and capital, but as the world-scale process of the extension of capitalism that has been taking place since the middle of the eighteenth century. As Krippendorff has pointed out:

The qualitative new element, which begins with imperialism which takes over from crude colonialism, is therefore not the creation of an internationally communicative unit; however it is the beginning of the creation of an interdependent social system, whose individual parts are not able anymore to develop autonomously nor according to their own laws, but on the contrary develop in the interest of some societies - the capitalist industrialist nation-states of Europe and North America - and they will be subjected to a radical social and economic transformation.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the Roman, Oriental, Arab, or other earlier forms of imperial domination and colonialism, modern imperialism, Krippendorff continues, is defined as "the active economic integration of pre-industrial societies into the capitalist mode of production". In this way the system of capitalist production with its specific exchange and production relations

has become an international mode of production. A multitude of factors - non-economic as well as economic - caused this particular development in response to structural socioeconomic needs.

In order to gauge the distinctiveness of this approach, let us consider the contrary definition of Hans Kohn:

Western imperialism has had only a brief day in history. Its sun is now setting and though this sun has been shining over many injustices and cruelties, in no way worse than the normal cruelties in Asia and Africa, it has brought lasting benefits to Asia and Africa, as the imperialism of Alexander the Great and of the Romans did for their empires, and has awakened and revitalised lethargic civilisations.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Marxist view, such an indiscriminate definition empties the concept of any useful and distinct content and makes it impossible to employ in concrete analysis. Benjamin J. Cohen's characterization of imperialism as "any relationship of effective domination or control, political or economic, direct or indirect, of one nation over another", or George Lichtheim's similar definition are both examples of this widespread understanding of the concept.<sup>3</sup> The problem with these writers is not that they equate imperialism with formal political conquest, but that they fail to explain why those conquests occurred, and to understand the territorial imperatives of capitalist expansion in the era of finance capital.

When it is not regarded as an age-old phenomenon having no specific application to capitalism, imperialism is interpreted as being simultaneously new and old. Schumpeter, for example, believed that imperialism was not a result of capitalism, but on the contrary a preceding stage which would naturally

disappear with capitalism's full development.

The history of the concept of imperialism is a relatively brief one, for even as recently as the eighteenth century the term was unknown; only the adjective 'imperialist', used to describe a supporter of the Imperial and Catholic Majesty, Emperor of the Romans might have been known to a few learned scholars. The French word *l'impérialisme* first appeared with the Bonapartist revival under Louis-Philippe's monarchy (1830-48), and later came to represent the form of rule adopted by Napoleon III after he seized power in December 1852 - that is, a rule based upon military pomp, appeals to the mob and the influence of the stock exchange.<sup>4</sup>

When we come to Marx himself, his use of the term 'imperialism' was identical to that of the Bonapartist revival period. One of the best-known examples is in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852), where he referred to 'the hidden imperialism of Le National. (Le National was the journal of the republican bourgeoisie.)<sup>5</sup> Further on in the same article he used the term in connection with the role of the French peasantry in the transition from the Second Republic to the Bonapartist regime (1848-52). After accusing the bourgeoisie of hypocrisy for its allegations that the peasantry 'betrayed' it to Bonaparte, he argued that in reality the bourgeoisie itself nurtured the imperialism of the peasant class.<sup>6</sup>

Such fleeting references might suggest that Marx himself contributed very little indeed to what has become known as the 'Marxist concept of imperialism'. However, it will be shown that Marx's general theory of capitalism, together with his own

and Engels's writings on the expansion of capitalism in regions outside Europe, and their writings on the relations of nation are full of references to class and laid part of the crucial foundations on which Lenin and Mao Zedong were able to build their concept of imperialism. I shall return in detail to the question of whether the concept underwent any fundamental transformation in the hands of these later writers.

The writings of Marx and Engels directly concerned with the East and Far East - the principal area of capitalist expansion in their time - are scattered throughout their huge corpus of books, articles and letters. But as Kubalkova and Cruickshank have wryly remarked, they "were inconsiderate enough to fail to provide for their readers a neatly referenced synthesis of their work with the main ideas and theories carefully plotted".<sup>7</sup> Marx and Engels were very interested in the development of capitalism in and outside Europe, but they were less concerned with Asia as such. "Marx concentrated his energies on the study of capitalism, and he dealt with the rest of history in varying degrees of detail, but mainly in so far as it bore on the origins and development of capitalism."<sup>8</sup> They saw Asia mainly in connection with the impact of European industrial capitalism, so that their interest in Asia developed as a result of the expansion of capitalism. Moreover, their major works on the rise and consolidation of capitalist society naturally focused on its core country, England, and their interest in Asia only developed after 1848 from their analyses of European industrial capitalism.<sup>9</sup> The principal sources are the articles that Marx and Engels wrote for the New York Daily

Tribune between 1851 and 1862. When reading these articles it is necessary to bear in mind that they were running commentaries and reports on contemporary, often military, events - quite a different genre from their theoretical writings proper - with a relative lack of economic or class analysis.<sup>10</sup>

In this material Marx and Engels were concerned mostly with India, but also China. This is partly because they happened to be living in England at the time when it was trying to enforce the conditions for free trade. If they had been living in Holland, for example, they would quite probably have written more about Java. More importantly, however, they regarded England as the pivot of the capitalist world, whose inherent mechanisms and expansionist tendencies indicated the direction in which capitalism itself would develop. They believed that England could not be treated simply as a country along with other countries. England was the metropolis of capital. England was "the representative of European industry in the world market".<sup>11</sup> For this reason it is sometimes appropriate for the reader mentally to replace the word 'England' with the more general term 'capitalist country' or even 'capitalism'. Similarly, in the nature of its exploitation, India came to be seen by Marx and Engels as typifying a process whose significance transcended its own particularities. And what happened to China was not peculiar to China, but represented what was to happen to all other such countries, to a greater or lesser degree.

Thus, although Marx and Engels did not directly analyze

imperialism, they did lay the foundation for Lenin to construct his theory. The advantage of starting with Marx is that he alone has developed a general theory of the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production as a totality. At the heart of his theory is the process of capital accumulation. This general theory allows specific historical applications and models to be developed - as Lenin later did to account for imperialism.

(ii) Capitalism's Double Mission

Marx and Engels understood that while it was transforming them, capitalism was bringing unprecedented misery to the colonies.<sup>12</sup> One might assume that their use of the term 'misery' entailed a moral evaluation of such phenomena as civil wars, invasions, famines, conquests or European despotism grafted upon Oriental despotism. In reality, however, they perceived misery as a necessary consequence of the complete disintegration of the existing social framework in colonial societies. As they said of China, the death-hour of the old society was "rapidly drawing nigh".<sup>13</sup> Marx described how England had destroyed the village-community system in India, which had remained self-sufficient for centuries.<sup>14</sup> This work of destruction was not caused primarily by the British army or the British taxman, but by the imposition of free trade and steam machines. "It was the British intruder who broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning-wheel."<sup>15</sup> Later in the same article Marx wrote: "British steam power and science destroyed,

over the whole surface of Hindostan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry."<sup>16</sup> It was this union that Marx described in a letter as the "solid foundation for stagnant Asiatic despotism".<sup>17</sup> This process of disintegration revealed the "real history of British rule".<sup>18</sup> Marx and Engels condemned the British capitalists for their plunder, violence, torture; in a word, for their barbarism. Indeed, they compared them unfavourably with "the Calmuck hordes of Genghis Khan and Timur".<sup>19</sup>

However significant and impressive this emotional condemnation may be, Marx and Engels never unconditionally damned colonialism. This is regretted by some writers: "It would be a pleasure to report that Marx opposed the British occupation of India from the beginning, and that he welcomed the uprising of 1857 ...".<sup>20</sup> Others, in an attempt to overcome the implicit ideological embarrassment, have argued that there was a fundamental shift in Marx's position. Mohiri, for example, is of the opinion that in the 1850s, Marx assessed colonialism as a progressive force, but that from the 1860s onwards his view had changed to one of hostility and contempt.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, one should not minimize the importance that Marx and Engels consistently attached to the growth of the productive forces made possible by the introduction of capitalism in the colonies. Authors like Davis, who are eager to discover a shift from acceptance of colonialism to active opposition,<sup>22</sup> do not seem to understand this basic point. It appears likely that Marx and Engels exaggerated the depth and effect of capitalist penetration in the colonies, but as Mandel



has explained, this is quite a different matter:

But unlike many of those who call themselves his disciples, Marx sees no contradiction between acknowledging and emphasizing this 'historically necessary mission' of capitalism and constantly pillorying whatever is exploitative, inhuman and oppressive in it. Marx keeps in view all the time the **two contradictory aspects** (emphasis in the original) of the historical reality he has experienced, and steadily steers clear of both reefs, that of subjectivism and that of objectivism.<sup>23</sup>

In the article on 'The British Rule in India', there is already an eloquent expression of that ambivalence which is the key to Marx's analysis of colonialism in India:

Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness these myriads of industrious, patriarchal, and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget that these little communities ... subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey and Sabbala, the cow.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps we can understand this attitude better if we remember that, in general, although Marx was a bitter political enemy of the bourgeoisie, he had the profoundest respect for the material and technical accomplishments of bourgeois society. Questions of morals or justice were of secondary importance beside the progressive mission of capitalism. Thus, in the Communist Manifesto Marx said of the bourgeoisie: "It

has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals".<sup>25</sup> These wonders essentially came down to the many-sided, highly developed organization of production in capitalism.

In the historical development of humankind, with all its socio-economic conflicts, Marx identified progress as the increasing independence from or even domination of human beings over nature - the extent to which this was achieved being reflected in, among other things, the level of development of the forces of production and the corresponding social relations, i.e. the division of labour, private property, commodity production and the necessity to sell labour power. The bourgeoisie's technical development of the forces of production was thus highly appreciated by Marx and Engels, for it was necessarily a levelling process and an identification of the interests of workers of all nations.

When they turned their attention to regions outside Europe, Marx and Engels had little positive to say. During the Indian mutiny in 1857 Marx called the Asian nations "great",<sup>26</sup> but their basic judgement was nevertheless that such societies were devoid of history, as history was for them the history of class struggles. The state in these countries confronted simple public slavery. And the absence of class conflict meant that these 'rotting semi-civilizations' had no internal dynamic for change. "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society."<sup>27</sup>

This idea seems to have been taken straight from Voltaire and Hegel.

These communities had no intercourse with the outside world, no commodity production, no Burgher, no cities or conflicts between aristocracy and monarchy, church and state, and so on. In the article The Future Results of British Rule in India, Marx added: "The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton."<sup>28</sup> It was therefore obvious to Marx, that "the breaking-up of these stereo-typed primitive forms was the *conditio sine qua non* of Europeanization".<sup>29</sup>

We have now come to the core of Marx's and Engels's theory of colonialism. Marx wrote: "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of the old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia".<sup>30</sup> The destruction of the old society, which Marx called "revolutionary",<sup>31</sup> could only mean the introduction of capitalism to all these regions outside Western Europe. "It was to Europe's credit that this was done since ... for all its cruelties, it is better that [the modern world] was born than it had not been".<sup>32</sup>

Capitalism arises and persists because it alone is able to carry productive power from the level of pre-capitalist class society to that of post-class society. In the first volume of Capital Marx had this to say: "Development of the productive

forces of social labour is the historical task and justification of capital. This is the way it unconsciously creates the requirements of a higher mode of production."<sup>33</sup>

One of the major preconditions of capitalism is private property. The purpose of Capital had been to establish that the metamorphosis of feudal production into capitalist production had its point of departure in the expropriation of the producer, and in particular the peasantry. The basis for defining the capitalist mode of production was not the pursuit of profits, nor the production of goods for sale, nor a certain spirit of rationality, nor the organization of production for distant markets. Rather, and as Miller wrote, "the capitalist mode of production ... is dominated by a particular kind of commodity market ... namely the labour market".<sup>34</sup>

A related precondition of capitalism is the twofold freedom of labourers; first, to be available and mobile, not bound to pieces of land; second, to have been set free from feudal bonds. In the words of Engels: "Modern Society is the society in which capital rules and labourers are used as instruments. It was absurd to imagine that the slaves of Cuba and Brazil, or the population of China and India, could be at once developed into associative labourers, they must first be made free labourers before they could be emancipated."<sup>35</sup>

Clearly Marx was intrigued by the apparent absence of private property in the East. An explanation of this would provide "the real key even to the Oriental heaven".<sup>36</sup> If the old communities - "this living fossil" as Marx called China<sup>37</sup> - could not be preserved, this was not only because of what they

were but also because of what they hindered, namely, the world-embracing movement of capitalism. The point comes across clearly in the Communist Manifesto, where Marx and Engels wrote:

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere ... In place of the old and national seclusion and self-sufficiency we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependency of nations ... The bourgeoisie embodies the rapid improvement of all instruments of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations, into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarian's intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e. to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.<sup>38</sup>

Marx viewed Britain - with her most highly developed "system of alienated human activity" (emphasis in the original)<sup>39</sup> entailed by commodity production and mechanization - as having assumed the role of revolutionizing social relations in the colonies, preparing the ground for capitalism. "Whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution [in Asia]."<sup>40</sup>

A proletariat resulted from the internal division of labour, thus paving the way for a future world-wide social revolution. In California, to take an example from the other side of the world, Marx and Engels argued that the more progressive North Americans were justified in taking the territory away from the "lazy Mexicans".<sup>41</sup> The British, at their higher economic level, had the capability that no earlier

invaders had possessed; they could change the social relations in the colonial countries, because they were the first conquerors superior. In India, Marx believed, it was already possible to see signs of the second, regenerative aspect of capitalism's double mission, with the political unification of the country, the formation of a native army, the development of a free press, and the introduction of private property, "the great desideratum of Asiatic society".<sup>42</sup> As a new class of English-educated administrators took over, the steam engine, the electric telegraph and international shipping were putting an end to the isolationism in and of India, "which was the prime reason of its stagnation".<sup>43</sup>

All this laid the foundation for a new India. Marx and Engels admittedly did not fully recognize that inequalities and contradictions would develop not only between classes domestically but also between nation-states. They expected, put simply, that the socialist resolution of the contradiction between the the forces and relations of production would result in the transcendence of war among states:

To the degree that exploitation is transcended of one individual by the other, exploitation of one nation by the other is transcended. With the suppression of class-contradiction domestically, the hostile position of nations against each other will be abolished as well.<sup>44</sup>

In a letter, some time before this, Marx had written that the whole internal organization of nations, all their international relations were nothing but the expression of a certain division of labour which would have to change with a change in social relations.<sup>45</sup>

It is now obvious that Marx and Engels miscalculated the

lasting importance of nationalism. In the Communist Manifesto they had declared: "The workers have no fatherland ... With the world market ... national separations from and contradictions of the people disappear more and more".<sup>46</sup> Marx and Engels believed that conflict would evolve along class lines on a world scale and not along nationalist lines. Their vision was one of a world capitalist system divided into social classes rather than nations.

In summary, it can be said that Marx and Engels located the superiority of capitalism over its predecessors in its control over nature, and its development of the productive forces of society. This, together with the breaking up of earlier, stagnant social relations, was its civilizing mission. Although Marx and Engels neither understood nor employed the concept 'imperialism' as it is used today, we will demonstrate in what follows that there is a powerful connection between their analysis of capitalism in the nineteenth century and Lenin's fully-fledged theory of imperialism. Given that they were mainly interested in socio-economic developments in Britain, France and Germany as well as Russia in later years, all their work on extra-European regions has to be understood as a means for them to understand capitalism at home. While condemning the barbaric treatment of the colonies, they saw this as necessary to break up stagnating societies - something which Hegel had already considered to be the inevitable fate of these countries. Since the colonies had no dialectical internal mechanism for change, it was the mission of European capitalism to destroy their stagnant, despotic societies, and thereby lay

the objective foundations for a development of their own productive forces on a capitalist basis. Once this was achieved, all these countries could pass into a still higher stage of human history.

In judging positively the capacity of the capitalist mode of production to spread into the colonies and to generate a balanced industrialization, Marx and Engels differ sharply from Mao and to a considerable degree from Lenin. They also differ fundamentally from the partisans of dependency theory. Indeed, one might argue that their view of world economic development brought them close in some respects to modern neo-evolutionist theories of modernization.

{iii) Crises and the Need to Expand: Underconsumption or the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall

This section concentrates first on the inter-relationship between colonies and capitalist countries, and considers whether there is an inherent necessity in the capitalist mode of production to expand to colonies all over the globe.

The main reason why capitalist countries acquired colonies after the phase of primitive accumulation was to tackle the problems of capitalist production as such, i.e. to counter the tendency of the fall of the rate of profit by moderating the rise in the composition of capital between constant capital (the machinery and raw materials used in production) and variable



capital (labour used, i.e. wages). This could be done by opening up new regions with a supply of mobile cheap labour, inexpensive resources and cheap food imports, thus lowering the share of variable capital in the composition of capital. On one side, investments in the colonies were often highly profitable; on the other, trade, seen from the 'unequal exchange angle', was also very profitable, even though the dangers to ships and cargo were a factor to be reckoned with.

According to Marx, one of the basic laws of motion in capitalism is a continuous revolution of the methods of production. This leads to a devaluation of existing capital, accumulated in the technical side of the forces of production, for example machinery. To improve production and expand its scale is a necessity to be obeyed 'on pain of extinction'. A capitalist is only too well aware of the urge to accumulate, to increase capital and to produce surplus through quantitative and qualitative expansion of the scale of production. For this reason the market has to be expanded continuously. As Warren noted: Under capitalism, to stand still is to perish; to fail to reinvest profit, or to do so at a rate of interest less than the average, is likewise to court disaster. Success is an even greater stimulus to renewed effort than failure, since it demands greater efforts to invest the greater surplus profitably.<sup>47</sup>

Marx, then, did not attach prime explanatory weight to under-consumption by the labouring classes. A move towards foreign markets was fundamentally intended to lower the organic composition of capital and only secondarily to solve a crisis

of internal under-consumption by providing new markets for commodities.

The necessities of capitalist competition would bring greater and greater concentration of production (largely promoted by technical progress and its accompanying economies of scale) and centralization of capital (the expropriation of many capitalists by few). This would lead finally to qualitative change in the relations of production, as the existing social relations of production become 'fetters' on the mode of production.

Here we should note in passing that before 1848 Marx and Engels predicted an impending crisis that would bring about the collapse of the capitalist mode of production. Only with their studies on the structure of bourgeois society - the Grundrisse (1862-3), A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859), Theories of Surplus Value (1861-3) (and of course Capital vol. 1, 1863) - did they recognize the extraordinary capacity of capitalism to survive crises and to restructure and adjust by, among other things, changing the forms of political representation and state intervention. From then on they drew attention to the problems of false consciousness and ideology.

Marx and Engels attempted, by laying bare the (economic) law of motion of capitalism, to show tendencies and fixed points of other social phenomena, earlier modes of production and the development of capitalism in general. Underlying this was the assumption of a capitalist system which had an in-built tendency to crisis because of the necessity to produce ever increasing profits and its corollary, the tendential law of the

rate of profit to fall, which was for Marx "in all respects the most important law of modern political economy and the most essential one in order to understand the most difficult relations ... It is a law which has never been grasped up to now despite its simplicity and it has even less been expressed consciously."<sup>48</sup>

This tendency to crisis stems from the impossibility of producing ever-increasing surplus to secure average profits and thus to ensure future accumulation, future expansion of capital. Marx and Engels ascertained that the necessity of profit-yielding employment lies in the very concept of capital.<sup>49</sup> If capitalism as a system is to survive, profits must be enhanced, business cycle troughs must become crests, and recessions must become booms. In short, new conditions for expanded capital accumulation must be created. Historically, the capitalist class has achieved this objective by the spatial expansion of capitalist relations of production. Expansion as a means of overcoming crises in accumulation involved the creation of what Marx called the 'world market' by means of foreign investment, foreign trade promotion, development of needs, overcoming of national barriers and prejudice and the incorporation of new regions into the capitalist commodity market.<sup>50</sup>

According to Marx, trade became with mercantilism the servant of industrial production, which was the moving force of the time. Marx tried to prove that all over the world capitalism enforced the conditions for the satisfaction of its structural needs. Only with production based on capital was

universal industry created. "The tendency to create the world market is given directly in the concept of capital itself (emphasis in original)." <sup>51</sup> However, industrial production turned out more than the existing markets could absorb, and thus capital was forced to look constantly for larger markets in order to avoid collapse. In Britain the free trade market (which since 1707 had included Scotland) was then the biggest of its kind in Europe. At the same time, the high cost and complexity of the newly developed means of production compelled the industrialists 'to chase all over the world' in search of buyers, not only to pay off earlier investments, but also to keep abreast of their competitors.

This unlocking of new markets seemed to solve the problem of the organic composition of capital and of the relationship between production and consumption. Yet Marx and Engels maintained that cyclical crises of overproduction, followed by expansion of production on a higher level of development and with a stronger concentration of the forces of production, were an inherent law of capitalism. This process in turn increased the share of constant capital, as against variable capital, in production. And since surplus value could only arise from variable capital - only human labour creates value according to Marx - the crisis tendencies of capitalism were reinforced.

Let us now look a little more closely at the ways in which the bourgeoisie, for Marx and Engels, attempts to overcome the crises which regularly arise from the structure of capitalism. One possibility is to engage in more thorough exploitation of old markets; another is to gain access by different means - the

final one being colonialism - to new markets. As we have seen in the previous section, according to Marx such expansion of markets has a positive effect on the colonial country. For the already industrialized country, however, the positive effect is only transitory and will result in an even more wide-ranging crisis. Marx believed that the last safety-valve of this kind had been used up with the opening of China and Japan and the incorporation of Australia and California into the world market. In a letter to Nikolai Franzevich Danielson, Engels wrote:

In crisis capitalist countries try to open up new markets. But here as well one is confronted with a cul-de-sac. Take England! The latest new market whose opening up could bring a temporary revival to English commerce is China. That is the reason why English capital insists on building Chinese railways. But Chinese railways mean the destruction of the whole basis of the Chinese small agriculture and home manufacture, and as there is no 'grande industrie' as a counterweight, millions of people will be placed in the impossibility of living. The consequence will be mass-emigration on a scale the world has never seen before, a flooding of the Americas, Asia, and Europe by the hated Chinese, who will be in competition for work on the basis of the lowest standard of living, the Chinese standard to the American, Australian and European worker - and if the system of production still has not been changed until then in Europe, then it will have to be changed then. The capitalist production creates its own doom ...<sup>52</sup>

It should be noted here that the Marxist theory of crisis has given rise to two misunderstandings. On one hand, theoreticians of the Second International interpreted it as implying the inevitability of a final breakdown or 'collapse' of capitalism - a conception which, as is well-known, bred a fatalistic attitude in politics. On the other hand, it has been argued that capitalism ultimately has no 'laws' or "no evolutionary tendencies in general".<sup>53</sup>

Fine and Harris, for their part, have successfully avoided the fatalist-evolutionist-positivist implications of a law of the falling rate of profit by defining it as "the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall".<sup>54</sup> In fact, they pointed out that in Chapter 14 of the third volume of Capital, entitled "Counteracting Causes", Marx wrote: "There have to be counter-acting influences which cross out and transcend the effect of the general law, giving merely the character of a tendency. This is the reason why we have called the fall of the general rate of profit a tendential fall."<sup>55</sup> Another reason for the European bourgeoisie's interest in the colonies was the supply of various natural resources that they could provide. Marx saw that in times of crisis industrial capitalists might agree to control and regulate the production of resources - but one looks in vain for any belief on his part that this would become a permanent tendency. He did mention the formation of national trusts or international cartels, but the normal course of capitalism remained dominated by competition. Even protectionism and cartels introduced after 1865 did not suggest to him that a new stage of capitalism was making its appearance. Rather, they were a fair weather phenomenon that would disappear with the next storm, as Engels added in a note to the second volume of Capital (1894).<sup>56</sup> What Marx does however mention is that these relations are in no way a simple one-way street from East to West, however much this may appear to be the case. Marx wrote about the sixty million agricultural and industrial labourers of India, sending over to Britain the total sum of their incomes,<sup>57</sup> and added, in the third volume of

Capital: "India alone has to pay five millions as tribute, for 'good government', interest and dividends of British capital, etc., whereby the sums have not been counted, which are sent home yearly, partly by civil servants as savings from their wages, partly by English merchants as part of their profits, to be invested in Britain."<sup>58</sup>

(iv) World Market: Safety Valve or cul-de-sac?

The world market which developed in the context of overcoming crises, enabled Engels, after Marx's death, to assess new developments in international capitalism and to adjust accordingly the relative emphasis of certain elements within their theory. Although neither Marx nor Engels wrote much that is concrete about the future communist mode of production - they rejected detailed blue-prints as an idealist enterprise - they did clearly maintain that communism was only possible as a mode of production that was dominant all over the world. It presupposed a universally high level of development of the forces of production and easy access to all parts of the globe.<sup>59</sup>

For this reason, they usually regarded protectionism as an atavistic phenomenon, and free trade as the "normal state of affairs of modern capitalist production".<sup>60</sup> In the Grundrisse Marx had written as mentioned above that capital would create the world-market.<sup>61</sup> This would lead to a new and international division of labour, a division which suited the requirements of

the chief centres of modern industry, as capitalism must invest in colonies to maintain the system. In due course, Lenin and Mao would have to cope with the penetration of their countries by this globalization of capitalism.

The ideas of Marx and Engels about the world market conflicted with the growing force of nationalism in the nineteenth century. Refusing to categorize nationalism as invariably progressive, they looked at each case 'on its merits', according to whether it would assist the course of 'progress'. Nevertheless, it might be considered a failure on their part not to have adequately assessed post-1789 nationalism. Not only did they fail to provide a sociological analysis of this cross-class phenomenon; they did not foresee the wide currency that it would gain in the future. Since they believed that the rise of free trade and the world-market would diminish national differences, the proletariat would know only one common enemy and one common goal: the bourgeoisie would have to be fought and communism realized.

At the same time, however, the bourgeoisie retained separate national interests.

... while the bourgeoisie of each nation still maintained separate national interests, big industry created a class, which has in all nations the same interest and whose nationality is already destroyed; a class which really got rid of the old and which confronted it simultaneously.<sup>62</sup>

The bourgeoisie was automatically creating national conflicts by pursuing new markets and attempting to control them exclusively for one state. Furthermore, the exploitation of one nation by another produced national hostility, and chauvinism was one of the ideological tools which enabled the



bourgeoisie to maintain its domination over the proletariat and to reduce class conflicts at home.

Despite these important insights, Marx and Engels principally analyzed divergences along class lines rather than in national terms. The world-market was accordingly a place to settle antagonistic class contradictions.

The mass of 'mere' workers - the utterly precarious position of labour-power on a mass scale cut off from capital or from even a limited satisfaction and, therefore, no longer merely temporarily deprived of work itself as a secure source of life - presupposes the world-market with its competition. The proletariat can thus only exist world-historically, just as communism, its activity, can only have a 'world-historical' existence.<sup>63</sup>

Later, Engels toned down this conception of the world-market as diffuse world-historical movement towards progress, where actors are neither obvious nor determined in an evolutionary way. In particular, he came to see the world-market as a site of harsh economic competition among nation states rather than classes, a competition which resulted from the falling rate of profit,<sup>64</sup> and the competition between nations became much fiercer, much more decisive.

Marx had already stated that if the bourgeoisie did not establish a world-market - at least in outline - then this would deepen the crisis in capitalist countries.<sup>65</sup> A failure of that kind, or the contraction of one of the great colonial markets, could accelerate the crisis at home. Marx once thought that this could "throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolutions on the Continent."<sup>66</sup>

In support of this thesis, he pointed out that no serious revolution since the beginning of the eighteenth century "had not been preceded by a commercial and financial crisis".<sup>67</sup>

(v) Crisis in the Colonies and Repercussions for Europe

The role of colonialism, then, was seen by Marx and Engels as a temporary safety-valve in the context of domestic crises - and nothing more. The effects of a crisis in an exploited country seemed quite evident to them. Marx, it is true, thought that "... the next uprising of the people of Europe and their next movement for republican freedom and economy of Government may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire ... than on any other political cause".<sup>68</sup> However, he came to this conclusion because of the economic situation in China where, as a result of the Taiping rebellion, a decline of imports had occurred and was aggravating the crisis in Europe. At the same time, Marx expected that upheavals in the colonies would divert the colonialists' attention from internal problems and from checking the approaching revolution. In the same way, he argued that the 'India Question' was a problem not only for India but for English capitalism as well.<sup>69</sup> Apart from the question of a market safety-valve, India brought out the struggle that was taking place within the capitalist class in England, between a declining mercantile, among them landlords, fraction and an ascending industrial capitalism or feudal landlords versus

bourgeois capitalists.<sup>70</sup>

In 1773 merchants from London, Liverpool and Bristol broke the monopoly of the East India Company for the first time. A further law in 1814 opened the Indian market to all manner of English commodities. The China monopoly was then lifted in 1833 and in 1858 the East India Company was dissolved. It was manufacturing industry that had pressured parliament into this legislation, for the East India Company charter no longer corresponded with the development of industrial capitalism. "Free trade became the watchword of the day."<sup>71</sup>

In 1846 free trade won a major victory in Britain, then the dominant world power, with the abolition of the Corn Laws. But this suffered reverses with the coming of the Great Depression in the 1870s and was superseded by the neo--mercantilist and imperialist policies adopted by the major continental powers and the USA. "The interests of the plutocracy which had converted India into its landed estates, of the oligarchy who had conquered it by their armies, and of the millocracy who had inundated it with their fabrics had gone hand in hand up to then".<sup>72</sup> By moneycracy Marx seemed to have had in mind the merchants, the financiers and the aristocracy. This is not to say, however, that there was a clear-cut contradiction between landed gentry and industrial bourgeoisie: "On the one hand, the landed proprietors placed at the disposal of the industrial bourgeoisie the people necessary to operate its manufacturing and, on the other, were in a position to develop agriculture in accordance with the state of industry and trade. Hence their common interests with the bourgeoisie;

hence their alliance with it."<sup>73</sup>

After the destruction of nearly all the Indian native forces of production, British industrial capitalists began to notice a decline in their exports to India. Consequently, they attempted to build up a market for their products in China. In order to achieve this, they had to overcome and break down the thrifty habits of the Chinese, who had no inborn need for commodities from Manchester. "Absence of wants, and predilection for hereditary modes of dress, are obstacles which civilized commerce has to encounter in all new markets."<sup>74</sup> The breakdown of this traditional society would of course be the task of the double mission of capitalism discussed earlier. If a change could be accomplished, the outlook for profits was very promising indeed. Marx quoted John Bright's statement that in India twelve days labour could be paid for with the same amount of silver or gold that would have obtained only one day in England.<sup>75</sup>

(vi) Who Makes the Profits?

The dissolution of the East India Company was made easier by its unsound economic position. In its later years it had accumulated a debt of millions of pounds, only to balance it out by gambling on opium sales to China.<sup>76</sup> As already mentioned, Marx quoted John Bright's statement on the subject to support his point: "The Indian government had cost more to govern India than it was possible to extort from the population of India".<sup>77</sup>

In another article Marx stated that the "annual revenue has never sufficed to defray the annual expenses";<sup>78</sup> and, in a letter to Engels: "The joke is that John Bull will now have to pay 4 to 5 millions in cash in India year after year to keep the machine going."<sup>79</sup> In the article, British Income in India, he was even more forceful: "What is the real value of their Indian dominion to the British nation and people? Directly, that is in the shape of tribute, or surplus of Indian income over Indian expenditures, nothing whatever reaches the British Treasury. On the contrary, the annual outgo is very large."<sup>80</sup>

It would be strange if capitalists had engaged in an enterprise that contradicted the reason and *leitmotif* of their existence, i.e. profit - and indeed Marx himself referred to the profits made in India. However, this apparent contradiction disappeared as Marx developed his argument. The crucial distinction is between the society and the economy as a whole, and individuals and classes within that society. Marx explained: "It is evident that the advantage to Great Britain from her Indian Empire must be limited to the profits and benefits which accrue to individual British subjects. These profits and benefits, it must be confessed, are very considerable."<sup>81</sup> Writing in 1857, Marx reported that approximately ten thousand British subjects held lucrative positions in India, drawing their pay from the Indian service. In addition, there were the bondholders, creditors of Indian loans in the City of London and pensioners living off their pensions in England. He added: "It is thus evident that individuals gain largely by the English connection with India,

and of course, their gain goes to increase the sum of national wealth."<sup>82</sup>

However, these profits were offset by the expenses of the military and naval enterprises undertaken on Indian account - expenses that were "paid out of the pockets of the people of England".<sup>83</sup> Marx included in these expenses not only the sums paid for the quelling of disobedient natives, but also the investment in the Persian War (1856-57), the Afghan War (1839-42), the Chinese and Burmese Wars (1856-58 and 1860 and 1852 respectively). "In fact, the whole cost of the late Russian War [1853-56] may fairly be charged to the Indian account, since the fear and dread of Russia, which lead to that war, grew entirely out of jealousy as to her designs on India."<sup>84</sup>

British rule in India - and of course elsewhere - might thus be seen as an indirect way of transferring tax revenue from parts of the British people to the upper classes in Great Britain. As Shlomo Avineri puts it: "Marx arrives at an even more profound indictment of British imperialism in class terms than is usually attributed to Marxism: ultimately it was Britain, and not only India, that was being exploited for the benefit of the British ruling class through British rule in India."<sup>85</sup>

(vii) Protectionism or Free Trade?

Marx and Engels witnessed the growing competition between nation-states, Bismarck's Germany and America being the latest

newcomers to the capitalist fold. By that time, that is post-1871, capitalists were seeking to avoid the demise of capitalist production by protectionism and the formation of cartels and trusts to regulate production and fix prices. This was a new kind of protectionism whose purpose was not to foster capitalism at home as in earlier years, but to support and protect certain commodities intended for export in the harshly competitive conditions of the world market. This would lead to an accelerated centralization of capital - as Marx had noted in additions to the third and fourth editions of the first volume of Capital.<sup>86</sup>

Engels lived to see even more clearly that the formation of domestic trusts and monopolies might transcend competition and avert cyclical crises, although only on a temporary basis. In general, both he and Marx condemned protectionism and were on the side of the free traders - if only because it would take capitalism to the furthest corners of the globe. They considered that protectionism had been useful in the past, as a means of fostering domestic industry in the face of international competition, but that it had outlived its purpose now that France and Germany had reached the economic level of Britain. However, their support for free trade should not be confused with that of middle-class advocates. Marx wrote:

We are for Free Trade, because by Free Trade all economic laws with their most astonishing contradictions, will act upon a larger scale, upon a greater extent of territory, upon the territory of the whole earth; and because from the uniting of all these contradictions into a single group, where they stand face to face, will result the struggle which will itself eventuate in the emancipation of the proletarians.<sup>87</sup>

Marx and Engels believed that free trade was dissolving nationalities, pushing the contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat to a point of no return. It was creating one big market and objectively preparing the ground for proletarian internationalism. Furthermore, the forces of production would develop faster in a climate of free trade.<sup>88</sup> This point is important to understand Marx's positive view of the impact of capitalism in the colonies referred to earlier, for as he said, "only in this revolutionary sense, gentlemen, do I vote for Free Trade".<sup>89</sup>

(viii) Concentration and Centralization

With regard to the questions of concentration and centralization, which were to play such a key role in Lenin's analysis of imperialism, we should first note Marx's brief mention of a 'plethora of money-capital'. This capital is available for borrowing at a time when industrial capital is still blocked by a crisis that has only just been overcome, and when production or trade cannot absorb all capital. At a later stage, when production is approaching the zenith of the cycle of crisis, there is no longer any question of a plethora of money-capital. Capital, which is still available for lending, begins to separate from industrial capital but only as part of a normal cycle of recurrent crisis, seeking 'employment' wherever possible.

Concerning concentration, monopoly and oligopoly, Kuhne mentions three different elements in Marx's theory and makes



the following observations:

One ... Marx recognizes that monopoly price, or rather, oligopoly price contains an element of indeterminacy. Secondly, he touches on the problem of the 'transfer of surplus value' from non-monopolistic to monopolistic lines of activity, and he thus recognizes that the former may 'exploit' the latter. Thirdly, he admits that the worker may be exploited as a consumer by monopolistic tendencies... Nevertheless he still thinks that the influence exercised on market price by monopolistic forces can be calculated.<sup>90</sup>

As we have already seen, Marx and Engels differentiated between industrial and money capitalists and noted a change in the system of credits and the banking system in general. Having written before of the necessity of capital to concentrate, Marx indicated that the new system of credit - for the time being - would become a new and terrible weapon in competition and it would lead to the centralization of capital.<sup>91</sup>

The system of credit not only created money capitalists in the domestic economy: it also had consequences beyond national borders. When money was not being employed in Britain, it was given as credit to other countries. There it helped to create indigenous industry which would compete with England for resources, pushing up their prices and so reducing the margin of profit. This development was the "natural price England pays for her commercial and industrial superiority".<sup>92</sup> In Capital Marx added to this point:

The system of credit accelerates the material development of productive forces and the creation of the world-market. It is the historical task of the capitalist mode of production to create the material fundament for the new form of production up to a certain high level. At the same time the credit accelerates violent outbreaks of this contradiction, the crises, and thus it creates the elements of the dissolution of the old mode of production.<sup>93</sup>

Engels elaborated on this in his notes for the completion of the third volume of Capital. As that volume had been written by Marx before 1865, Engels analyzed the growing importance of the banking-system after that date. The stock-exchange, he noted, had become the most outstanding representative of capitalist production, for it concentrated all production, traffic, and means of communication, etc., in the hands of stockbrokers. Engels's own death in 1895 makes it impossible for us to know how he would have further elaborated on this issue.

Equally, Engels never completed his thoughts on the relationship between the stock-exchange and colonialism. Colonialism had gained in importance since the late 1870s and early 1880s, when an upsurge in competition began to give rise to organized Colonialism. Engels wrote in his last letter to Kautsky (21 May 1895):

In the meantime I am about to write an essay for you for the Neue Zeit, which will give you great pleasure. Complementation and supplement to the third volume of Capital, No 1: Law of value and rate of profit. . . . Later follows No 2: The very importantly changed role of the stock-exchange since Marx wrote about it in 1863 . . . The first article would have been ready, if my head had been clear.<sup>94</sup>

The first article was in fact written and the second is also available, but ends at point number 7 in draft form:

Then colonization. This is today purely a branch of the stock-exchange, in whose interest the European powers divided up Africa a couple of years ago, and the French have conquered Tunis and Tonkin. Africa is let directly to the companies (Niger, South Africa, German Southwest Africa and East Africa) and Mashonaland and Natal has been taken into possession by Rhodes for the stock-exchange.<sup>95</sup>

Although Engels here plunged directly into colonialism, he remains open to the criticism of Hans-Holger Paul (among

others) that he was interested in colonialism not as part and parcel of the activities of individual nation-states, but for its influence on the revolutionary conditions of the European working class.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless there are considerable differences in the way Marx and the later Engels perceived the stock-exchange. For Marx it was more a kind of toy for capitalists, whereas Engels realized its changing importance as an institution which could control and direct production and which was related to colonialism. Evidently, given the embryonic character of Engels's thoughts on the subject, it would be unwise to attach too much importance to them in connection with the concept or theory of imperialism.

#### (ix) The Russian Village Commune and the Skipping of Stages

A major thread in the writings of Marx and Engels is the idea that the development of non-European countries had to follow that of Western Europe. In The Communist Manifesto, for instance, they wrote that the development of capitalism in Europe "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production ... In one word, it creates a world after its own image".<sup>97</sup> And this was necessary, they argued, because capitalist societies would break the stagnation of Asiatic despotism and enable European and non-European nations to progress to socialism and communism.

Some critics have set against this a number of other

statements from Marx's and Engels's discussion with the Russian *narodniks*. It is suggested that there was a definite break between the 'young' Marx and Engels, who envisaged a unilinear historical development of all countries, and the 'old' Marx and Engels, who saw that particular conditions in a society might lead to a development towards communism without the necessity of passing through the stage of capitalism. In a letter to the editor's office of the Russian periodical Otechestvennye Zapiski a letter which he never actually sent - Marx wrote: "If Russia keeps on following the path which it has been on since 1861, then she will lose the best possibility which history has ever offered a people, and will instead go through all the disastrous vicissitudes of the capitalist system."<sup>98</sup>

Generally speaking, in the opinion of Marx and Engels it was the property of the tribe or commune which was the starting point of all progressive development. These original communities survived in later social formations. One such survivor was the Russian village community, the *obshchina*. Marx and Engels were in agreement with Maurer, Morgan and von Haxthausen that "village communities were found to be or to have been the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland".<sup>99</sup> They did not believe, therefore, that primitive communal property was an exclusively Russian or even distinctively Slav, phenomenon. The primitive commune had developed - for different reasons - into the Slav commune, Asiatic commune, classical commune and Germanic commune."<sup>100</sup> This was in sharp disagreement with Bakunin and Herzen who believed in the unique nature of the Russian commune.

Nevertheless, in Marx's view Russia was the only European country where the village community had survived on a large scale into the nineteenth century. This original form of commune was a "contemporary of a higher culture and connected with the world-market, where capitalist production was predominant".<sup>101</sup> Dutschke considers it remarkable that Marx could imagine a transition from a pre-capitalist village community to collective communism at a time when these communities were in transition and private ownership of land was increasing.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, at one point Marx had written: "The village community is the stronghold of the social rebirth of Russia."<sup>103</sup> For the commune to have such an effect, however, it first had to remove disastrous external influences and secure the conditions for a normal development.

Even though communal property had disappeared throughout Western Europe, this did not necessarily preclude a different development in a different historical context. The uniqueness of the situation in Russia was that the commune had survived in a world economy dominated by a more progressive mode of production: capitalism. But, "Russia does not live isolated in the modern world",<sup>104</sup> nor had communal property - which had existed - survived anywhere in Western Europe, why should it in Russia? However, since capitalist society was in a deep crisis, the Russian commune possessed the historical possibility of bypassing capitalism.<sup>105</sup> This might seem to clash with Marx's famous and rather categorical assertion in the 1859 Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:

No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have developed, and new, superior relations of production

never replace older ones before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks it is able to solve, since, closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already present or are at least in the process of formation.<sup>106</sup>

In reality, however, Marx's view of historical development was far from the kind of dogmatic conception of universal 'laws' that some of his later followers attributed to him. This point is well made by Paul Thomas: "Marx's scientific work, or the work and procedures that Marx regarded as scientific, did not according to Marx's own admission aim at the discovery of universal laws (or, as he would say, of 'eternal laws') regulating political economy or governing human behaviour ..."<sup>107</sup> Thus, when Marx entered into contact with the Russian population - and many of them strongly believed that the *obshchina* might provide the basis for a new form of society and the avoidance of capitalism - he scrupulously avoided diminishing them out of hand. He was prepared to organize alliances with any groups and individuals if it served revolution in the long run - a point later developed by Lenin and Mao (see Chapter Six). And as the political situation in Russia was reactionary, any revolution there would have positive repercussions on the international scene. It would relieve the Tsarist pressure on Poland, Hungary and Germany, and thus make socialism rather more likely in those countries. A Russian revolution, he wrote (and Engels repeated it later) would be of the utmost importance for all of Europe, simply because it would destroy with one blow the last intact reserve of European reaction.<sup>108</sup>

In the same text, written in 1855 Marx stressed that it was not of primary importance whether or not a revolution in Russia was communist. And twenty-two years later, he stated in a letter that even though the revolutionary movement in Russia was in confusion, its mere existence indicated a "full decomposition of Russian society ... This time," he stated, "the revolution begins in the East, hitherto the unbroken bulwark and reserve army of counter-revolution."<sup>109</sup> Some members of the Social Democratic movement found this hard to accept, as Engels's letter to Marx made clear: "It is strange that people can't get used to the idea that there could be an impulse from over there [Russia]. And I have explained it to him [A. Bebel] more than once."<sup>110</sup>

The discussion of revolution in Russia and paths to communism must be understood in the wider context of European politics. In Western European countries the revolutionary upsurge of 1848 had long since abated. Although Marx and Engels were only too keen to see anything as a sign of the long hoped-for crisis which would lead to revolution in the West, they could not fail to appreciate that a communist revolution was for the time being not on the agenda. Emerging unrest in Russia seemed to promise a helping hand to European revolution through the demise of the arch-reactionary Tsar.

But as we have seen, this was not the only aspect that concerned Marx and Engels. One would be justified in saying that they saw a direct transition to communism as a real possibility in Russia, but it had to happen before the commune was eroded by the rapidly growing impact of the capitalist mode

of production. As this impact increased still further in subsequent years, a 'great leap' of the kind that Marx had considered in his letter to Zasulich came to be increasingly improbable.

In a sense, the advance of the capitalist social formation in Western Europe, with a surprising capacity to survive crisis, gave it new prospects in other regions. The possibility of a direct transition to communism in Russia remained theoretical - not only because the interconnection and cross-fertilization of revolution in the West and East did not occur, but also because capitalism had spoiled the original commune. To accomplish a communist revolution, Engels noted in direct reference to Russia:

We need not only the proletariat, which carries out the revolution, but also a bourgeoisie in whose hands the productive forces of society have developed to such a stage that they permit the final elimination of all class distinctions.<sup>111</sup>

By 1893 Engels seemed to be drawing a final curtain over the possibility of a peculiar Russian path:

And as Russia had no choice but this: either to develop the commune into a form of production from which it was separated by a number of historical stages, and for which not even in the West the conditions were then ripe - evidently an impossible task - or else to develop into capitalism, what remained to her but the latter choice?<sup>112</sup>

In this context the "Preface" by Marx and Engels to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto is interesting. The last two paragraphs run as follows:

Is the Russian *obshchina*, as severely undermined as this ancient form of communal property already may be, able to change directly into the higher form of communist property? Or does it on the contrary first have to go through the same process of disintegration, which constitutes the historical development of the West? The only answer which is possible at present [1882] is this:



if the Russian revolution becomes the signal of the proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the existing Russian communal property might serve as a starting point for communist development.<sup>113</sup>

This statement (more in the form of a question, heavily qualified by the political condition of revolution in the West), the ambiguous letter to Zasulich (of which only the fourth and most general draft was eventually sent off), and the un-despatched letter to Otechestvennye Zapiski should not be understood as indicating a disjuncture between the 'young' and the 'old' Marx. Rather, we should read them in the light of a basic tension in his work. On the one side there is the rigorous, general logico-deductive, holistic and theoretical Capital, which is an analysis of the laws of motion of laissez-faire capitalism. On the other hand, and by no means separate from it, there is the methodo-logically empirical approach to concrete historical situations. The fusion of these two aspects of Marx's life work avoids a crude separation of science and politics.

By way of conclusion, one does sometimes have the impression that Marx emphasized the open-endedness of development rather more than Engels ("Either the existing element of private property in the *obshchina* will win over the collective element, or the other way round. Everything depends on the historical 'milieu' ...")<sup>114</sup> However, it can safely be assumed that the following passage from Engels could also be taken as Marx's last word on the matter:

It is not only possible, but certain, after the victory of the proletariat and after the transfer of the means of production into communal property among the West European peoples, that in the countries which have only just become capitalist and still have

gentile institutions or some remains of them, that in these remains of communal property and the respective popular customs, there is a powerful means to shorten significantly the process of development to the socialist society and to spare themselves to a very large part the sufferings and struggles, through which we in Western Europe have to work our way. But for this the example and the active assistance of the hitherto capitalist West is an indispensable condition ... Only if the regressed countries observe through this example, 'How it is to be done', how one puts the modern industrial forces of production into the service of the community as communal property, only then can these countries take up this shortened process of development.<sup>115</sup>

(x) The Labour Aristocracy

In 1852 Marx noted that English workers were not "a very malleable material for political agitation" and he detected the reason for this in the "political flaccidity and indifference consequent upon a period of material prosperity".<sup>116</sup> Six years later Engels was unable to report anything more positive:

The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately to possess a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie.<sup>117</sup>

English workers regarded themselves and enjoyed being part of a ruling nation over colonies. "They gaily share", as Engels wrote in a letter to Kautsky, "the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies."<sup>118</sup>

Not only had the minds of the colonial people been awakened,<sup>119</sup> but those of the proletariat at home as well, they had been seduced by the material benefits of exploitation, as Lenin would later (see Chapter Three) argue. Participation in

colonial domination had stifled resistance against the originators of capitalist exploitation. In a passage written in 1885 and reprinted in the introduction to the 1892 edition of The Condition of the Working Class in England, Engels referred to the English trade unions as forming an aristocracy among the working class.<sup>120</sup> Later, however, he modified this generalization. In the nineteenth century, the only country where the proletariat profited from colonialism was England. Engels had pointed to this in his writings in the 1880s. In 1885 he wrote that

As long as England's industrial monopoly continued, the English working class took part to a certain degree in the advantages of this monopoly. These benefits were divided very unevenly; the privileged minority pocketed the major part, but even the masses benefited at least off and on.<sup>121</sup>

While Marx and Engels noticed the corrupting influence in Britain of the fruits of colonialism, it does not seem to have concerned them too much. It is likely that they assumed that this negative influence would not stand in the way of social revolution in the long run.

(xi) Revolution in the West and its Interconnections with Colonies

Faced with the practical problem of what to do with colonies after a revolution, Engels maintained that with the exception of those with a large European population like Canada and Australia, they "must be taken over for the time being by

the proletariat and led as rapidly as possible towards independence". The idea of the proletariat as a 'benevolent dictator' is a controversial one and Engels recognized this. He added cautiously: "One thing alone is certain: the victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without undermining its own victory by so doing."<sup>122</sup> In one of his speeches about Poland, Engels asserted that a people which repressed another people could never emancipate itself."<sup>123</sup> In the case of India, Marx argued that it would eventually be capable of carrying out its own revolution. It was only necessary for it to become as thoroughly capitalist as possible, for with capitalist penetration the revolutionary proletariat would develop alongside the bourgeoisie."<sup>124</sup>

In some writings Marx can be seen to be sketching a vision of the complete interdependence of revolutionary prospects in Europe and in the colonies. Thus, in October 1858 he wrote:

On the continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character. Is it not bound to be crushed in this little corner [i.e. Europe] considering that in a far greater territory the movement of bourgeois society is still in the ascendant?<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand in 1853 he had stated:

The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether.<sup>126</sup>

As the century progressed, however, the time when the colonies would gather sufficient strength through capitalist development to shake off this yoke seemed to recede into the distance. Not only was the regenerative influence of British capitalism far

from obvious, but Marx and Engels had noticed that the British were actually placing very little investment capital in the colonies.<sup>127</sup>

(xii) Nationalism and National Liberation Struggles

When we read Marx and Engels today, what is most striking is the fact that the possibility of national liberation struggles did not really occur to them. Although they referred fairly frequently to national revolts, national wars, guerrilla and popular wars,<sup>128</sup> and appeared to have some admiration for the resistance against the Europeans,<sup>129</sup> they also tended to underestimate its strength and considered that defeat in such national revolts (in this case Persia) would do the natives "the more good the more signal it was".<sup>130</sup>

Similarly, in articles about the Taiping rebellion and the French conquest of Algeria, it is obvious that Marx and Engels did not feel much sympathy for the rebels. Marx judged the Taiping rebels to be an even greater scourge of the population than the old rulers and accused the leaders of the rebellion of not being "conscious of any task except the change of dynasty".<sup>131</sup> Engels added in another article: "The conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilization."<sup>132</sup> In fact, both Marx and Engels considered such national revolts to be aimless movements on the political surface typical of the "eternal story of peasant countries",<sup>133</sup> standing not for 'progress' but for 'regress' since they

supported the old structure of society. Even though "great national states in Europe", Engels wrote, were "the unavoidable precondition for the harmonious international co-operation of the peoples",<sup>134</sup> such cooperation would become possible only after a socialist revolution. Marx and Engels saw the development of capitalism leading finally to a confrontation with, on the one side, the bourgeoisie and, on the other side, the proletariat. On a global level - that of the world market - this antagonistic contradiction would be solved only by a victorious proletariat. Class relations - the horizontal line - took precedence over national aspirations - the vertical line.

If Marx and Engels did not support national movements *per se*, and often regarded them with suspicion or even outright hostility, this was because they believed that nationalism tended to cover up internal class contradictions and deflected attention from the real problem at hand: social revolution. The scathing attacks on 'little nations' or 'small pigheaded nations',<sup>135</sup> are perhaps surprising given that during Marx's and Engels's lifetime nationalism was an ever growing force. Anticipating the slogan of the world as a 'global village', however, they hoped in the Communist Manifesto that national differences and antagonisms were "vanishing daily more and more owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to free trade, to the world-market, to conformity of the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto".<sup>136</sup> And they concluded: "As in material so also in mental, spiritual production ... national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness will become more and more impossible."<sup>137</sup>

Both Marx and Engels noted the conjunction of the rise of capitalism with a growing number of nation-states. The rule of the bourgeoisie in any country was even considered to be "impossible without national independence."<sup>138</sup> However, they regarded this as positive only when it fulfilled its historical mission, that of breaking up the old stagnant societies. A national state ruled by the wrong class - India by the Mutiny forces, China by the Taiping - would only delay the accomplishment of this mission. If it seemed likely that a national movement would endanger a revolutionary situation, then Engels contemptuously advocated that - as in the case of the Serbs in the 1880s - "their right to cattle-rustling has to be sacrificed without mercy to the interests of the European proletariat".<sup>139</sup>

The attitude of Marx and Engels was similar when it came to the question of national movements and war. Gallie wrote: "Marxism does not reject war in general as inherently evil or irrational: it approves of some wars, e.g. those fought to liberate oppressed classes and races, while disapproving of others that have an opposite purpose."<sup>140</sup> Thus, if they supported the initial Prussian war effort against France in 1870-71, this was not for patriotic reasons on their part but because of what they saw as the relationship between the war and European revolution. German unity, overcoming the division of the country into 39 parts, was necessary to the development of a modern economy without which socialism was unthinkable. And in the early stages of the war Prussia was, in their view, essentially defending itself (and this economic potential)

against the policy of Napoleon III. Only with the Prussian conquest of Alsace did they change their position, for they considered that this expansionist move would pit France and Germany against each other for a long time to come, giving reactionary Russia more room for manoeuvre - thus hindering the development of revolution in Europe.<sup>141</sup> Condemning the German claims to Alsace Lorraine they affirmed: "What is being proclaimed is Pan-Germanism and 'secure' frontiers, and this is going to have fine consequences for Germany and Europe - from the East!"<sup>142</sup>

The question of the rights of nations, then, was not an isolated, self-sufficient question; it was part of the general problem of the proletarian revolution, subordinate to the whole, and had to be considered from the point of view of the whole. Connor's view that "nationalism and Marx are philosophically incompatible", is therefore exaggerated.<sup>143</sup> Marxism is not merely a philosophy. Nationalism is related to socio-economic change. Mexico was taken over by the Yankees "for civilization"<sup>144</sup> and "by the same right under which France took over Flanders, Lorraine and Alsace ... by the same right Germany has taken over Schleswig - it is the right of civilization against barbarism, of progress as against stagnation".<sup>145</sup> If the driving back of reaction in Europe meant supporting the Polish national movement, then Marx and Engels were quite prepared to take this step - but not out of support for nationalism as such. Indeed they roundly condemned national movements which assisted reaction and denied their right to self-determination. When they come out in favour of the Irish



independence struggle it is usually only because it needs to be settled so as not to continue to divide the English working class. It is thus too abstract and incorrect to state, as Davis did, that "just as they opposed oppression of one class by another, so they opposed oppression of one people or nation by another."<sup>146</sup>

In Poland - the *cause célèbre* for many of Europe's liberals - Marx and Engels saw a budding working class that gave them reason to believe in a flow of revolution from East to West, a revolution which would weaken the Tsar's influence on developments in Western Europe and thus encourage socialist forces in these countries. Moreover, the Polish movement seemed to have all the necessary elements for the future: numbers, territory, vitality, working-class development. On the other hand, both Marx and Engels, though Marx perhaps less radically so, condemned the national aspirations of most of the Eastern peoples who were not of great number, did not live in a large territory or possess the necessary minimum of vitality.<sup>147</sup> On this subject Marx and Engels could appear utterly ruthless:

We have to work for the liberation of the Western European proletariat and we have to subordinate everything else to this aim. And even if the Slavs from the Balkans, etc., were really interesting, you could forget about them, the moment their urge for liberation clashed with the interest of the proletariat.<sup>148</sup>

On various occasions they talked mockingly about the bothersome and unwanted hive of peoples (*Völkerbienenschwarm*);

Eastern confusion of peoples (*Völkerverwirrung*); Austrian tin-kettle serenade of peoples (*Völkerkatzenmusik*); Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks are called 'head-hunters' (*Kopfab Schneider*); Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Romanians are termed 'rubble of peoples' (*Völkertrümmer*).<sup>149</sup> Moreover, although what we know of their analysis of 'non-historic nations' is written about Slavs, there is no reason to doubt that they would have applied it to nations of other continents. At one point, indeed, Engels burst out:

The next world war will make disappear not only reactionary classes and dynasties, it will also make disappear whole reactionary peoples from the face of the earth ... Then struggle, relentless struggle for life or death with Slavs who betray the revolution; war of extermination and reckless terrorism - and not in the interest of Germany but in the interest of revolution.<sup>150</sup>

Such concepts as compactness of territory, size or vitality of a people, readiness to take an active part in history are a far cry from class analysis. However certain parallels with Hegel's thoughts on extra-European peoples can be detected. For Hegel, the practical construction of a state was fundamental, and only if they had formed a state could they be called proper people. Nations which had not been capable of implementing the *zeitgeist* were superfluous on the world stage. They were without history - and future.

When trying to analyze why the revolution of 1848-49 had not succeeded, Engels eventually came to the Southern Slavs and their role in the events in Central Europe. He noted that peasants and workers had joined the Tsar's and the Habsburg

monarchy's armies against the bourgeois flickering of revolution. What he did not comprehend, however, was that the revolution of the bourgeoisie was not far reaching enough in that it did not offer the peasants or the national minorities satisfaction of their needs and grievances. He explained the failure of revolution not in socio-economic class terms but by the "theory of inherently counter-revolutionary 'non-historic nations' - a category in which he include[d], pell-mell, Southern Slavs, Bretons, Scots and Basques."<sup>151</sup> Similarly, one looks in vain in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, whose editor was Marx, for an analysis of Austrian agrarian problems, for a concrete programme on the Austrian peasant question.<sup>152</sup>

The categorization of a national movement as progressive or reactionary, then, depended not so much on the degree of its suffering at the hands of its oppressor, or on its past historical deeds and future aspirations, as on its overall role in respect to social revolution. The transcendence of any kind of particularism towards ever larger political and economic units was regarded as progressive, while anything blocking development in this direction was deemed reactionary and anti-historic.<sup>153</sup>

This section has demonstrated that Marx and Engels did not realize the full importance of nationalism, and that their prognoses concerning disappearing peoples have not been vindicated in the course of the past century.

### (xiii) Conclusion

Let us now sum up the analysis of the preceding sections and draw some tentative conclusions for the general subject of this thesis.

In the twelve years after Marx's death in 1883, Engels tried to employ the methodological tools that he and Marx had fashioned, to take account of the changes that were occurring in capitalism. It was a movement from practice to theory to practice to theory. The principal elements in the modified cycle of crisis were: the rise of colonialism and neo-protectionism; the new forms of interaction by capitals on the world market; and the formation of monopolistic trusts and cartels. Even for Engels these new tendencies were only just becoming discernible - although it is true there was a long tradition, going back to Sismondi, Wakefield, Owen or Rodbertus, that had considered the economic reasons for capitalism's expansion into regions beyond Europe. However, the development of capitalism up to 1895 did not allow Engels to work out a full-fledged theory of imperialism. Yet it seems clear that Marx and Engels touched upon most of the important elements of such a theory, without actually anticipating the results of Lenin's work written in 1916.<sup>154</sup>

Nor did Marx or Engels make the decisive breakthrough in analysing the ever closer relationship between state and economy. The reason for this is that they did not lay as much stress as others did later on the necessary connection between domination of the colonies and measures to solve the crisis in the industrialized capitalist countries. Although their

writings display a consistent interest in theoretical analysis of the 'pure' capitalist mode of production, in its classic country Great Britain, neither Capital nor any other work contains a substantive and coherent analysis of the colonies as such, which must evidently be at the centre of any theory of imperialism.

Indeed, we can say that to refer to 'Marx's theory of imperialism' is incorrect, since the theory derives from the later theoretical analysis by Lenin. I would even reject a formulation like Warren's: "Imperialism, conceived by Marx and Engels as the historical process of capitalist expansion into the non-capitalist world."<sup>155</sup> This applies also to Davis, who wrote: "Imperialism as a system (emphasis in the original), identical with colonialism ..." or to Kiernan's "Marx's doctrine of imperialism ..."<sup>156</sup>

The essential contribution of Marx and Engels, then, was at a methodological and historical level. They grasped the interrelationship between colonies and capitalist countries and the potential influence of the former on revolution in Europe. This point gained in importance after the heyday of 1848, when Marx and Engels thought that crisis in the colonies might actually precipitate revolution in Europe. In their work they described an inherent necessity for the capitalist mode of production to expand into colonies after it had established itself at home.

This movement served to counter a crisis at home whose roots lay in the tendential fall of the rate of profit. Since capitalists were forced by competition continually to increase

the productive forces and to increase the mass of production, they were also compelled to expand the market. The resulting creation of a world-market prepared the conditions for world-wide industrial production. This was the historical 'mission' or 'obligation' of the bourgeoisie, although ultimately the movement contained an inner contradiction by approaching the limits of the capitalist mode of production. Marx and Engels perceived colonialism as positive insofar as it disrupted the stagnation of the Asiatic mode of production.

Well before the 1848 revolutions, they clearly understood that the world-market, with its high level of communication between countries, was necessary as a foundation of communism. Conflicts on the world-market were seen as an extension of class-struggles at home, nationalist aspirations and hopes being subordinated to the general movement of socialism. In the post-Marx Engels, however, one can detect a shift as the world-market became an arena of struggle between nation-states.

Marx and Engels considered the 'India question' not only as a symbol for various rising and declining fractions of the ruling class in Britain; it also reacted on the domestic scene by serving as a safety-valve in recurrent crises. Concerning the profitability of colonies, they went beyond superficial arguments to distinguish between, on the one hand, small fractions of the ruling class in Great Britain who made excessive profits from the over-whelming majority of the people in India and other colonies, and on the other hand the exploited mass of the working-class in Britain.

The question of how Russia would pass to communism -

whether the capitalist mode of production and the resulting social formation was a must for all societies in the world - was of great interest to Marx and Engels in the wider context of European politics. They spoke about capitalism bringing its influence to bear on all countries. Thus, as the commune had survived in Russia, there seemed to exist a possibility of building on it (in conjunction with progressive elements of the more modern capitalist mode of production in Western Europe), and establishing a new radically different mode of production: communism. The vicissitudes of the capitalist stage seemed to be avoidable in this case.

This issue was very problematic, both because of the theoretical problems involved and because of the historical context in which it erupted. The question concerned whether the skipping of stages was possible in general and, secondly, whether it was a practical possibility for Russia, where the archaic formation in the form of the *obshchina* was dissolved to a great extent already. In addition, there was the question of alliance with groups like the *narodniks*, who pursued - in Marx's and Engels's view - certain ambiguous policies. Revolutionary hopes had faded in Europe after 1848, but when unrest erupted again it was in the fortress of reaction: Russia. The people through whom this social upheaval was expressed were the *narodniks*, who believed in the theory of peasant revolution, the uniqueness of the *obshchina*, and its ability to avoid the capitalist stage. An avoidance of capitalism in Russia, or for that matter, any revolution weakening the dreaded Tsar, could ignite revolution in Western

Europe.

Clearly, outer-European regions were of interest to Marx and Engels for only two reasons. First, they were the object of theoretical interest - for example, to what extent had capitalist social formations survived in China? Secondly, there was the question of whether they had a positive or negative influence on revolution in Western Europe. Marx and Engels believed that the contradiction laboured out in Western Europe between the proletariat and bourgeoisie was the crucial one for the future of the world. Theoretically it would have been possible to use the co-operative and egalitarian peasant commune as a base for communism. Historical developments had eventually rendered this possibility impossible.

To understand Marx's and Engels's apparently contradictory remarks concerning the uniqueness of the Western capitalist example, one has to properly comprehend their mode of procedure. They analyze an established mode of production differently from a social formation which is in the process of disintegration. In an evolved social formation the structural-systematical tendencies of the mode of production are dominant; in a transitory social formation the room for manoeuvre for collective actors is greater. This reconciles, I believe, their statements on the possibility of skipping a specific stage.

Another point of inquiry for Marx and Engels was the feedback of colonial enterprises on the proletariat in Western Europe. They recognized a corrupting influence from the proceeds of colonialism, but this was not of primary importance to them as they believed that the battle between bourgeoisie



and proletariat would soon be decided. They anticipated a struggle along class lines expanding to a world-wide class struggle, and nationalism was considered to be of minor importance and a vanishing phenomenon.

Accordingly they supported not nationalist movements but peoples who were situated in great numbers in vast territories and who possessed the vitality to take an active part in their history. All others were considered history-less and inherently beyond hope. Here Engels should have remembered his own phrase: "The eternal changes in human destiny ... where nothing is stable except instability, nothing is unchanging, except change ..."<sup>157</sup>

Marx and Engels did not hesitate to ally themselves with theoretically dubious groups if they believed that this would serve the aim of revolution. For the same reason they did not hesitate to change their thinking when necessary. Thus, there are a number of ambiguities and complexities in the work of Marx which enable different interpretations to be made. Lenin and Mao, living in the time of practical revolutions, used Marx to understand their own particular situation.

#### ENDNOTES

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### 3. LENIN'S THEORY OF IMPERIALISM AND ANTI-IMPERIALISM

#### (i) The Nature of the Contribution

Lenin's theory of imperialism is a vast subject which has already been the object of countless research projects and published works. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it will be clarified at the beginning what this chapter is not designed to do. First of all, the intention is not to prove or disprove the accuracy of Lenin's historical analysis, since others have amply criticized his claims that the concentration and centralization of production and capital leading to monopolies is decisive in economic life, or that the export of money capital as opposed to the export of commodities is central from the point of view of capital.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the division of the world by international monopolist capitalist combines has been much discussed, and thousands of pages have been devoted to discussion of Lenin's view that this process had been completed among the major capitalist powers and that any further development would centre on redivision and war.

Nor will I concern myself with Lenin's view in the early years of the century that capitalism was entering a final crisis from which no escape was possible. The First World War may have given this notion some plausibility at the time, but we can now see that it was so clearly wrong that little can be gained from its consideration.

Another debate that would take us too far from the subject of this thesis concerns the argument that in the 1880s Britain's move into Africa had no economic rationale and was conducted purely for foreign policy reasons - or the counter-argument that strategy and imperial policy were functions of the protection of Britain's position on the world market which was or could be threatened by other European competitors.<sup>2</sup>

Critics who try to invalidate Lenin's theory by denying that imperialism had any economic motivation, or who even maintain that economically the colonies were a loss-making operation, seem to forget that Lenin and other classical theorists of imperialism never employed such a vulgar definition. There is no reason to accept the economic reductionism of Fieldhouse's Hobson-Lenin Model.<sup>3</sup> Lenin's as well as Marx's and Engels's concept of economics was not that of the narrow discipline taught in universities today and separated off in our newspapers from home news/ foreign news/ arts/ sports pages. Political economy rejects the compartmentalization of science or social science and avoids the isolation of facts, relationships or disciplines. The starting point of Marxism is that of a total society where economic and political processes are related as two parts of a more complex whole. --

Finally, I shall not be interested here in a terminological dispute about whether Lenin wrote a theory of imperialism, an ideological tract or a political pamphlet. It seems clear that it is the interrelationship of the five elements of Lenin's definition of imperialism that provides the ground for

an all-encompassing theory - even though, as Brewer writes, - these interconnections "are only examined either in passing sentences or ... in the polemical sections directed against Kautsky".<sup>4</sup> The question of whether the five points are joined by an essential relationship or just by historical contingency is of course important, and it is a common problem for Marxists and non-Marxists to develop a single theory which adequately explains the whole phenomenon of imperialism.

However, the purpose of this chapter is different: namely, to uncover the nature of Lenin's theory, to discuss whether it is internally coherent and where the ties are with Marx, which will in turn provide a basis for the judgement about Mao's indebtedness to Lenin. Three further points should be borne in mind. When interpreting Lenin's Imperialism, one must not forget that his writings very often function as tactical moves in factional disputes, and that this book in particular was written with an eye to the Tsarist censorship.<sup>5</sup> His focus was overwhelmingly upon European capitalism, its trends, its problems, the possibility of revolution against it. In the period when he was writing, there was no lack of ideas or literature on the changing nature and ultimate collapse of capitalism. Before Luxemburg's underconsumptionist theory, there had been various liberal analyses of imperialism; Kautsky's 'ultra-imperialism', Bernstein's reformism, and the rise of a chauvinist pro-imperialism within the Social Democratic Parties in Europe. Finally, Hobson - a major reference for Lenin - had developed a social-reformist approach



to overcome the crisis of under-consumption.<sup>6</sup>

The reality of the economic and political changes since the Great Depression of the 1870s-90s had necessitated further analysis both of the capitalist economy and of the policies followed in capitalist states. Amongst the prominent trends were the development of monopolies and the rise of finance capital, the introduction of protectionism to replace free trade, the formation of cartels, syndicates and vast industrial empires owned and controlled by an oligarchy of bankers (a process of concentration which Marx forecast would inevitably accompany mature capitalism), the re-division of the world, the existence of international tensions and the subsequent danger of war, and the unexpected emergence of reformism in the working-class movement.

It was against this background, then, that Lenin conceived his work Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism. A Popular Outline as the necessary theoretical underpinning for revolution in capitalist countries and as a rebuttal of a number of wrong approaches to it. Whereas the writings of Marx and Engels were often at a high level of abstraction, pointing to future possibilities rather than actual trends in Europe or in the colonies, Lenin wrote from the perspective of what he considered to be a fast-developing revolutionary situation, and soon indeed as the leader of the first successful socialist revolution in the world. He did not think that his conception of imperialism as the last stage of capitalism undermined Marx's and Engels's analysis: after allowing capitalism to gain

some time in tackling its inner contradictions, imperialism would lead to a further, more explosive crisis of essentially the kind that Marx and Engels had predicted. Thus, Lenin believed that he was analysing a new historical trend on the basis of the general laws of capital uncovered by Marx, in order to grasp how far capitalism had developed internally and internationally and, above all, to assess how this had affected the objective bases for socialist revolution. For him, as for other communists coming after Marx, the main problem in the end was to add a political theory, a theory of practice, to fill the blanks in the founding fathers' discourse. Besides the key theme of the dialectical question of class/nation, the other key theme of this thesis is the relation of revolutionary political tactics to theories about the relation of nations in Marx/Engels, Lenin and Mao. Here one needs to emphasize the tactical purpose of Lenin's Imperialism. It is not only real theory, but its purpose was also to justify the Bolshevik internationalist, revolutionary line in the Socialist International during the First World War. It will be the aim of this chapter to assess the nature and success of his enterprise in this light.

Imperialism for Lenin was a particular development within world capitalism that began no earlier than 1898-1900.<sup>7</sup> This is a point that should be remembered by those who reject Lenin's theory. In his view it does not make sense to say that imperialism is as old as the world as this would lead to an understanding of the concept as meaning neither more nor less

than the phenomenon of empire building throughout history.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the term has been used by Northedge as just one expression of the "propensity of states to expand", or "the state, as all history bears witness, is an expansionist or imperialist animal" and by Cohen as referring to "those particular relationships between inherently unequal nations ...". Sumerians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans, and even the ancient Chinese were already imperialist, some claim.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that after 1900 people perceived a drastic change in capitalism's structure - a change that cannot be reduced to something shared with the Sumerians, Egyptians or Romans.<sup>10</sup> Today the word imperialism is used to mean the domination of one nation by another - whether politically, economically or ideologically. Hans Morgenthau has stated: "... observers have used the term imperialistic (emphasis in original) not for the purpose of characterizing objectively a particular type of foreign policy, but a term of opprobrium by which a policy to which the observer is opposed can be discredited."<sup>11</sup>

However, this is not the way Lenin used the term. For him, the term imperialism denoted a specific stage in the history of advanced, West European, capitalism, and not a policy which could be introduced or withdrawn at will. It signified the internationalization of capitalist relations of production, as the whole world was incorporated into an international division of labour. This particular structure of capitalism with its characteristic monopolies, finance capital, re-division of the

world was different from *laissez-faire* competitive capitalism. It differed from simple colonialism and its motivation and results were not the same as those of previous struggles for imperial domination in the history of the world.

It has led to confusion that Lenin talked about 'Russian imperialism' in the Middle Ages and that he mentioned Rome as an example of 'colonialism and imperialism'.<sup>12</sup> And in another place he wrote:

Imperialist wars also occurred in the period of slavery (the war between Rome and Carthage was on both sides an imperialist war), as well as in the Middle Ages and in the epoch of mercantile capitalism. A war is certainly imperialist, if both (emphasis in text) warring sides oppress foreign countries or nationalities, and are fighting for their share of the loot and for the right to 'oppress and rob' more than the others.<sup>13</sup>

At one point in Imperialism, Lenin even stated: "Colonial policy and imperialism existed before the latest stage of capitalism, and even before capitalism".<sup>14</sup>

These sentences show that Lenin, like Marx and Engels and any number of other writers, was not always consistent in his use of a particular term. At times he does use 'imperialism' in such a way that differences in modes of production seem almost irrelevant. Very often he uses 'imperialism' to mean 'capitalism'. In his major theoretical works, however - and we are, after all, concerned here with the distinctiveness of Lenin's theory - he saw imperialism as part and parcel of capitalism and of late capitalism only, related to the inner laws or tendencies of capitalism, not just to the criterion of conquest as in the case of Roman wars. Indeed, he often

explicitly rejected general analyses of imperialism which ignore or push into the background the fundamental difference between modes of production. However interesting comparative historical analysis might be, such conflations became "most vapid banality or bragging, like the comparison: 'Greater Rome and Greater Britain'".<sup>15</sup>

In the end, we simply have to accept that Lenin used the term 'imperialism' in a specific way. For our own purposes, the interesting comparative question is how he saw his own theory in relation to the Marxist tradition and to the orthodox pretensions in both politics and economics of the major theorist of European Social Democracy: Karl Kautsky. Lenin believed that peaceful cooperation among capitalist powers could never endure, given the shifting fortunes of capitalist states and the changing pattern of opportunities for external investment. Consequently, he thought a socialist revolution was on the agenda around the time of the First World War and even suggested that without it the world would sink into barbarism. Evidently he regarded as a perversion of Marxism any talk of a peaceful agreement among imperialist partners, in the kind of ultra-imperialism theorized by Kautsky. Such a view, with its implication that the contradictions of capitalism could be overcome, would strengthen the tendency of a stratum within the working class to avoid the risks of confrontation with the imperialist bourgeoisie in its own country. Thus, as was so often the case with Lenin's work, polemical needs were the immediate origin of a development of Marxist theory which

transcended that immediate polemical focus.

Another influential account of Lenin's theory of imperialism argues that it served to mediate between Marxism (as originated in the West) and the non-European world.<sup>16</sup> The impetus is supposed to have come from Russia's location halfway between Europe and Asia, when viewed from the standpoint of economic and social development.<sup>17</sup> Such an interpretation however, lays exaggerated emphasis on one aspect, and remains idealist in that it isolates the contribution of Lenin (and, *mutatis mutandis*, Marx and Mao) from the socio-economic context - here the change from *laissez-faire*, competitive capitalism to monopoly capitalism and the expansion into the colonies of European monopoly capital. Lenin saw himself as entering the debate on the economic and political changes in European capitalist countries since the deaths of Marx and Engels, and on the impact of internal finance capital on international relations in the world. Similarly, his theory of imperialism is first and foremost a theory for revolution in the advanced industrialized countries, not for colonies and semi-colonies. Only when the revolution failed to spread in the West did he look to the East for new sources of support.

Thus, despite any inconsistencies noted above, Lenin's major writings locate the period of imperialism after 1898. The expansion of capitalism on a world scale had been only a minor issue for Marx's research, since he took it to be an inherent outcome of the movement of capitalist forces in the world market.<sup>18</sup> Nor did he or Engels apply themselves extensively to

the implications of a developing world-market, such as the role of the state, or the competition of national capitalists. In fact, they had concentrated on working out the innermost organization of 'classic' capitalism in Great Britain.

On the basis of his own study of Marx's abstract analysis, Lenin came to the conclusion that all the fundamental laws were still valid - the law of surplus value, the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the impoverishment of the proletariat, the theory of centralization and concentration of capital, and the theory of crisis. The exception was that *laissez-faire* competitive capitalism had changed into monopoly capitalism. This prompted him to introduce five complementary tendencies to the analysis of capitalism in general: (1) the concentration and centralization of both production and capital, involving the creation of monopolies as a decisive feature of economic life; (2) the fusion of banking and industrial capital in finance capital, with the formation of a new finance oligarchy; (3) the growing importance of capital exports as opposed to commodity exports; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist combines dividing the world among themselves; (5) the territorial division of the world among great capitalist powers.<sup>19</sup> At the heart of these processes - and here, perhaps, is the most original element in Lenin's analysis - is the newly increased weight of competition between countries, which now becomes the engine driving the bourgeois economy.

Interspersed throughout Imperialism: The Highest Stage of

Capitalism are definitions in line with this analysis. Thus he wrote of imperialism as "the domination of finance capital,"<sup>20</sup> "the monopoly stage of capitalism",<sup>21</sup> "the partitioning of the world, and the exploitation of other countries",<sup>22</sup> "an enormous 'surplus of capital' has arisen in the advanced countries",<sup>23</sup> "parasitic or decaying capitalism",<sup>24</sup> "capitalism in transition, or, more precisely, as moribund capitalism."<sup>25</sup>

For Lenin therefore capitalism had fulfilled its historical task, it was now 'moribund'; capitalist competition had played a progressive role but eventually created monopolies and thus laid the basis for direct state intervention:

the capitalism of giant trusts, syndicates, and cartels ... introduced the beginnings of state-controlled capitalist production, combining the colossal power of capitalism with the colossal power of the state into a single mechanism and bringing tens of millions of people within the single organization of state capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

However, this was now combined with a desperate reactionary attempt to avert a restructuring of the system. Production was becoming social, so to speak, whilst appropriation of profits remained private.<sup>27</sup> Lenin argued that monopolies per se had a tendency to retard innovation, since monopoly profit thrives on restriction rather than expansion and on price maintenance rather than cost reduction. — He qualified this picture of 'stagnation and decay' by arguing that reductions in the cost of production could generate innovative change and that, although capitalism as a whole was decaying, this did not preclude periods of rapid growth.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, he argued that as monopolies dominated the



market and price-competition decreased internally, the home market acted less and less as a stimulus to innovation and accumulation. Yet monopolies were in competition with each other and as they had to divide the world for a share of the market to realize profits, any division at the turn of the century would mean redivision and thus war.<sup>29</sup> The lessons to be drawn by the workers' movement were spelt out in the clearest of terms. Thus in his 'Material on the Revision of the Party Programme', Lenin wrote:

The extremely high level of development which world capitalism in general has attained, the replacement of free competition by monopoly capitalism, the fact that banks and the capitalist associations have prepared the machinery for the social regulation of the process of production and distribution of products, the rise in the cost of living and increased oppression of the working class by the syndicates, due to the growth of capitalist monopolies, the tremendous obstacles standing in the way of the proletariat's economic and political struggle, the horrors, misery, ruin, and brutalisation caused by imperialist war - all these factors transform the present stage of capitalist development into an era of proletarian socialist revolution.<sup>30</sup>

Although Marx and Engels did not employ the concept of 'imperialism' as it was used by Lenin, we shall try to show in what follows that there is a powerful connection between their analysis of capitalism in the nineteenth century and Lenin's fully fledged theory of imperialism. Given that they were mainly interested in socioeconomic developments in Britain, France and Germany, as well as Russia in later years, all their work on extra-European regions has to be understood as a means for them to comprehend capitalism at home.

## (ii) Monopoly Capitalism - The Economic Aspect of Imperialism

### (a) Structural Changes

In elucidating the shift from *laissez-faire* competitive capitalism to a capitalism characterized by monopolies, Lenin quoted extensively from 'non-suspect' bourgeois sources which showed that concentration had increased immensely since Marx and Engels had first taken up the subject. This was accompanied by increasingly direct intervention by the banks in the organization of economic life, and a parallel reduction in the importance of the stock exchange.<sup>31</sup> The laws of capitalism led to concentration and centralization, a factor which Marx had discussed in Capital. Capital centralization (or oligopolic dominance of each market sector by a small number of firms) and concentration (mergers and amalgamation into larger capitalist firms) led to that structure of capitalism which Lenin called monopoly capitalism. This term denoted the dominance of larger capital units, cartels, trusts, etc. rather than monopoly in its literal sense.<sup>32</sup>

Owing to the rising organic composition of capital, with huge investment outlays in plant and machinery, production became profitable only for larger and larger amounts of capital, and the tendential fall in the rate of profit therefore strengthened the tendency towards concentration. The fusion of banking and industrial capital in 'finance capital' was symptomatic of the fact that capitalism had become

'overripe'<sup>33</sup> and could no longer find sufficient areas for profitable investment. The resulting change from the export of manufactured goods, as under colonial capitalism, to the export of money capital was not a matter of choice but a deeply rooted structural necessity flowing from tendencies within the capitalist mode of production itself.

(b) Under-consumption or the Falling Rate of Profit

As we have seen, Marx and Engels were opposed to any underconsumptionist analysis of capitalist crisis, which they regarded as epiphenomenal, and referred instead to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as the underlying mechanism in this respect. This is therefore an important issue for an understanding of Lenin's approach. While Brewer<sup>34</sup> is right in showing that Lenin introduced 'underconsumptionist' elements into his analysis, this was only intended to explain the export of capital at one level. Lenin was certainly aware that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall acted to spur the export of capital even at the cost of the collapse of capitalism. Brewer goes on to recommend a fresh look at Lenin's earlier works, like The Development of Capitalism in Russia, in order to solve the problem. In his debates with the *narodniks* about the necessity of a capitalist stage in Russia, Lenin was of the opinion that "the question of a foreign market has absolutely nothing to do with the question of the realization (emphasis in the original)"<sup>35</sup> of surplus value.

When transposed to 1916, this appears to address the accumulation problem within capitalism - the problem of investing surplus capital with the resulting concentration of production and centralization of capital - which had given rise to imperialism. If constant capital (c) and variable capital (v) can be kept low, then the rate of profit (surplus value divided by c and v) will in turn be high. But as the organic composition of capital rises with the proportion of constant capital, the quest for profits or super-profits constantly leads the capitalist to innovate in order to gain an advantage over other industrialists. When such innovations become common knowledge and the initial advantage is wiped out, the entire manoeuvre begins anew. It was from this rising organic composition of capital that Marx had identified the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as the fundamental cause of capitalist crisis. According to Lenin, the problem is not underconsumption, which might be countered with conquering a new (foreign) market. Underconsumption is only one element in the whole process of capitalism. "A foreign market is needed because it is inherent in capitalist production to strive for unlimited expansion - unlike the old modes of production, which were limited to the village community, ..., to the tribe ... or state (emphasis in the original)".<sup>36</sup>

Individual capitals, even when united in monopoly capital, seek to avoid the tendency of the rate of profit to fall by finding ways of reaping a surplus profit over and above the average profit. The routes to this super-profit are many and

various, including wage reductions, the introduction of new and more efficient machinery, or relocation where raw materials, wages or land are cheaper or where capital does not find a competitor of the same quality and there exists an opening for investment.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, capitalism in the form of imperialism attempts to avert crisis by expanding to regions where the organic composition of capital is lower. In the end, however, for Lenin as for Marx and Engels, super-profits were only temporary bonuses up to the moment when other capitalists eroded the competitive advantage on which they were based and gave a new twist to the profit spiral. Lenin's analysis of imperialism rests on this anarchic character of capitalist production and, at the most general level, can be deduced from it.

Harry Magdoff objected to attempts to find one prime mover, whether "the drive to export pressured by a surplus of capital; or the declining rate of profit, or the inability to realize surplus value within existing capital markets; or imperialist expansion as the way out of crises."<sup>38</sup> Lenin, however, did not fall prey to such a mono-causal approach. In fact, the criticism that may be justly levelled at him is of another kind. Thus, we might agree with Schroeder that Lenin was not sufficiently rigorous in locating the necessity of monopolist-imperialist expansion.<sup>39</sup> We should add that when he was writing Imperialism, Lenin was not in fact directly confronted with a crisis of realization, as an economic conjuncture, but with a crisis in the form of war between

capitalist states. At the core of the dynamic was the passing of the earlier competitive and progressive phase of capitalism into a higher monopoly phase, marked by predatory warfare among the new magnets of capital, by restriction and probably by stagnation.

On the vexed question of underconsumption, we may sum up Lenin's argument as follows. Capitalism is an international mode of production, determined not simply by the exchange of surplus goods that individual producers do not need themselves, but by the domination of exchange at the very heart of the logic of production. As compulsive accumulation and the quest for profits constantly create more advanced means of production, the need to find new areas of consumption becomes a vital necessity. These may appear in the national market itself - through, for example, the creation of new needs - or they may be developed externally. The necessary extension of the 'circle of production' and the 'circle of consumption', as Marx called it, would be carried out wherever the conditions for profit-making were most favourable. In the colonies, capitalism would avail itself of particular conditions for maintaining or, if possible, increasing the rate of profit. Thus, although underconsumption in the metropolis is an important element in the development of imperialism, it cannot be regarded as the underlying cause. Underconsumption is ultimately an adjustable matter of low wages - as social reformers and far-sighted capitalist strategists came to understand in the course of the twentieth century. For Lenin, however, the cause of imperialism

lay in the very way in which production was organized under capitalism, and capitalist relations of production had to be transformed in a revolution to overcome the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

Consequently, capitalism could not be saved, as the contradiction between social production and the individual character of appropriation and the contradiction between constant and variable capital were part and parcel of capitalism. Only a drastic approach could prevent the ever recurring crises and misery they entailed for the vast majority of the population. No different was Lenin's final judgement about attempts to overcome imperialism on the basis of the existing social system: "Colonial policies and imperialism are not unsound but curable disorders of capitalism ... they are an inevitable consequence of the very foundations of capitalism."<sup>40</sup>

(c) State capitalism, Nation-states and Internationalization of Capital

Lenin's definition of imperialism as a stage in the development of capitalism should not be taken to imply that the nation-state had become superfluous, but rather that it was the firm basis for movement towards the colonies.<sup>41</sup>

As we have seen, Marx and Engels supported free trade and the necessary expansion of capitalism but did not emphasize that this would lead to clashes between competing countries and thus to an increase in international conflict. By Lenin's time

this expansionist drive had incorporated all parts of the world. The 'world economy', to use a fashionable phrase, had become fully interdependent, on the basis of an internationalization of capital made possible by the growing number of monopolies seeking higher profit margins in the colonies. Finance capital, in Lenin's view, was continually striving to extend the frontiers of its monopolistically dominated area. The accompanying national regulation and lessening of competition were complemented by international tension, leading inevitably to war between imperialist nations over the redivision of the colonies. A further reason for war was the sole support and connection between the state apparatus and the monopolies, so that neo-mercantilism was tending to shut out foreign goods through the erection of high tariff walls, customs duties and subsidies for home industries as described by Friedrich List, as well as introducing repressive 'social-imperialist' legislation.<sup>42</sup>

However, Lenin not only emphasized the urgency of revolution - to prevent barbarism and wars - but also pointed to the highly organized economic life that accompanied the rise of monopoly capital. World capitalism which in the 1860s and 1870s was an advanced and progressive force of free competition and which at the beginning of the twentieth century grew into monopoly capitalism (i.e. imperialism), took a big step forward during the First World War, not only towards greater concentration under the aegis of finance capital and the state, but also towards strengthening the objective basis for



socialism. Capitalism had exhausted its progressive potential, while the monopolies had made socialism feasible by simplifying the rationalization of production. Thus, monopoly capitalism was leading to a kind of 'organized' or 'state' capitalism which, to Lenin and others, extended and strengthened the objective basis for socialism by introducing an element of planning into the national economy.<sup>43</sup> However, since this growing fusion of state and economy went together with a sharp intensification of competition and militarism on the international level, the proletariat had to push for a socialist revolution to avoid a barbaric war, the responsibility for which would be all too apparent.

The final stage of capitalism, then, most clearly to be observed in European countries, was a dialectical unity of destructive and potentially regenerative elements. As Marx and Engels had written in their own time, the bourgeoisie was creating its own grave-diggers in the shape of the proletariat. Although Lenin's analysis centred on Europe, this contradictory progression/regression held a special meaning for the colonies (and later for Mao), as became obvious after the revolution in Russia. We shall return to this point later, but it should be stressed here that the fierce intensification of international rivalry and conflict, which to some extent displaced competition from the now regulated arena of national capitalism, meant that whole nations were becoming competitors for profits on a world scale. As industrializing countries reached the monopoly stage of capitalism, they too would enter

the world arena searching for the means to reverse the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

The growing importance of the banks in imperialist capitalism came about as more and more countries in Europe (and the United States) industrialized faster and faster. Through this process industrial capitalists accumulated vast amounts of money behind the national protectionist shields which they could, had they wished, have handed out to the proletariat. Evidently capitalism was about profits not about equitable sharing, and so this surplus money found its way into the banks to be invested, not in the home market but in the colonies.

The export of capital influences and greatly accelerates the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is exported. While, therefore, the export of capital may tend to a certain extent to arrest development in the capital-exporting countries, it can only do so by expanding and deepening the further development of capitalism throughout the world.<sup>44</sup>

As capitalism incorporated all parts of the world, this 'safety-valve' against the fall of the rate of profit would sooner or later close. Capitalism needed constant extension of production,<sup>45</sup> a point made earlier by Marx and Engels, the new type of capitalism, i.e. imperialism needed the export of capital.

If capitalism could solve its problems of production, consumption and profitability in the home market, then imperialism would be an aberration, an atavism, a welcome but not necessary source of additional profits. This would mean that Kautsky's 'ultra-imperialist' thesis was right, and that socialist revolution was not a necessity for the workers'

movement. Had underconsumption been the essential reason for capitalism's crisis, then Hobson's proposal for an all-round increase in wages would indeed have gone a long way to avoiding a revolution. Lenin tried to refute this thesis in his book.<sup>46</sup> He argued that the solution lay with the radical change of capitalism. Only a revolution could save people from war and exploitation. For this, however the working class had to be willing to change capitalism.

### (iii) The Concept of Labour Aristocracy

The special profiteering by the English workers (or some of them) of colonial exploitation and the consequent opportunistic tendencies was generalized at first by Lenin at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in 1907. An increase in wages, made possible by imperialism and fought for by trade unions, helped to overcome political crises and increased demand by the proletariat, which was important for production and profits. This idea was then further developed by Lenin, who felt that events at the outbreak of the war had proved him right, noting the tendency of imperialism "to split the workers, to strengthen opportunism among them and to cause temporary decay in the working-class movement ..."<sup>47</sup> He observed that capitalists with profits squeezed from foreign labour purchased working-class reformism in Europe. In developing this

concept, Lenin saw himself as defending the socialist movement against two influences: on the one side the Mensheviks, with their emphasis on trade-union work; and on the other, the German Social Democrats with their belief in reform and legal change within the system.

The era of monopoly capitalism was, according to Lenin, a time of immense change and contradiction but also of openings for socialist revolution. The nationalization of production in 'organized capitalism', with an increased interventionist role for the state, indicated the 'technical' possibility for socialism. But this stage of capitalism was also characterized by stagnation, decadence, and violence. Revolution would not come about by reliance on 'historical laws'; rather, the vanguard party had a duty to intervene and mobilize the proletariat when economic conditions and preparations of the masses made a revolution possible.<sup>48</sup>

However, Lenin detected a stratum of the working class which was not prepared to risk the overthrow of the capitalist system. This stratum obviously had more to lose than just its chains, and provided the basis for a tendency to reformism and opportunism in the labour movement, which "does not exist by coincidence but is economically founded".<sup>49</sup> This tendency found its highest expression, despite the resolutions of the Basle (1912) and Stuttgart (1907) Congress of the Second International, in the 'Burgfriedenspolitik' or policy of civil peace which eventually led all the Social Democratic parties of Western Europe to vote for war credits in August 1914. For

Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks, this was a logical outcome of the effect of imperialist ideology and participation by parts of the proletariat in the imperialist profits made in the colonies. The integrative effect of social imperialism is shown in the case of Bismarck's Germany by Hans-Ulrich Wehler.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, despite its thesis that national working classes were merely units of a universal working class, the Second International in practice became the defender of the national interests of specific classes within particular nation-states. Lenin tried to show that through an accumulation of colonial super-profits, West European capital was able to bribe parts of the proletariat and thereby lessen socio-economic conflict and the danger of an overthrow of the system. This stratum of the proletariat became the 'watchdogs' of capitalism, the corruptor of the working-class movement.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, in the 1920 German and French preface to Imperialism, Lenin argued that the bourgeoisie accumulates a double profit by exploiting its proletariat and the colonies, as shown in the previous chapter, a point also made earlier by Marx and Engels:

... the labour aristocracy ... are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism (emphasis in the original).<sup>52</sup>

Exploitation was for Lenin not merely an internal affair. The labour aristocracy took part in exploiting the "hundreds of millions of non-civilized people".<sup>53</sup> Exploitation thus became an issue of whole nations against whole nations, an issue to which I will return in detail later.

With his concept of the labour aristocracy, Lenin was able after 1917 not only to give indications as to why the socialist revolution had occurred in backward Russia and to explain the opportunist social-chauvinist participation of sections of the working class in the war, but also to justify theoretically his support for anti-imperialist movements and revolutionary subjects in colonies and semi-colonies. Furthermore, it enabled him to explain that, because of increased exploitation in the colonies to bribe European workers, there would be anti-imperialist sentiments and struggles in the colonies themselves. Here again, we find the argument that capitalism creates its own contradictions. By generalizing the concept of labour aristocracy, Lenin advanced the case that imperialism creates the conditions for its own disappearance. His development of the concept of labour aristocracy is a 'better' solution for an understanding of the imperialist attitudes of the working class as he attributes its ideology to material interest (of the working class leadership) but it exonerates the majority of the proletariat from enjoying any objective benefit from imperialism, something which Marx and Engels did not.

This is not to say that Lenin believed a proletarian revolution in Western Europe was impossible. Indeed, he never abandoned his wartime position that imperialist barbarism would open the eyes of the European proletariat and draw a line between true Marxist revolutionaries and the opportunist social chauvinists and reformist social imperialists undermining the

role of the labour aristocracy. Nevertheless, in the early 1920s there was a clear shift in his thinking towards the colonies as socialist revolution failed to materialize in the West. Economic progress in the West would now be paralleled by progress in consciousness in the colonies, which was characterized by a three-sided class struggle between an autocracy, oligarchy or comprador bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the peasantry.

(iv) Violence and War

As we have seen, there were various reasons why Lenin wrote his essay and other articles on imperialism. One was the economic form of capitalism at the turn of the century, another was the reformism of the Second International and labour aristocracy. A further obvious reason, to which we have alluded at various points, was the outbreak of the First World War, and the question of what attitude Social Democracy should take towards it.

The decadence of capitalism, caused by over-ripeness, and the violence generated through rivalry, uneven development and redivision of the world, were both effects of the monopolistic form of capitalism.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the war of 1914-18 was "imperialist ... on the part of both sides".<sup>55</sup> If the war was the inevitable result of the clash of irreconcilable rival national bourgeoisies of the industrial countries, then this

meant that the war could not be a war for the workers. Hence the obligation to turn the war between nations into a world war between classes.

Owing to the superabundance of capital in the advanced countries and the impediments to further investment in the protected and highly cartelized home sphere, such a system, according to Lenin, was characterized by expansionism - in particular by export of capital, which in turn became the basis for a division of the world between the great powers. Any division, however, was temporary; capitalism developed unevenly (see Section E on Uneven Development below) and as the relative parts grew at different rates, pressure mounted for a re-division. Thus violence and the threat of war were built into the very structure of monopoly capitalism. Plainly, the imperialist war is symptomatic of contradictions between the great development of productive forces, the increasingly social character of production and the mode of production which remains limited by the narrow limits of private ownership. In The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had already written that one of the bourgeoisie's principal means of overcoming commercial crises was by the conquest of new markets undertaken at the risk of provoking national wars of competition for the control of scarce overseas markets.<sup>56</sup>

Also in Imperialism, Lenin argued that imperialist wars, being an "absolutely inevitable" symptom of the "internal contradictions" of the world capitalist system in its final stage, would provide the necessary "objective" historical



conditions for world revolution.<sup>57</sup> By breaking up the old order, in a last-ditch attempt to arrest the progress of history and hold back socialist revolution, such wars would actually speed up history and facilitate the birth of a new social order.<sup>58</sup>

In pre-monopolistic times dominant classes led wars to conquer (and exclude trade competitors from) markets, colonies and sources of raw materials. During the imperialist stage of capitalism, war was used by the monopoly bourgeoisie to re-divide the world from time to time, as a result of the shifting balance of power among imperialist countries. These wars were in Lenin's view unjust and reactionary, and deserved no support whatever from the working-class movement. Wars were just only if they led to liberation from colonial or national oppression or to the emancipation of exploited and oppressed classes. The attitude of Marx and Engels concerning wars had been similar to their attitude towards nationalism. Anything that weakened reaction was welcomed, anything that helped the revolution was to be supported.<sup>59</sup> Lenin took a similar view at the time of the Russian-Japanese war, but the only positive element he could find in the 1914-18 war was the possibility of transforming it from an imperialist war between peoples into a revolutionary civil war.<sup>60</sup>

Since cooperation among capitalist states (as envisaged by Kautsky and Hobson) could not last, imperialist war was inevitable as long as the capitalist system remained in place. Nevertheless, the question remained as to why internal competition between capitalists should not lead to civil armed

conflict, while rivalry on an international level necessarily did so. Clearly this has much to do with the state-capitalist development at the heart of the imperialist stage of capitalism. In the new form of competition, nation-states were more and more directly pitted against each other on the world market, so that competition which had led on the home market to the economic elimination of individual capitalists now took the form of attempts to make whole national capitalist systems 'go to the wall'.

All imperialist countries were involved in this war to plunder foreign colonies, to subjugate new areas for exploitation and to quash other imperialist rivals, because war was by then part of that stage of capitalist development. In Lenin's view, imperialist war would not only expose the reformists in the Social Democratic Parties but also heighten the consciousness of the European proletariat. For the barbarism of the war "... brought the whole of humanity to an impasse, that placed it in a dilemma: either allow the destruction of more millions of lives and utterly ruin European civilisation, or hand over power in all (emphasis in original) the civilised countries to the revolutionary proletariat to carry through the socialist revolution."<sup>61</sup>

Since war could only ever be overcome through socialism, Lenin demanded at the Zimmerwald conference in 1915 that the Social Democratic Parties should turn imperialist war between the peoples into a civil war between proletariat and bourgeoisie.<sup>66</sup> This encouraged him to work actively for the

founding of the Third International (1919) and to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, even though not only his own comrades but others too complained about the harsh terms. In his opinion, the war had brought nearer the revolution in Europe, and especially Germany. After the successful Bolshevik revolution the issue of the 'inevitability of war' took a new turn, as it became possible for Lenin to argue with reference to a concrete state that the impetus to war came from imperialist capitalism and was alien to the new socialist order.<sup>62</sup>

#### (v) Uneven and Combined Development

As discussed above, capitalism developed unevenly, leading at times to the occupation of colonies and attempts by latecomers to re-divide the existing order. It is this uneven development which is central to Lenin's thinking about Russia and later the colonies. His concept of uneven development leading to combined development later gave Mao a conceptual underpinning for his attempt to create the revolution in China. "Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism,"<sup>63</sup> wrote Lenin in 1915. He seems to assign as much importance to his law of uneven development as does Marx to his general laws of capitalist accumulation. This law of uneven development, with its complementary 'combined development', was important for Lenin in several respects: it

explained internally varying rates of growth and temporal incongruities among different elements of social life, as well as the social turmoil inherent in the competition of capitals. Internationally, it accounted for the different levels of development among capitalist countries such as Great Britain and Germany and the tension arising from this difference; and also for the way in which colonies were integrated into the imperialist economy and the impact of expanding capitals on the social formations in colonies. Uneven development was the root of the development of a comprador bourgeoisie and, as we shall see, it underlaid the question of anti-imperialist alliances in the colonies.

Combined development involved two different kinds of struggles in backward countries: on the one hand, the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, and on the other the bourgeoisie against the feudal landlords, relics of pre-capitalist relations and the comprador bourgeoisie. According to this concept of combined development, these two class struggles existed simultaneously in the colonies, so that two revolutions had to be fought out at the same time. In his Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin showed that capitalism existed there and had created the proletariat as a revolutionary agent. The *narodniks* not only wanted to preserve the village community and pass directly into a socialist form of society based on the peasantry; they also believed that capitalism was not developing within Russia but moving across the frontiers into foreign countries. However, according to

Lenin:

In the face of uneven development particular to capitalism one branch of production surpasses another one and strives beyond the limits of the old area of economic relations. The manufacturers need the market at once and if backwardness narrows aspects of the market of the national economy of the old area then they will search for a market in another area or in another country or in colonies of the old areas.<sup>64</sup>

It is, in fact, this analysis of the uneven development of capitalism as seen internally in Russia that is used by Lenin for his analysis of the uneven development of monopoly capitalism on an international level. So interdependent are these two factors that it can be said that his unevenness actually leads both to imperialist competition and to increased state control and intervention. For Lenin this law connects the reason for expansion with the inevitable danger of war and the attitude towards the anti-imperialist alliance in colonies.

The general reasons for uneven development lay in the anarchy of the market and the ultimately disorganized nature of capitalism. But the precise way in which the productive forces developed at different speeds in different parts of the economy depended on certain physical and historical elements in the country in question. As capitalist accumulation accelerated and expanded in areas previously untouched by advanced features of capitalism - whether in England or Germany, Europe or the colonies - these new regions were rapidly integrated, taken over and adapted. This gave a new shape to the social formation, and on an international level it also generated new contradictions between the old and new features of capitalism.

This could be seen, for example, in the case of England.

England possessed a monopoly in world trade and commodity production and colonies at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but when capitalism expanded, at first in other European countries, this monopoly was undermined and tensions developed among capitalist countries. This repeated itself in the move to colonies. More countries searched for their 'place in the sun' and it came to conflicts with England and among other aspiring imperialist countries.

However, while 'uneven development' may be seen as the 'world system' side of the coin, involving unevenness among social units within an international totality, the concept of 'combined development' referred to the ways in which these international elements combined in the internal situation of a particular country. Combination in this context meant that backward and advanced elements were combined in a single social formation, and that the eventual revolution there would be of an accordingly combined nature. In the colonies the bourgeoisie was in constant struggle with feudal elements on the one side and the proletariat on the other. Even though this struggle with the proletariat might be subdued for sometime - as was envisaged in the strategy of the Second Comintern Congress (1920) - the political situation in these societies was nevertheless very volatile. As the bourgeoisie was too weak to assume even the tasks of the 'bourgeois revolution', leadership of the revolution in the colonies, as in Russia, would fall on the shoulders of the proletariat. We shall see in the next section what the implications were for the nature of that

revolution.

In conclusion, therefore, it can be said that the concept of uneven and combined development explains the tension, frequently leading to war between one or more dominant imperialist powers and the ascending imperialist countries. It is also relevant for analysis of the articulation of various modes of production within particular social formations created in the colonies, of the subsequent contradictions between classes in that specific colony, and that of the bloc of anti-imperialist forces that is historically feasible.

(vi) Skipping Historical Stages

It will be remembered from the last chapter that Marx did not foreclose the possibility of a direct transition to socialism in Russia, without the necessity of passing through a capitalist stage. By the end of the century, however, when Lenin was engaged in debate with the *narodniks*, capitalism was spreading throughout Russian society and tending to dissolve the village community that Marx had foreseen as a possible basis for revolutionary change. Lenin however now emphasized the superiority of capitalist development, for all its manifest cruelties.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, it was a peculiarly uneven kind of development that was taking place. The impact of capitalism both increased the process of industrialization in Russia and

weakened the indigenous Russian bourgeoisie, which could not develop its own strength because of the weight of foreign capital within the economy. Moreover, capitalism in Russia was confronted with two problems: the traditional forces within industry, and the greater efficiency of manufactured imports from advanced countries in the West.

Lenin came to the conclusion in his The Development of Capitalism in Russia that capitalism no longer played the clear-cut role of destruction and regeneration foreseen by Marx and Engels. Because of the added complications with the development of indigenous capitalism, the possibilities of intervening in this process had widened. Although Russia remained a mainly agricultural country, there was a small but strong and centralized proletariat which at a very early stage, had given rise to a well-organized Social Democratic Party. After 1905 Lenin's thinking on this question underwent a further evolution and, in his theory of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', he emphasized much more strongly the incapacity of the Russian bourgeoisie to carry out the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and developed the concept of a vanguard party that would fulfil these tasks in its stead.

Nevertheless, in line with the thesis of Marx and Engels that no social order disappears before it has developed all the productive forces that it contains within it as a potentiality, he continued to believe that the political hegemony of the proletariat and peasantry within the national revolution would



be accompanied by the growth of a capitalist bourgeoisie that had been held back by the Tsarist autocracy. After the February Revolution in 1917, the idea rapidly takes shape of skipping a stage and passing directly to the socialist revolution. Since the Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of acting as a revolutionary class and 'sweeping away' all the remnants of the past, the task of organizing the new order was passing to the proletariat, according to Lenin.<sup>66</sup>

Even then, however, Lenin followed Marx and Engels in arguing that an industrial base was necessary for the construction of a socialist society. His idea of a 'continuous revolution' which continued the bourgeois and socialist revolutions, was more of a political strategy concerned with classes and class alliances.<sup>67</sup> Economic conditions in Russia were in no way ready for socialism, especially before there had been a socialist revolution in Western Europe. Socialism could not triumph there directly and immediately.

While "objective conditions created by the imperialist war" were leading to proletarian revolutions in "all the civilized countries", only accidental historical circumstances had placed the Russian proletariat in the vanguard "for a certain, perhaps very short, time (emphasis in original)".<sup>68</sup>

In the end however the revolution in Russia remained isolated; the expected revolutions in Europe did not happen. This had two consequences for Lenin's thinking. First, the Soviet Union came forward as a model for other backward nations of how to free oneself from imperialist relations and implement

industrialization. As there was now a socialist country in the world - one, moreover, which included the form of peasant soviets - this country could help other backward peoples to profit from this development and to jump over the capitalist stage.

Jack Woddis, indeed, claims that one of Lenin's most creative changes was his concept of colonies by-passing the stage of capitalist development.<sup>69</sup>

This in my opinion must be understood in the context of (a) the 'Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions' at the Second Comintern Congress (1920) and the famous debate between Lenin and the Indian Communist M. N. Roy;<sup>70</sup> (b) the disappointments following the lack of revolution in the West; and (c) the attempt to find new hope and allies in colonies for the survival of the young socialist republic, issues which will be discussed later on.

There remained a second, thornier problem: was socialism possible in just one country? Lenin developed the idea of combined revolutions which, at different stages and in different forms, would have a cumulative effect at world level. Already in 1915, as mentioned above, in an article entitled The United States of Europe Slogan, he argued that uneven economic and political development "is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone."<sup>71</sup>

This victory was possible not just in a highly industrialized country, but in a country where the

contradictions of capitalism reached their greatest tension. For the reasons we have already discussed - feudal remnants of Tsarism, weakness of the bourgeoisie, negative influence of foreign capital on indigenous capitalism - the weakest link in the capitalist chain could very well prove to be Russia. Against the economic determinism of Western European Social Democrats, he objected:

But what if the peculiar situation drew Russia into the world imperialist war in which every more or less influential West European country was involved; what if the peculiar situation brought her development to the verge of the revolutions that were maturing, and had partly already begun in the East at a time when conditions enabled us to combine 'the peasant war' with the working class movement, which no less a 'Marxist' than Marx himself, in 1856, suggested a possible prospect for Prussia?<sup>72</sup>

Yet how could socialism survive in one country or even in a few countries? Internationally it needed a period of peaceful co-existence between the two different socio-economic systems. Internally, Lenin wrote in one of his last articles 'Better Few but Better':

If we see to it that the working class retains its leadership over the peasantry, we shall be able, by exercising the greatest possible thrift in the economic life of our state to use every saving we make to develop our large-scale machine industry, to develop electrification, the hydraulic extraction of peat, to complete the Volkhov Power Project, etc. ... In this and in this alone lies our hope. Only when we have done this shall we, speaking figuratively, be able to change horses, to change from the peasant, muzhik horse of poverty, from the horse of an economy designed for a ruined peasant country, to the horse which the proletariat is seeking and must seek - the horse of large-scale machine industry, of electrification, of the Volkhov Power Station, etc.<sup>73</sup>

However, while Lenin emphasized that one country should and could begin to build socialism, and he heartily supported

attempts to create the conditions for building socialism in backward countries,<sup>74</sup> he did not envisage that socialism could be completed in one country alone. The idea that 'the world socialist revolution is being delayed' remained the essential context of his thinking in Russia, and the most he would say was that the Russian revolution would create the most favourable conditions for a global socialist revolution, "and would, in a sense, start it (emphasis in original)",<sup>75</sup> and it was not important which other proletariats completed the process. The ice had been broken, the road was open, the sparks had begun to fly, the way had been shown. Then, in December 1921, "I do not know whether this is for long, and I do not think that anybody can know."<sup>76</sup>

As we shall see, this contradictory situation came to the surface in the Lenin-Roy debate over the interests of world revolution and the interest of the Soviet state in ensuring its survival. The exploitation of conflicts between capitalist countries and the Soviet Union and nationalist revolutions against imperialist countries was a tricky business for the Soviet leaders as they wanted a period of peaceful co-existence to stabilize relations between the Soviet Union and imperialist countries.

#### (vii) The Dialectical Role of the Colonial Areas

In considering the role of colonial areas in Lenin's

theory of imperialism, we should bear in mind that he started by taking up and incorporating Marx's and Engels's old theme of the double mission of capitalism, at once destructive and regenerative. Although Lenin's main purpose in writing the Imperialism essay was to analyze trends in the advanced capitalist countries in order to ground an activist (or 'voluntarist') strategy of socialist revolution in Europe, his development of the theory assigned a more creative role to the colonies within his general concept of 'combined revolutions', than Marx and Engels had ever envisaged. The role of the colonies is first and foremost of a dialectical nature. By providing new investment possibilities, and offering a cheap and abundant supply of labour, raw materials, land and open and receptive markets, they function as a safety-valve for a capitalism beset by severe crises. Although imperialism may stabilize the system for a certain time, ultimately the self-destructive forces of this mode of production will assert themselves. Imperialism thus points to the end of the capitalist system and the transition to socialism. Lenin's conclusion was, as mentioned above, that imperialism would lead to "socialization of production."<sup>77</sup>

These self-destructive forces of capitalism will manifest themselves in the contradictions between different capitalist countries over the division or re-division of the world, and also in the forces released in the colonies that challenge capitalism.

Since capitalist imperialism penetrates all corners of the

world, the question arises as to its precise impact on the traditional colonial societies. Essentially agreeing with Marx and Engels, though under the new conditions of the export of capital, Lenin was also aware of exported capital accelerating the development of capitalism in those countries to which it was exported. Similarly, Marx saw capitalism as encouraging the development of industry and technology, and increasing the productivity of labour. In breaking down the economic, social and cultural isolation of rural communities, it introduced more complex and less backward forms of social organization. In this regard, Lenin was again in broad agreement with Marx. It is true that Russia had never been colonized and was not in the strict sense an Eastern country. But in The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin had already made a number of observations which are of value for an assessment of capitalism in colonies and semi-colonies. He certainly had no problems in recognizing the progressiveness of capitalism which is quite compatible with a full recognition of its negative and dark sides.

But he was also acutely aware of the complex problems introduced by the pressure of Western Europe on the bourgeoisie in Russia, and by the great and unexpected capacity for survival of the traditional structures of Russian society. Lenin was analysing a social formation in which he recognized a number of modes of production. In terms of scale, feudalism was the most important, but in terms of significance capitalism was becoming dominant. In The Development of Capitalism, of course,

Lenin was analysing a country in a pre-monopoly capitalist stage. With the advent of monopolies, however, the concept of uneven and combined development came to the fore and the progressive impact of capitalism had to be seen in a more subtle way than the 'double mission' of capitalism.

Marx and Engels had argued that the industrialization process occurring under the socio-political relations of capitalism was the economic foundation for all revolution, in the East as in the West. But monopoly capitalism by its very nature was essentially interested in finding new areas for investment. This might involve a development of the productive forces and new industries, but generally speaking monopoly capitalism tended to restrict the colonies to the production of mineral and agricultural goods. By the time Lenin came to write Imperialism, capitalism was having an uneven and restrictive impact on the economies of these extra-European regions.

In his article, written in 1913, Backward Europe and Advanced Asia, despite its title, Lenin wrote that it was the victory of the European workers which would free both the peoples of Europe and the peoples of Asia.<sup>78</sup> The idea that the advanced productive forces of Europe and North America would decisively contribute to economic progress in the East remained with him throughout his life - either under the management of the capitalist corporations or, particularly after the October Revolution, through economic collaboration between the socialist proletariat of the West and the liberated peoples of the East. In other words, there is a tension in Lenin's

position. Surely the important point is to accept this tension, and analyze it in terms of its implications for later theorists, in this case for Mao.

(viii) Nationalism and National Liberation Struggles

At more or less the same time that he was preparing and writing Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin was engaged in an important debate on national self-determination and socialist internationalism. However central the demands of immediate politics remained for him, Lenin differed from Marx and Engels in accepting the right of nations to self-determination as a universal historical principle. (This holds true even though, in the case of the Soviet Communists, the phrase "the right of self-determination" was deleted from the Party Programme at the 1917 Party Congress and replaced with "right of secession."<sup>79</sup>) The right of nations to self-determination was his minimum programme. The maximum programme was a socialist world order in which national boundaries and national sentiments would dissolve.

As with his attitude to the peasantry, Lenin's revised assessment of nationalism was partly due to a realization of the role that national movements could play in the overall struggle against the Tsarist autocracy. An alliance with them was both necessary and possible, but in order to gain their support the Bolsheviks had to offer a concrete and attractive



national programme clarifying the concept of self-determination. This pragmatism or opportunism, as it has been called variously "depending on whether one wishes to praise him or blame him"<sup>80</sup> is indeed "one of the fundamental characteristics in Lenin's paradigm ... is ... a subordination of scientific exigencies to those of political activity".<sup>81</sup>

As seen earlier, Marx and Engels devoted little time or energy to nationalism unless it helped to weaken the power of European reaction. In The Communist Manifesto they anticipated an end to nation-states: the class with no fatherland would unite on an international level. Lenin agreed with this as something which would happen in the long-term. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie would tremendously accelerate the collapse of every kind of national particularism. It would not diminish the "wealth and variety of humanity, if we are to understand by this the wealth and variety of spiritual life, trends of ideas, tendencies, shadings".<sup>82</sup> Proletarian internationalism by definition strove to overcome such particularist tendencies as nationalism, racism or religion. At his specific time on a world scale the scene is set for thinking not in terms of bourgeoisie/proletariat as Marx and Engels did (with the concomitant of looking for moves towards an integrated world capitalism without nations as the path to world socialism), but in terms of the oppressors (bourgeoisie of some countries plus their allies) against the oppressed (workers, peasants, etc.).

Curiously, the overriding struggle against Tsarist rule, which preoccupied him for most of his life, meant that Lenin's

theoretical writings on the national question somehow showed a greater consistency - and a lesser tendency to polemical or conjunctural distortion - than those of Marx and Engels. Thus, whereas Marx and Engels had fairly rigid ideas on what enabled a nation to form its own identity and nation-state, Lenin emphasized the possibility and right of any nation to form its own state, whatever its level of historical development or 'vitality'. After the Revolution, he actively combatted tendencies to Great-Russian chauvinism and promoted cultural and linguistic autonomy and the development of nationhood and national consciousness for most non-Russian peoples. It is true that he regarded the establishment of independent nation-states from inside the Soviet Union as a step backwards, and the Bolsheviks, both Russian and Ukrainian, fought against such a course in the Ukraine. More clearly still, the strategic needs of securing the survival of the revolution took precedence over national self-determination in the case of Georgia. But although the right to secede was never as secure in practice as it was in principle, the policy of genuine respect for the rights of non-Russian peoples only came to a halt with forced collectivization and the consolidation of Stalin's power.

Kubalkova and Cruikshank claim that the three separate slogans, "'the eventual amalgamation of all nations', 'absolutely direct, unambiguous recognition of the right for self-determination', and the 'complete equality of all nations' do not easily fit together. It might almost be said that they are contradictory".<sup>83</sup> They do not succeed in showing, however,

that this contradiction is rooted in the principles themselves, rather than in the tension between different forces and stages, national liberationist and socialist internationalist, which in the imperialist epoch were present simultaneously in the political-historical arena. At any event, Lenin never saw a contradiction in principle between the democratic right of an oppressed nation to secede and form its own state, and the socialist principle of centralization and internationalism. Like Marx and Engels, he strongly believed in the superiority of large, centrally administered economic units. But only when democratic national rights had been granted could socialists discuss with any moral authority, and without being misunderstood, the problem of whether or not secession was advisable from an economic and political point of view.

The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation. Specifically, this demand for political democracy implies complete freedom to agitate for secession and for a referendum on secession by the seceding nation. This demand, therefore, is not the equivalent of a demand for separation, fragmentation and the formation of small states ... The more democratic a state system and has complete freedom to secede the less frequent and less ardent will the desire for separation be in practice, because big states afford indisputable advantages, both from the standpoint of economic progress and from that of the interests of the masses and, furthermore, these advantages increase with the growth of capitalism ...

The aim of socialism is not only to end the division of mankind into tiny states and the isolation of nations in any form, it is not only to bring the nations closer together but to integrate them ... In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e., their

freedom to secede.<sup>84</sup>

This refers to secession from colonial rule, I believe, not from a genuinely socialist order. In an age of imperialism 'freedom to secede' became a progressive slogan.

In his 'Theses on the Socialist Revolution and the Rights of Nations to Self-Determination' Lenin drew some interesting conclusions. He proposed a division of the world into three groups:

(1) "the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the United States. In these countries progressive "bourgeois national movements came to an end long ago" and they had become reactionary; (2) Eastern Europe "and particularly Russia", where "the twentieth century has particularly developed the bourgeois-democratic national movements and intensified the national struggle" - here the need for proletarian unity was particularly acute; (3) the "semi-colonial countries such as China, Persia and Turkey, and all the colonies" - here "bourgeois-democratic movements either have hardly begun, or have still a long way to go" and where the concept of self-determination had gained a revolutionary significance.<sup>85</sup>

What is of special importance here is the dynamic way in which Lenin saw the issue of nationalism - whether it is positive or not depends on whether it brings the socialist revolution closer.

Up to 1919-20 the decisive role in the struggle for revolution was reserved for the European proletariat. Lenin had earlier supported national movements outside Europe, even if this was a rather utilitarian approach in that he was prepared to use everything and everybody which might bring the socialist revolution forward. Already in 1908, in his article Inflammable Material in World Politics, referring to the Turkish and Persian revolutions, Lenin had discussed the possibility of

mobilizing millions and millions of Asiatic proletarians to act against their own imperialist oppressors.<sup>86</sup> And in several articles that he devoted to the Chinese revolution in 1912-13, 'Democracy and Populism in China' (1912), 'Regenerated China' (1912), 'Big Achievement of the Chinese Republic' (1913), 'Cultured Europeans and Barbaric Asians' (1913), Lenin saw the 'awakening' of Asia as sounding the possibility of colonial liberation and the end of the European bourgeoisie. Nationalism in the colonies was not essentially a result of the diffusion of this idea from Europe, but rather it arose as a response to exploitation and oppression, a point emphasized even more strongly by Mao. The peoples of the East were now regarded by Lenin as 'independent actors', 'builders of new life', whereas previously they had been 'objects of international imperialist policy, and which for capitalist culture and civilization existed only as manure'.<sup>87</sup> Writing in 1916 he even considered the possibility that the socialist revolution could be sparked off by a mutiny in the colonies.<sup>88</sup>

In writings such as these, Lenin remained faithful to the tradition of Marx in that his enthusiasm for national movements in the colonies was based on the premise that they would secure the conditions for capitalist development: the complete victory of commodity production, capture of the home market, political unification of territories whose population spoke a single language, and so on.<sup>89</sup> However, a difference emerges in that Lenin saw the success of the national movement depending on separation and independence from European countries. He

stressed that the colonies were developing an important independent role and were no longer purely reactive. Lenin thought in this way since he had witnessed the decaying, over-ripening of capitalism, which Marx and Engels had not. This was a new element in the socialist movement, for the Second International was mainly Euro-centric in its policies and, even after it quietly abandoned Engels's distinction between 'historic' and 'non-historic peoples', did not consider the mobilization of colonial peoples. Kautsky, for instance, denied that the struggles of "the savages against civilization are our struggles".<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, during this period, Lenin did not devote much time to revolutionary movements outside Western Europe; as we have seen, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism is overwhelmingly concerned with the revolution in Western Europe, and he often repeated his general view that revolutionary movements were far more likely to be effective in the advanced capitalist countries than in the colonies.

In the years after the October Revolution, and the founding of the Communist International, the various strands in Lenin's earlier thinking gradually came together in the idea of a national liberation movement and the possibility of a national democratic revolution in the colonies and semi--colonies which would be broadly based in the working class, national bourgeoisie and peasantry. This would undermine Western European capitalism and the comprador bourgeoisie which it had created in the colonial countries. It would not be a socialist revolution, as in Russia, but rather a bourgeois

revolution which would throw off imperialist domination and lay the basis for capitalist industrial development. Socialism would then ensue, either through a continuing revolution or through the inherent contradictions of capitalism.

This shift in Lenin's thinking indicates a changed assessment of the revolution in Russia. The Soviet state was now an independent factor in international politics - for however long its revolutionary isolation continued. Indeed, intervention by foreign powers in the Soviet Union forced Lenin to take the closest interest in the world outside Russia. He pointed out at the Sixth Extraordinary All-Russia Congress of Soviets, "from the very beginning of the October Revolution foreign policy and international relations has been the main question that has been facing us".<sup>91</sup>

Internally, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was an expression of this new assessment, while internationally Lenin concluded that the masses in the colonies were likely to play a more important role in the United Front against the imperialist powers, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the social imperialists. At the First Congress of the Comintern in 1919, all attention was focused on the socialist revolution which was supposedly at hand in Western countries. The Congress upheld the traditional Marxist view that emancipation of the colonies was possible only in conjunction with the emancipation of the metropolitan working class. The workers and peasants of Annam, Algiers and Bengal as well as Persia and Armenia would gain the opportunity of independent existence only when the workers of

England and France had overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau and taken state power into their own hands.<sup>92</sup> But in November of the same year (1919), Lenin wrote about the position of the peoples in the East towards imperialism, and he described their national liberation movements as a factor of central importance for the socialist revolution. The Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in Baku in September 1920 strongly confirmed this creative new role that was being assigned to the colonial countries.<sup>93</sup> From this time on the Western and the Eastern revolutions were to develop hand in hand.

Only a common victory of the workers of Europe and America and the toiling masses of Asia and Africa will bring liberation to all ... Without our revolt there can be no victory for the world proletariat over world capital. And just as you cannot wrest power from the hands of the capitalists without us, so we are not in a position to hold this power in our hands unless we have unity with you.<sup>94</sup>

More and more one can detect the possibility of the centre for the world revolution moving from the West to the East. At the time of the Second Comintern Congress held in 1920, colonial liberation was no longer considered to be dependent on the revolution in Western countries, although ultimately the Western proletariat would play the key role in world revolution. At the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921 it was concluded:

It is absolutely clear that in the coming decisive battles of the world revolution the movements of the majority of the population of the world which was originally directed toward national liberation would turn against capitalism and imperialism and would perhaps play a bigger revolutionary role than we accept now.<sup>95</sup>

When Lenin began to realize that Soviet Russia could point



a way to liberation and modernization for the colonial and semi-colonial countries, he wrote in his last essay (1923) that the final victory of socialism would be guaranteed only when Russia, China and India - which together formed the great majority of the world's population - had succeeded in carrying through the revolution. In an interesting counter-position, he also contrasted the "counter-revolutionary imperialist West and the revolutionary and nationalist East."<sup>96</sup> This was certainly far from Marx and Engels, who had sought the closer integration of these areas into the world capitalist system. Lenin himself, commenting on the slogan 'Workers of all countries and all oppressed peoples, unite' issued by the Comintern journal The Peoples of the East, wrote: "Of course, the modification is wrong from the standpoint of The Communist Manifesto, but then The Communist Manifesto was written under entirely different conditions. From the point of present-day politics, however, this change is correct".<sup>97</sup> Thus it could be argued that he was emphasizing less strict class analysis within nation-states compared to an analysis of the world situation as a contradiction between exploited and exploiting nations.<sup>98</sup> As monopoly capitalism in Western countries was stagnant and decaying, it was possible that it could be broken up by the force and vigour of the national revolutionary struggles in non-European countries. The centre of gravity for the struggles against capital was tending to shift from the centre of the system to the periphery. "Real communism can succeed only in the West," he said in June 1920 in an interview with a Japanese

correspondent. But he immediately added: "the West lives on account of the East; European imperialist powers support themselves mainly in Eastern colonies; but they, at the same time, are arming and training their colonies; thus, the West is digging its own grave in the East."<sup>99</sup>

(ix) Class Alliances in the Colonies: Lenin's Debate with Roy

The tactical question of class alliances in the colonial and semi-colonial countries was to be at the heart of one of the most important early debates within the Communist International, conducted and partially resolved at the Second Congress which met in Moscow and Petrograd in July/August 1920. Earlier in a pamphlet written in 1914, (The Right of Nations to Self-Determination), Lenin had supported the concept of a bourgeois-democratic revolution that would establish a capitalist nation-state and allow the antagonistic contradictions between capital and labour to develop in the way envisaged by Marx and Engels. At the Comintern Congress, Lenin recognized the importance of the peasantry, and also of the national bourgeoisie insofar as it was still on the side of the peasantry and the small proletariat against the imperialist exploiters.

In advocating an anti-imperialist alliance with the bourgeois-nationalist movements of the East, Lenin was motivated not only by what he saw as the potential of these

movements but also by the need to find allies to relieve the isolation of the socialist regime in Russia. He stated: "Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression (emphasis in original)." <sup>100</sup> Lenin's vision of an alliance with the national bourgeoisie was based on a certain analysis of political realities. Unlike in Europe, there was a revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie which would at least go some of the way in fighting imperialism to implement liberal democracy and support capitalist development: "Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. The bourgeoisie there is as yet siding with the people against reaction. Hundreds of millions of people are awakening to life, light and freedom (emphasis in original)." <sup>101</sup> The ultimate basis for this unified national sentiment was the fact that, in the imperialist epoch, it was no longer just classes but whole peoples that could be said to be exploited by big capital. Talking of a war between slaves and slave-holders, he saw himself as addressing millions and millions of people who, together with the Soviet regime, formed a gigantic majority of the world's population.

On the other side of the debate, the Indian delegate to the Second Comintern Congress, M. N. Roy, had come to the conclusion that the world revolution no longer depended on the Western proletariat, but on the revolution in Asia. Warning against the dangers of an alliance with the bourgeoisie in

these colonial countries, he strove to emphasize the conflict between the proletariat and the native bourgeoisie. He suspected that the national bourgeoisie would oppose radical agrarian reforms and thus would not dare to mobilize the peasantry in an anti-imperialist struggle. By overriding class analysis, Comintern support for nationalism would undermine class struggle for the proletarian revolution as well. After all, he argued, the bourgeoisie was a weak class because capitalism had been implanted from the outside. Roy's and another delegate Sneevliet's (Maring's) strategy was based on the idea that these were 'Asian Societies', that is the bourgeoisie was a class implanted by and dependent on Western capitalism.

In the end it was Lenin's position that largely carried the day. But he adopted the suggestion of Roy that the proletariat should only work together with a truly revolutionary nationalist bourgeoisie, the "white blackbird" as Claudin has called it,<sup>102</sup> and not with any bourgeois groups. Roy also won the concession that Communists should retain their independent organization and not merge with any other group, even though this was precisely what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) did not do in 1924 when allied with the Kuomintang (KMT). This clearly indicated that although the Communists were interested in a temporary alliance with the bourgeoisie and the peasantry against imperialism, their ultimate intention was to take up the internal class struggle on new terrain. The point would not be lost on the leaders of the KMT in China. Indeed,

in 1920 some of the problems ahead were already becoming apparent in Turkey, where Lenin supported Ataturk's nationalist, anti-imperialist government even though it was persecuting Turkish Communists. In principle, however, Lenin's idea was that the Communist Party in such countries could act as in a relay race and eventually take over from the local bourgeoisie in an uninterrupted revolution that would result in socialism. His two-stage conception of the revolution was as follows: first, a bourgeois revolution in which the proletariat joined as allies, and then a second stage in which the proletariat would establish its own social dictatorship. But only if the Communists kept their independent identity would they be capable of taking over from a bourgeois democratic alliance.

Lenin's new view of revolutionary alliances in the colonies became a central issue for various Comintern conferences, directly affecting the policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Even though the working class was very small in colonial countries, it did exist and was recommended to ally itself with the bourgeoisie and the peasantry in the struggle for the establishment of a liberal democratic state. Whereas the Marxist tradition had generally regarded the peasantry as an alien force with a petty-bourgeois attitude to property, a 'sack of potatoes' in Marx's contemptuous phrase, the experience of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia allowed Lenin to make a major reassessment of its potential as a revolutionary ally, a force which the revolution itself could

transform from a 'sack of potatoes' into a historical subject, a theme which Mao later extended further. The reason for this change was that in colonial countries revolutionary movements were largely directed against landlordism and feudal forms of land ownership. This was in turn a major similarity with the revolutionary experience in Russia itself, where the gaining of support from the landless peasants had been essential to success.

Remarkably, Lenin even advocated the formation of peasant soviets, albeit with less weight than the workers' soviets in national representation. Later on these peasant soviets were found in China. Lenin argued that active participation by the colonial peasantry in the bourgeois revolution would speed up this stage and help it to progress to the socialist stage - but only if the whole process remained under the guidance and leadership of the urban proletariat, with its advanced consciousness. Lenin and the Comintern never failed to stress the need for the political independence of the working class, and especially its representative, the Communist Party - a crucial issue for the CCP in the First United Front, 1923/4-27, and the Second United Front, 1936/7-45. Only a vanguard party, resting upon the historically most advanced force in society, could grasp the whole complex of national and international factors determining the ripeness of the situation for revolution. Practically on the ground in China, however, in the First United Front and Sneevliet's (Maring's) 'bloc within' strategy, the exact opposite happened. This lesson was well

taken by Mao when it came to the Second United Front.

(x) Conclusion

The effects of metropolitan imperialism in colonial areas were not seen by Lenin in quite the same way as they were by Marx and Engels. Many ideas are the same: for example, that imperialism creates its own grave-diggers, or that colonies are a temporary safety valve. But Lenin's analysis of imperialism increasingly led him in practice to doubt whether Marx's idea of the progressive mission of capitalism could be fully applied to the colonial and semi-colonial world of the early twentieth century, where it was becoming increasingly difficult to detect the industrial growth that had once been confidently expected to follow from capitalist expansion. In the end, the change in perspective became so substantial that Schröder and others have referred to Lenin's differences with Marx and Engels as revisionism of Marxism - although I do not find this charge justifiable. As has been argued, Lenin had to develop practical revolutionary political tactics in order to succeed in Russia and he had to justify Bolshevik revolutionary politics in the Socialist International during the First World War.

Similarly, whereas before the First World War and in his 1917 essay on imperialism Lenin effectively limited the goal of socialist revolution to the advanced capitalist countries, after the October Revolution he came to see the colonial areas

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The effects of metropolitan imperialism in colonial areas were not seen by Lenin in quite the same way as they were by Marx and Engels. Many ideas are the same: for example, that imperialism creates its own grave-diggers, or that colonies are a temporary safety valve. But Lenin's analysis of imperialism increasingly led him in practice to doubt whether Marx's idea of the progressive mission of capitalism could be fully applied to the colonial and semi-colonial world of the early twentieth century, where it was becoming increasingly difficult to detect the industrial growth that had once been confidently expected to follow from capitalist expansion. In the end, the change in perspective became so substantial that Schröder and others have referred to Lenin's differences with Marx and Engels as revisionism of Marxism - although I do not find this charge justifiable. As has been argued, Lenin had to develop practical revolutionary political tactics in order to succeed in Russia and he had to justify Bolshevik revolutionary politics in the Socialist International during the First World War.

Similarly, whereas before the First World War and in his 1917 essay on imperialism Lenin effectively limited the goal of socialist revolution to the advanced capitalist countries, after the October Revolution he came to see the colonial areas



less as acted-upon and more as potential actors in the struggle against the decadent and dangerous force of imperialism and for the survival of the first socialist revolution that had unexpectedly occurred in Russia. It was now a question of combining - in ways that could not yet be precisely defined - social revolution by the proletariat in the advanced countries with a whole series of democratic and revolutionary movements, including movements for national liberation in the underdeveloped, backward and oppressed nations.

An obvious difference here with Marx and Engels is that the correlation between advanced productive forces, social relations and proletarianization no longer implied a higher level of (revolutionary) consciousness and action, while economic backwardness did not necessarily result in political immaturity. In both cases, the outcome would depend on the precise working out of the law of uneven and combined development on a world scale. Not only was exploitation in the colonies fierce, obvious and unmediated; the whole structure of society was weak, volatile and contradictory. The backwardness of colonies could help to bring about revolution, and even a numerically small proletariat could play a strategically decisive role as long as it avoided the twin pitfalls of sectarian isolation from national political life and opportunist accommodation to its temporary anti-imperialist allies. In Lenin's view, we might say, the advanced form of economic progress of the imperialist states was paralleled by a high degree of anti-capitalist political consciousness in the

underdeveloped world. Thus, basing himself on a concrete analysis of changes in the capitalist economy, Lenin was able to put politics in command against a one-sided adherence to the economic-determinist elements in the writings of Marx and Engels.

Although there were striking tensions in the articles Lenin wrote in the last few years of his life, at least a powerful strand can be interpreted as suggesting that the future of socialist world revolution would actually be decided in the East. By chipping away parts of the imperialist system, revolutions of national liberation would increase the internal contradictions of capitalism, while the Soviet Union might provide an attractive model for industrialization and resistance against exploitation in the colonial areas. This idea may indeed be said to have 'turned on its head' Marx's own assumption that "the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie ... [becomes] the signal for liberation of all repressed nations".<sup>103</sup>

In the next chapter we link Mao with Marx and Lenin. The various concepts, such as class analysis, the United Front and feudalism, which make up Mao's view of imperialism will be considered and how this generates anti-imperialism. This will be done by referring to Marx and Lenin in order to point out similarities and differences.

## ENDNOTES

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21. *ibid.*
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45. ibid, chapters IV, Export of Capital, IX, Critique of Imperialism.
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55. Lenin CW, vol. 22, Imperialism, p. 189.
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61. Lenin CW, vol. 23, Farewell letter to Swiss Workers, pp. 370-1.
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67. Stuart R. Schram, Die permanente Revolution in China. Dokumente und Kommentar, (edition suhrkamp:Frankfurt), 1966, p. 34. The *locus classicus* of this concept of permanent revolution is to be found in MEW, vol. 7, Ansprachen der Zentralbehörde an den Bund vom März, pp. 247-8, "Whilst the democratic petit bourgeois wants ... to bring to an end the revolution as quickly as possible, ... so it is in our interest and it is our task to make this revolution permanent, until all classes who own something are removed from power, until state power has been conquered by the proletariat and the association of proletariat is not only advanced in one country but in all dominant countries of the whole world, so advanced that the competition among proletariats of these countries has stopped and that at least the decisive production forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletariat." Trotsky and Parvus are known for their early - 1905 - development of the concept 'permanent revolution'. Lenin developed his own ideas in close, sometimes contradictory relation to Trotsky. He was really forced to confront this issue because of the attempted revolution in 1905. Would this have been a major bourgeois or socialist revolution? Who would have been the allies? He wrote: "... from the democratic revolution we shall at once go over to the socialist revolution - always assessing how strong we are, and how strong the class-conscious and organized proletariat is. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop halfway ... first we support until the end with all available means, inclusive of confiscation, the peasant against the landowner, afterwards, however, (and even not afterwards, but at the same time) we will support the proletariat against the peasantry." Lenin CW, vol. 9, Social-Democracy's Attitude Toward the Peasant Movement, pp. 236-7. Until 1917, however, the argument that revolution in Russia will be followed by a period of capitalist development occurs much more frequently in Lenin's, as opposed to Trotsky's, writings.
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82. Cited in H. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism ..., op. cit., p. 206.
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87. Lenin CW, vol. 19, Backward Europe and Advanced Asia, pp. 99-100.

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98. Lenin CW, vol. 31, Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International, pp. 184-201; Lenin CW, vol. 33, Our Revolution, pp. 476-9; Lenin CW, vol. 31, The Second Congress of the Communist International, pp. 213-63, esp. pp. 240-6; see also Meyer in Wehler, Imperialism, op. cit., pp. 131ff.
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#### 4. MAO AND THE USES OF IMPERIALISM

##### (i) Introduction. The Place of Imperialism in Mao's Thought

The aim of this chapter is to examine what Mao understood by imperialism. Mao was not interested in a general study of capitalism and how it would affect Third World development, as Marx had been. Unlike Lenin, Mao did not develop a theory or account of the causes of imperialism - of why America, Britain, Germany, Japan acted as they did. But he was interested in the nationalist implications of capitalism in its advanced version, imperialism: "the Chinese proletariat emerged and grew simultaneously not only with the Chinese national bourgeoisie but also with the enterprises directly operated by the imperialists in China."<sup>1</sup> This is one of the main questions at issue, as mentioned already in Chapter One, namely the interrelation of national and class oppression and exploitation. Imperialism was therefore, a central feature of Mao's analysis of modern China and of the politics of revolution.

From the early 1920s Mao read Marxist-Leninist material that had been translated into Chinese. Earlier in Primary School in 1910, he had learned about Washington, Napoleon, Catherine the Great, Peter the Great, Wellington, Gladstone, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Lincoln. He named Qin Shi Huangdi and Han Wu-ti as his ideals. A year later Mao cut his cue off, demanded the

toppling of the monarchy, and the presidency for Sun Yatsen, the founder of the KMT (National People's Party, 1905) and creator of the 'Three Principles' (democracy, sovereignty and welfare state), which were meant to restore China's power. Such ideas were brought to Mao's attention through the pages of Min-Li Pao, a national-revolutionary paper. At this time, 1911-12, he read for the first time about socialism. Being undecided about his future career, Mao spent time reading in the Provincial Library of Changsha. There he read Adam Smith, Darwin, John Stuart Mill, Rousseau, Spencer and Montesquieu. He decided to become a teacher in 1913 and finished his studies in 1918. Among the newspapers he continued to read was Min-Li Pao, which was close to the KMT. Nonetheless, he also read classical literature, which was encouraged at the time by his teacher, Yang Ch'ang-chi, who pointed out patriotic writers such as Wang Fu-chih from the Ming Dynasty. Mao also read System of Ethics by Friedrich Paulsen. He thought about the rejuvenation of China, admired the American struggle of independence and considered the idea that the total destruction of China was a necessary precondition of the new state.<sup>2</sup>

In July 1914, the first issue of Xiangjiang pinglun (Xiang-River Review) appeared, agitating against imperialism and warlords. Mao became one of its journalists. In 1915, he also became a reader of Xin gingnian (New Youth) and took the editors Chen Duxiu and Hu Shih as his models. When he had completed his teacher's training (1918), he was employed by Li Ta-chao, China's

pioneer Marxist and one of the progenitors of the Chinese communist movement, as Assistant Librarian at Peking University, but was also able to sit in on lectures and became a member of the Philosophy and Journalists' Club, although he was politically close to anarchism.<sup>3</sup> He also met future CP founder Chen Duxun and CP leader Chang Kuo-t'ao. Among the books he read in 1920, three impressed him particularly, he stated: The Communist Manifest, Kautsky's Class Struggle and the History of Socialism by Kirkup.<sup>4</sup> "By the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory, and to some extent in action a Marxist, and from this time on, I considered myself a Marxist."<sup>5</sup> In 1921, Mao was one of the 13 delegates at the First Party Congress of the CCP where he took the minutes, and back in Hunan he became Party Secretary.<sup>6</sup>

Arif Dirlik however, has suggested that "as late as 1921, when the Party was formally established, the intellectuals who participated in its founding knew little about Marxism, and even less about the Marxism of Lenin than about the Marxism of Marx."<sup>7</sup> Maurice Meisner claimed that "the dissemination of Marxist theory ... increased rapidly in the wake of the May Fourth Movement."<sup>8</sup> Jack Gray however argued: "What is striking is that he [Mao] read so little of Marx and Engels. He read only the 'Communist Manifesto' and 'Socialism, Utopian and Scientific', he seems to read little more even in the course of the next twenty years [up to 1940]."<sup>9</sup> However, a lengthy list of the Soviet and Chinese philosophical sources read by Mao during his period in Yen-an, i. e. post-1935, suggests that he was quite well versed in

contemporary Soviet and Chinese Marxist philosophy.<sup>10</sup> In an article by Li Ji which lists the texts on philosophy available for study in the early to mid-1930s, it is stated that by 1937 Mao had read Capital, Anti-Dühring, and many of Lenin's writings.<sup>11</sup> Between April and May 1937-8, Mao lectured at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University in Yen-an. He gave more than a hundred lectures, some of which dealt with the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism. A little later, a number of Soviet texts on philosophy were available in Chinese, inspired by Stalin's aides Mitin and Yudin and finding their way into the work of Chinese writers such as Li Da and Ai Siqi. Stalin's History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course was translated into Chinese in 1939. Ai Siqi had written a very successful popular exposition of Marxism, The Philosophy of the Masses, which quoted at length from Stalin's Short Course. Another source for Mao was Mitin's Dictionary of Dialectical Materialism, translated into Chinese in 1939.<sup>12</sup> However, Robert Elegant has claimed in his Foreword to Lazlo Ladany's The Communist Party of China, 1921-1985, A Self-Portrait, that Mao was "an ignoramus regarding Marxism."<sup>13</sup> This view is shared to quite a degree by Ladany.

The Party leaders did not really begin to study Marxism until the late 1930s in Yen-an, and what they studied was the Marxism of Stalin. Methodology of the Thoughts of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin was printed in Chinese in Moscow in 1942. This was a sort of compendium of Stalinist Marxism. The introduction said it should fill the gap left by the lack of Chinese versions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. What China learnt in those days was not Marxism but the Lenin-

Stalin ideology.<sup>14</sup>

In 1964, in a talk with members of the Socialist Party of Japan, Mao himself declared that during the student movement around 1918, he neither knew of Marx nor Lenin and that he believed in idealism, in Confucius and the dualism of Kant.<sup>15</sup>

Nick Knight has argued that neither Wittfogel's view of Mao's originality (he was merely a Soviet clone), nor Schram's view (his Chineseness overwhelmed everything else) are tenable. He quotes Shi Zhongquan, who recognized both the debt that Mao owed to the orthodox Marxist tradition as well as the areas in which he clearly made a theoretical contribution of some originality, or applied abstract principles of Marx in a novel way that could function as a model in the subsequent development of the theories, strategies and tactics which were to become part-and-parcel of Chinese Marxism.<sup>16</sup>

Mao did not write a major analysis of capitalism, but this had already been done by Marx. For Mao, the most important point was the manifestation of capitalism/imperialism in China and its effect on the country. The key aspects of his thinking were guided by an anti-imperialist nationalism. Although this issue will be discussed again in general terms, as well as in the context of Mao's United Front policy (see Chapter Six), at this point his philosophy of science will be considered, and more specifically the issue of the sinification of Marxism. The views of Arthur Cohen and Karl August Wittfogel, who believed that Mao's Marxism was only a thinly-disguised copy of its Soviet progenitor, will

not be discussed.<sup>17</sup>

The sinification of Marxism does not indicate the power of Chinese culture and the hold it had over Mao, causing him to downplay the universal Marxist truths, but his utilitarian approach to dogmas.<sup>18</sup> Mao was most concerned with the problem of integrating the universal theory of Marxism with the 'concrete practice' of Chinese society and the Chinese revolution. In the late 1930s he described this process of integration as the 'sinification of Marxism'. His concept of imperialism is part of this sinified Marxism (others are, for example, his emphasis on the peasantry, the establishment of rural base areas, class struggle and the encirclement of the cities from the countryside). Secondly, the sinification of Marxism was not a Machiavellian ploy to oust the Moscow-oriented faction of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>19</sup> I agree with Knight that

Mao's sinification of Marxism was neither of these, ... it was rather an attempt to establish a formula by which a universal theory such as Marxism could be utilised in a particular national context and culture without abandoning the universality of that theory (emphasis in original).<sup>20</sup>

According to Mao, 'truth' was the result of practical investigations and from observation one could then draw conclusions in the form of laws.

In discussing a problem, we should start from reality and not from definitions ... We are Marxists, and Marxism teaches us that in our approach to a problem we should start from objective facts, not from abstract definitions, and that we should derive our guiding principles, policies and measures from an analysis of these facts.<sup>21</sup>

Laws are usually defined as having universal validity, but Mao



departed from this by discussing 'laws' of specific validity. As Knight puts it: "In Mao's hand a 'law' does not automatically have a general or universal validity but provides at the level of the specific instance an interpretation useful in understanding that specific instance."<sup>22</sup> He was interested in a 'law' at this level for its utility, largely in the formulation of political and military strategy. To quote Knight again:

Thus, by Mao's criteria, it was valid to accept a universal theory such as Marxism as representing a scientific reflection of objective reality if it had been constructed with regard to the norms of inductive procedure, building from the particular to the universal, and utilising the distilled wisdom of 'scientifically abstracted' indirect experience. Mao did not perceive, therefore, any contradiction between utilising an empiricist methodology under an overarching world view, for he accepted implicitly that this world view (Marxist dialectical and historical materialism) had been constructed in accordance with the idiosyncratic inductionist methodology which he espoused throughout his productive life.<sup>23</sup>

In this sense, Mao could accept that Marxism was universally valid, and at the same time abstract and in need of 'sinification' or concretization. However, Marxism as a guide to action had helped to direct attention to the issue of class analysis (as discussed later in Chapter Five). As Dirlik has stated: "In its conversion into an ideology of action, which is the ultimate goal of Marxism, the theory must inevitably be interpreted and instrumentalized."<sup>24</sup> In his Rectify the Party's Style of Work, Mao insisted that "It is necessary to master Marxist theory and apply it, master it for the sole purpose of applying it",<sup>25</sup> which is in accordance with Marx's famous dictum that one should not only know

the world, one should also change it. Mao's approach does not signify the primacy of Chinese conditions over Marxism-Leninism, but the rounding off of Marxism, in the sense of Marxist universal laws applied to Chinese reality.

The theory of Marx, Engels and Stalin is universally applicable. We should regard it not as a dogma, but as a guide to action ... It is not just a matter of understanding the general laws derived by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin from their extensive study of real life and revolutionary experience, but of studying their standpoint and method in examining and solving problems ... Being Marxists, Communists are internationalists, but we can put Marxism into practice only when it is integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and acquires a definite national form. The great strength of Marxism-Leninism lies precisely in its integration with the concrete revolutionary practice of all countries. For the Chinese Communists who are part of the great Chinese nation, flesh of its flesh and blood of its blood, any talk about Marxism in isolation from China's characteristics is merely Marxism in the abstract, Marxism in a vacuum. Hence to apply Marxism concretely in China so that its every manifestation has an indubitably Chinese characteristic, becomes a problem which is urgent for the whole Party to understand and solve.<sup>26</sup>

Mao also argued against people who did not know China's history since the Opium Wars and students returning from abroad who could only "parrot things foreign"<sup>27</sup> and who violated a fundamental principle of Marxism-Leninism, i. e. the unity of theory and practice.

Nowhere in his Yenan writings did Mao present a coherent exposition of any of the Marxist classics. This is neither accidental nor a result of the confused war situation; on the contrary, he would have considered an exegesis of the classics to be a waste of time, and would have found some rustic peasant terms

to express this view. Mao regarded the laws of Marxism-Leninism as valid, but did not accept the validity of these abstract principles divorced from Chinese reality; he was concerned to indicate the manner in which such phenomena were manifested in specific Chinese situations. He knew that imperialism was attacking the Chinese nation and wanted to determine its effect. Mao's concept of capitalism was not that of the first volume of Marx's Capital; for him an imperialist country was essentially a more developed country and one which was bullying others.

Mao did not analyze capitalism or rather in his case, imperialism as such, but used it in a way that was appropriate to Chinese conditions. It is clear, however, that Mao refused to accept that the specific principles or 'laws' arising from Marx's and Lenin's analysis of European capitalism and later imperialism possessed universal status. On the contrary, he believed that their relevance was limited by the specific nature of the historical situation from which they had arisen. The function of such universal laws was to describe the general or universal existence of a certain phenomenon (like class struggle), but not to anticipate the specific form that such a phenomenon might take in any concrete situation or historical moment. It is in this sense that Marxism could be 'universally applicable', for it served to direct attention towards such phenomena. Consequently, Mao asserted: "Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action,"<sup>28</sup> and that is why, the Chinese revolution had been successful he claimed much later:

Marxism is a general truth which has universal application. We must accept it. But this general truth must be combined with the concrete practice of each nation's revolution. It was only because the Chinese people accepted Marxism and combined it with the practice of the Chinese revolution that they won victory in the Chinese revolution.<sup>29</sup>

Meisner formulated it in the following way:

Mao derived from the objective laws of historical development proclaimed by Marx some degree of assurance in the historic inevitability of a socialist future. But, in the final analysis, Mao's faith in the future was not based upon any real Marxist confidence in the determining, objective forces of sociohistorical development. For Mao, the essential factor in determining the course of history was conscious human activity and the most important ingredients for revolution were how men thought and their willingness to engage in revolutionary action.<sup>30</sup>

In the following section I will deal in detail with the impact of imperialism on China, which was Mao's main concern, and attempt to understand the usefulness of Marxism and Leninism to counter it. The problem of overcoming the misery in China produced numerous approaches - from total resistance based on imported weapons, through a rejuvenation of Confucius, to extensive accommodations with and mirroring of the West. Marxism-Leninism was one framework which seemed to many Chinese to provide a way of overcoming the consequences of Westernization without giving up their own identity completely. For Mao the net economic impact of imperialism was negative, but politically it gave birth to anti--imperialism. As the impact of imperialism was uneven in China, Mao suggested utilizing all conflicts among landlords, capitalists and Chinese sympathizers of imperialist countries, as well as contradictions among imperialist countries. It will become clear

that Mao's analysis of imperialism and with it, anti-imperialism, is a development of Lenin's thinking on anti-imperialism.

Mao distinguished, as did Lenin, between economic, military, political and cultural imperialism. He also did use 'imperialism' to mean 'capitalism', something which Lenin had done in Imperialism. The impact of imperialism on China was not to create one well-established capitalist mode of production, but a system of a heterogeneous character. This heterogeneity was perceived by Mao as positive, as it gave him room to manoeuvre domestically as well as internationally. After the defeat of Japan in 1945, Mao did not suffer from the illusion that imperialism had been defeated. He believed that the USA had replaced Japan as the most aggressive global power, and would manifest this aggressiveness first by attacking Third World countries rather than the Soviet Union.

When Mao declared in 1949, "Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up"<sup>31</sup>, he was expressing what millions of ordinary Chinese citizens felt and hoped. From then on, China would reject any unequal treaties<sup>32</sup> and would establish diplomatic relations with other countries only on an equal basis. He stated: "We are willing to establish diplomatic relations with all countries on the principle of equality, but the imperialists, who have always been hostile to the Chinese people, will definitely not be in a hurry to treat us as equals."<sup>33</sup> He added that the Chinese people had won a tremendous battle against all odds because they had dared to take on, as once Yu Gong had

done with the mountains outside his home, the twin evils of imperialism and feudalism.<sup>34</sup>

The CCP's Second United Front with Chiang Kaishek and the Nationalist People's Party (KMT) against the Japanese was regarded as a betrayal by some in the Party, as was the softening of land policies in certain phases. This United Front had been conducted at the instigation of Moscow and Mao accepted that on the path to victory, compromise was legitimate, as long as it brought closer the realization of the maximum programme. Only by the use of long-term historical goals could a compromise be judged principled or unprincipled. The Party, if it survived a compromise, would emerge strengthened, while the enemy would be correspondingly weakened, Mao believed. Thus he was prepared to discuss aid from certain imperialist countries against another imperialist, Japan. This ability to form compromises, while ensuring enough independence for the CCP to pursue socialist policies, was not the result of Mao's skill as fortune-teller,<sup>35</sup> but was based upon an analysis of the contradictions of the time. In order to decide with whom to work and whom to exclude, Mao had to answer the following questions over and over again:

(1) What was the impact of imperialism in China? Was it creative or destructive, in terms of the development of the capitalist mode of production?

(2) What impact was it having on Chinese social forces? What were the repercussions of imperialist actions on Chinese politics and economics?

(3) What impact did imperialist actions in China have on the imperialist countries themselves?

Generalizing within a Marxist-Leninist framework, which initially took Stalin as the leader of the worldwide socialist movement and the Soviet Union as the model, Mao developed his way of leading the CCP to victory, which in turn created a Maoist model of revolution in the Third World. "This war [against Japan] will not only affect China and Japan, strongly impelling both to advance, but will also affect the whole world, impelling all nations, especially the oppressed nations such as India, to march forward."<sup>36</sup> His differential analysis of contradictions led him to formulate a general conception of national revolutionary war:

Qualitatively different contradictions can only be resolved by qualitatively different methods. For instance, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is resolved by the method of socialist revolution; the contradiction between the great masses of the people and the feudal system is resolved by the method of democratic revolution; the contradiction between the colonies and imperialism is resolved by the method of national revolutionary war.<sup>37</sup>

In the case of China, this war was shaped by four characteristics:

The first characteristic of China's revolutionary war is that it is waged in a vast semi-colonial country which is unevenly developed politically and economically and which has gone through a revolution ... The second characteristic is that our enemy is big and powerful ... The third characteristic is that the Red Army is small and weak ... The fourth characteristic is Communist Party leadership and the agrarian revolution.<sup>38</sup>

This does not seem to provide an optimistic outlook, but the contradiction between imperialism and the Chinese people was such that, while involving the exploitation of China, it also created

the opportunity to exploit imperialist activities in China to liberate it from foreign penetration. This may not have been exactly the dialectic of capitalist expansion that Marx had in mind in his writings on India, for example; but it was not entirely inconsistent with a Marxian or Hegelian sense of history as full of contradiction and unintended outcomes.

(ii) The Impact of Imperialism

For Mao the decisive turning point in modern Chinese history had come with the 1840 Opium war. This is how he described the ensuing period:

Chinese feudal society lasted for about 3000 years. It was not until the middle of the 19th century, with the penetration of foreign capitalism, that great changes took place in Chinese society. As China's feudal society had developed a commodity economy, and so carried within itself the seeds of capitalism, China would of herself have developed slowly into a capitalist society even without the impact of foreign capitalism. Penetration by foreign capitalism accelerated this process. Foreign capitalism played an important part in the disintegration of China's social economy; on the one hand, it undermined the foundations of her self-sufficient natural economy and wrecked the handicraft industries both in the societies and in the peasants' homes, and on the other, it hastened the growth of a commodity economy in town and country. Apart from its disintegrating effects on the foundations of China's feudal economy, this state of affairs gave rise to certain objective conditions and possibilities for the development of capitalist production in China ... The history of the emergence and development of national capitalism is at the same time the history of the emergence and development of the Chinese bourgeoisie and proletariat ... As distinct social classes, the Chinese bourgeoisie and proletariat are new-born and never existed before in Chinese



history ... They are twins born of China's old (feudal) society, at once linked to each other and antagonistic to each other. However, the Chinese proletariat emerged and grew simultaneously not only with the Chinese national bourgeoisie but also with the enterprises directly operated by the imperialists in China. Hence, a very large section of the Chinese proletariat is older and more experienced than the Chinese bourgeoisie, and is therefore a greater and more broadly based social force ...<sup>39</sup>

This lengthy quote reveals much of Mao's assessment of the impact of capitalism on China (it was not critical since capitalism already existed in China), a possible strategy for responding to it (an alliance with the bourgeoisie) and the view that China fitted into the five-stage unilinear scheme of development. Although this point goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to note that Mao added the paragraph on the first sprouts of capitalism after 1949 and that he did not understand China in an Asiatic Mode of Production way.

It was Mao's view that the imperialist presence in China was double-faceted. On the one hand, it "hastened the disintegration of feudal society and the growth of elements of capitalism, thereby transforming a feudal into a semi-feudal society". Having accorded imperialism this limited positive role in China's historical development, he went on to show in considerable detail how the other facet of the imperialist presence was negative. It "imposed ... ruthless rule on China, reducing an independent country to a semi-colonial and (in the case of Japanese imperialism after 1931), a colonial country."<sup>40</sup>

Here we find many issues that had been discussed by Marx and

Lenin. Implicit in Mao's thinking is the view that the old, feudal order was overrun by foreign influence, something that both he and Marx saw in a positive light. Marx would not have agreed that capitalist sprouts already existed within Chinese society, as he had analyzed China as having an Asiatic Mode of Production. But the important point is that the introduction of capitalism was greatly speeded up by foreign forces, and that this had various consequences for Chinese society. Meisner phrased it as: "Imperialism ... served as 'the unconscious tool of history' in creating conditions for a social revolution in China."<sup>41</sup>

One of the effects was the combined existence of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the feudal classes.<sup>42</sup> This articulation of different modes of production was something which benefited imperialism, but is also created a multitude of contradictions, potential dangers, and opportunities for the CCP. Another effect was the uneven economic and political development of China.

A weak capitalist economy coexists with a preponderant semi-feudal economy; a few modern industrial and commercial cities coexist with a vast stagnant countryside; several million industrial workers coexist with several hundred of millions peasants and handicraftsmen, labouring under the old society; big warlords controlling the central government, coexist with small warlords controlling the provinces; ... a few railways, steamship lines, and motor roads exist side by side with a vast number of wheelbarrow paths.<sup>43</sup>

It is easy to recognize here Lenin's concept of 'uneven and combined development': Capitalism in its imperialist form possessed positive and negative characteristics, performing its

'Double Mission' but not in the way envisaged by Marx. Whereas Warren, for instance, has highlighted only the positive, revolutionizing effects of imperialist capitalism on the colonies, and André Gunder Frank ('The Development of Underdevelopment') has seen only the damage, these two aspects were inextricably intertwined in the thinking of Lenin and Mao. The result, according to Mao, was that "The uneven political and economic development of China gives rise to the uneven development of her revolution ... The transformation of this unevenness into a general evenness will require a very long time."<sup>44</sup> Above all, there could no longer be any question of a thoroughgoing transformative modernization of these societies along the lines of the Western metropolises. Indeed, imperialism might even hinder the overthrow of the old mode of production whenever this suited its only purpose: profit. "It is certainly not the purpose of the imperialist powers invading China to transform feudal China into a capitalist China. On the contrary, their purpose is to transform China into their own semi-colony or colony."<sup>45</sup>

Mao's position is very different from that of Marx, who believed that colonizing powers did not consciously pursue a policy in occupied territories, except to plunder them or otherwise make use of them. Secondly, Marx stated that their activities led to the destruction of the old order and the building of a new industrialized order, with all the hope this gave him for the future, summarized in the phrase from the Preface

of Capital, vol. I: "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future."<sup>46</sup> However, Lenin thought Marx's hopes for general industrialization were exaggerated. In an analysis similar to that of Moore in Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, he noted that the weakness of the local bourgeoisie prevented it from establishing its monopoly of power and pushing through industrialization and liberal democracy.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, Lenin maintained that local industrialization must be tackled by a coalition of anti-imperialist forces, led by the Communist Party.

The assessment of imperialism's industrializing ability apparently went too far for Mao, who stressed that the imperialist powers consciously tried to keep China non-industrialized and in a state of dependence. The important question then was what to do about this state of affairs, and the multitude of contradictions in China and among the imperialists left room for manoeuvre for anti-imperialists.

China had been a target of imperialism for nearly a century - at one time primarily European (i.e. British colonialism), then Japanese and finally American. Jack Gray, assessing the validity of the 'Marxist concept of imperialism', concluded:

Thus in the crisis following the defeat of China by Japan in 1894-5 it was the most advanced capitalist powers - Britain, the United States and laterally Germany - which opposed the partition of China and so saved her from dismemberment at the hands of the predatory feudal powers, Russia and Japan. In sum, the Leninist theory of imperialism, if it is to fit China, has to be stood on its head: imperialism was not connected with the last stage of capitalism but with its first.<sup>48</sup>

British, or Japanese or American, for Mao imperialism remained the same, only the facade had changed. Sun Yatsen had described China since 1895 as the 'Sick Man of the Orient' and a 'hypo-colony' which is a grade worse than a semi-colony because of the multiple control and exploitation exercised by the imperial powers. Chiang Kaishek attributed evil to the Unequal Treaties (as he expressed it in his book, China's Destiny).<sup>49</sup> A CCP resolution of the Sixth Congress in Moscow in 1928 (where Mao in absentia was again elected to the Central Committee), argued that "despite impressive development in the initial stage ... the revolution finally failed. At this historical stage, it did not have sufficient strength to overcome the numerous difficulties of the period."<sup>50</sup>

The resolution identified the causes of this failure as betrayal by the national bourgeoisie, the strength of landlord armies, vacillation by the petty bourgeoisie, uneven development of the workers' and peasant movements and, most important of all, "the powerful strength of the imperialists".<sup>51</sup> In the case of China, there has been much debate among Westerners about the actual extent of the imperialist impact, with some arguing that only coastal areas were affected, others that the geographical losses were especially significant.<sup>52</sup> The question of what the net impact has been is still controversial, some believing imperialism blocked industrialization, others blaming domestic incompetence for China's state of affairs. Still others think that there was minimal foreign impact, both in quality and quantity.<sup>53</sup> What cannot be denied is that imperialism siphoned off resources which

the Qing dynasty could have used. Firstly there were the military defeats, Opium Wars, Yili crisis, Chinese-French war, conflicts with Tsarist Russia, the traumatic defeat by the 'former pupil' Japan and the humiliation following the Boxer uprising. Then European great powers such as Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany and later Japan demanded concessions, spheres of influence, war reparations, and the Most Favoured Nation status. They interfered in domestic affairs, playing off conservatives against revolutionaries, the Court against warlords, or the Taiping against the Court. China was indeed a football of international politics. Economic exploitation was however also noticeable. There were interest payments on foreign loans. In 1899 China's income was Tael 88. 4 mill., and Tael 24 mill. were paid back in interest. In addition reparations for various wars had to be paid. China's foreign trade deficit in 1911 was Tael 94 mill. Foreign capital controlled key industries in China.<sup>54</sup>

Areas which had been economically successful, such as Sichuan, Hunan, Henan and cities such as Xi'an, Kaifeng and Luoyang were replaced by Shanghai, Qingdao, Tianjin and Tangshan. If the economic heart of China had during the Ming and Qing dynasties been at the Yangzi and South East Coast, it moved in the second part of the last century to North and East China because that is where the coal mines were and where the new railway lines were built. This move did not take into consideration Chinese economic needs, but was arranged according to the needs of the world market. Thus, the raw materials for the light industry in

Shanghai or Tianjin came from overseas and not from the Chinese interior. These industries were integrated into the world market but did not have much to do with 'China'. Consequently a domestic market hardly existed. At one time, for example, Guangdong exported rice, whilst Hunan was starving. As Oskar Weggel put it:

If one summarises all these 'imbalances' and 'contradictions', which would not have been imaginable without foreign influences, one can conclude that the theory of imperialism, which is based on the assumption that misery and alienation are caused on the whole exogenously, does indeed fit the China of the time.<sup>55</sup>

Jonathan Spence agreed with this assessment: "The charges made by Sun Yat-sen and by the CCP concerning the power of foreign imperialism in China were on the mark."<sup>56</sup>

Foreign capital dominated modern key sectors of the Chinese economy: banking, ship building, and transport, railways, mining and heavy industry. Due to lack of customs control, China was unable to protect infant industries. More difficult to measure is the humiliation of the Qing government by foreigners. Naturally, the slow pace of modernization in China cannot be explained by the impact of imperialism alone. Increase in population, limited arable land and scarcity of raw materials as well as reliance on traditional techniques were also responsible. Mark Elvin's 'high equilibrium trap'<sup>57</sup> and Weber's 'Protestant work ethic'<sup>58</sup> (and its relative absence in China) are to some degree useful in understanding the absence of industrialization. Foreign debt, reparations and exchange rate manipulation undoubtedly undermined the already weak power of the Chinese government. Were they

available, official statistics might show that imperialism should not be understood primarily by a 'drain-of-wealth-thesis'.

Nevertheless, foreign-induced instability, especially on the state apparatus, with its disintegrating effects on the economy and society cannot be denied.<sup>59</sup> May and Fairbank have noted how little tangible economic profit either the USA or China drew from their relationship, and yet how emotionally charged the contacts have been.<sup>60</sup> Fairbank declared, due to the Western impact traditional China entered an "era of collapse ... and only in the mid-twentieth century could a new historical orthodoxy become established through the application of Marxism-Leninism to China in the thought of Mao Tse-tung."<sup>61</sup> Without denying that the economic impact of foreign trade and investment is a highly complex issue, external factors, categorized by Mao as 'imperialism', played a formative role in the country's political, cultural and economic life up to 1949.<sup>62</sup>

Mao, for example, pointed to the many wars of aggression fought, the infamous 'Unequal Treaties' and the fact that customs sovereignty and control over foreign trade and communications were in foreign hands. To deny, as for example Feuerwerker<sup>63</sup> does, that the specific economic consequences of imperialism were of vital importance for China's twentieth-century history, however, does not (even for Feuerwerker) imply that imperialism in other guises did not play an important role - especially as the midwife of Chinese nationalism. Mao believed that imperialists exploited cheap Chinese raw materials and labour; monopolized the Chinese



banking and finance system; used compradors and usurers for their purposes and wanted to transform feudal landlords into a pillar of support for imperialism. Finally he asserted:

1. The imperialist powers have waged wars of aggression against China ... 2. have forced China to sign numerous unequal treaties ... 3. gained control of all the important trading ports ... 4. operate many enterprises in both light and heavy industry ... 5. monopolize China's banking and finance ... 6. have established a network of comprador and merchant-usurer exploitation ... 7. have made the feudal landlord class as well as the comprador class the main props of their rule ... 8. supply the reactionary government with large quantities of munitions and a host of military advisers ... 9. have never slackened their efforts to poison the minds of the Chinese people.<sup>64</sup>

All this is an example of Mao's 'objective facts', the numerous observations on the functioning of the real world with which one needs to start before developing guiding principles, laws.

Thus, even though imperialism had a positive side in that it accelerated Chinese development towards socialism,<sup>65</sup> it also produced much human suffering and caused problems for endogenous industrialization.

National capitalism has developed to a certain extent and has played a considerable part in China's political and cultural life, but it has not become the principle pattern in China's social economy; it is flabby and is mostly associated with foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism in varying degrees.<sup>66</sup>

Fairbank phrased it as follows: "Imperialism might be truly exploitative in some situations but in others more like a crude form of development."<sup>67</sup> Only certain raw materials were exploited, only certain roads to certain ports built, only in certain areas did investment occur. Political privileges, economic benefits,

penetration of the countryside, domination of Chinese industrialization to the exclusion of Chinese industrialists, support for feudal forces: these are some of the indications of the centrality of imperialism to Chinese life.

One of the interesting differences between Chinese nationalists and Communists, as well as being a point of difference between communists, was in the conclusions they drew from the fact that China was the victim not merely of one, but of many imperialist countries. While Sun Yatsen argued that this multiplied the evils and dangers, Mao argued that it multiplied the options. For Mao it was a fact that "China's economic, political and cultural development is very uneven, because she has been under the complete or partial domination of many imperialist powers."<sup>68</sup> Yet, inter-imperialist rivalry not only created the possibility for China to play off one imperialist power against another - as had been originally proposed by Lenin in his policy of 'peaceful coexistence' - it also provided opportunities for internal divisions to be made use of. Changes in imperialist tactics created changes in Chinese economic and political life, which could be instrumentalized, for example, in the form of the United Front.

China is a semi-colonial country - disunity among the imperialist powers makes for disunity among the ruling groups in China. There is a difference between a semi-colonial country controlled by several countries and a colony controlled by a single country.<sup>69</sup>

And of course imperialism created nationalism in the colonies, a point made by Lenin earlier (see Chapter Three) as it arose as a

response to exploitation and repression - which is after all the key for Mao's understanding and utilizing of imperialism.

Finally, in none of his various writings, did Mao offer a comprehensive political-economic definition of imperialism, partly because he saw himself as standing in the tradition of Lenin's work. It is true, that at an early stage in Mao's career (1925), in order to make the peasants understand the strange slogan 'Down with the imperialists' he changed this into 'Down with the rich foreigners'.<sup>70</sup> However, John Gittings has written in detail, as an example of imperialism, on the effect of the cigarette tax on Chinese cigarette production, national income and peasant income,<sup>71</sup> and Mao and the peasants must have been aware, if not of this, then of similar examples of how the political economy of imperialism affected the Chinese.

In On Contradiction Mao talked about different types of imperialism, the tough one of war, and the milder one of politics, economics and culture.<sup>72</sup> The Second World War, like the First, resulted from the need of imperialist countries to overcome their economic and political crisis with the help of war, redivision and plunder of the world - a key element in Lenin's original definition of imperialism which had been reinforced by Stalin. In an interview with Anna Louise Strong, Mao further differentiated between monopoly capitalism and the earlier capitalism of free competition which flows directly from Lenin's theory of imperialism. If one, however, compares this interview as it appeared under the original headline 'World's Eye Views from a

Yenan Cave', with the edited version in Mao's Selected Works, it is clear that when discussing imperialism, Mao emphasized its political and military aspects<sup>73</sup> with minimal reference to Marx's materialist base and super-structure approach.

Evidently, Mao's thought was concerned with economic, political, cultural and military issues, which Marxists would see as interconnected. As we will note in the discussion of class in Chapter Five, however, this does not solve the problem of the differential weight that should be attached to these and other areas of social life. The often quoted slogan 'Politics in Command' is, of course, open to various interpretations, according to both the period and the tasks at hand. But Mao believed that Marxism-Leninism, by being in the forefront of the struggle against different forms of Western penetration, would be able to rationalize and guide the tremendous force of nationalism. After all, it was the Japanese take-over of Shandong after Versailles which had sparked off the May 4th Movement in 1919. This nationalism (unlike, say, that in Germany 1871, was not of the bourgeois kind but a national-liberation type, as discussed in Chapter Three. National unification and anti-imperialism were not possible without radical change in the social and economic situation. At the same time, Mao argued (and he was not the first to do so) that imperialism had become so structurally important in the articulation of China's social life that, "Unless imperialist rule is overthrown, the rule of the feudal landlord class cannot be terminated, because imperialism is its main support."<sup>74</sup> Thus,

whether he placed the emphasis on national anti-imperialist struggle as a stage preceding the struggle for socialism, or as a kind of expression of class struggle, he was re-evaluating nationalism in the traditions of the socialist movement.

(iii) The Repercussions of Imperialist Actions in Imperialist Countries and Among Chinese Political Forces

Mao's analysis of imperialism provided a context for his analysis of class forces and in particular the role of the peasantry. We have seen that Mao did not directly or primarily analyze imperialism in the classical terms of political economy. But he did see that it had a major impact both on Chinese society and on politics in Europe and this informed his revolutionary political tactics, a point made already with Lenin. Marxism-Leninism had an inherent tendency to link together economic, political and cultural issues, as well as the internal and the external, and this would make it possible to develop a response to the problems facing China. First of all, imperialism sharpened class contradictions in China and made them obvious. At the same time the different roles of the classes in the anti-imperialist struggle changed more confusingly than in countries that were not as heterogeneous as China, a point which is the focus of Chapter Five. Mao freely admitted, as Lenin had in Russia, that the subjective forces of the Chinese revolution were weak, but all

reactionary dominant classes (state power, armed forces, parties, and so on) were even weaker in their attempt to remain dominant, as they relied upon a backward and dilapidated socioeconomic structure. For this reason, the revolution might not develop first in Europe - where the subjective forces of the revolution were stronger, but the reactionary classes still stronger - but in colonial or semi-colonial countries such as China.<sup>75</sup>

It was clear for Mao that imperialism had not created one unified capitalist mode of production throughout China: by 1940, the Chinese social formation contained a confusing mixture of various modes of production. Nevertheless, feudalism remained dominant into the twentieth century, although declining in its influence and fundamentally altered by imperialist penetration of China. This meant that the appropriate targets of revolutionary struggle could not be decided by economic criteria alone as suggested for example by the 'Returned Bolsheviks', but had to be carefully analyzed in terms of their interaction with the imperialist power. The argument in the Communist Party simplified in the so-called 'line struggles' had been about the target of the revolution and the class supporting it and for example Li Lisan was condemned for having launched unsuccessful attacks on cities.<sup>76</sup> Already at the end of 1925 Mao believed, at least according to the official Selected Works, that the central force for the

success of the revolution was the peasantry and that the revolution therefore had to be centred in the countryside. Ladany however stated that in 1928 ... Mao was still thinking of capturing the cities in the three neighbouring provinces and he quotes Zhou Enlai: 'I think that at that time [1928] Comrade Mao Zedong had not yet thought of centering the work on the villages and enabling the Party, representing the proletariat, to lead the peasants in guerilla war. He still thought that the centres of work should be in the cities.'<sup>77</sup>

Even though Mao was in 1928 already at his base in Jing Gangshan in the countryside and even though in his Selected Works Mao would like us to believe that his thinking developed step by step rooted in Marx's and Lenin's and Stalin's thought, as he was guided to transform ideology into action with the accompanying necessity of compromise, it is true as Ladany and Zhou Enlai claim that Mao was not the inventor of the peasant movement and of land reform. However, once pushed into the countryside, Mao did not see this as a handicap, but as a boon, as he then realized that in spite of established orthodoxy only adaptation to Chinese conditions would guarantee the survival of the CCP. In 1928 Mao was playing a dual game: trying to make it look as though he was toeing the Party line under Qu Quibai and then Li Lisan - attack cities - and developing a strategy for rural guerilla war, which the Party centre often disagreed with.

Even though it is possible to argue that the CCP was founded

at the direct instigation of Comintern agent Voitinsky, and that the Comintern was dominant, at certain times this guidance of the CCP caused also immediate problems, if not with Voitinsky then with other Comintern agents such as Sneevliet (alias Maring) or Otto Braun (alias Li De). In the end, it was the (Japanese imperialist) intervention which acted as the catalyst, fusing the disparate elements in Chinese society: "The War [against Japan] has changed a disunited country into a relatively united one."<sup>78</sup>

One positive result of China's heterogeneity, even before the Long March, was the possibility for Red Base areas to exist and survive; another the possibility to form alliances with a number of different partners and a third was to use this domestic heterogeneity against the various imperialist powers.<sup>79</sup> The uneven development resulting from economic imperialism had localized the agricultural sector and separated it from the cities. The Communist Red Bases were thus in a position to give support to peasant associations in various parts of China. It is true that united front policy towards the KMT required a scaling down of radical transformations in the countryside. But this does not mean that such policies were irrelevant or that anti-Japanese nationalism was the only element in the final victory as Chalmers Johnson claimed.<sup>80</sup> It meant simply that social policies alone were not capable of defeating both the KMT and outside powers. Through all the twists and turns of immediate policy, Mao never fundamentally altered the conception he had held since 1925-6 - at least as offered in the official Selected Works - of the social



well-spring of the Chinese revolution.

Since China's key cities have long been occupied by the powerful imperialists and their reactionary Chinese allies, it is imperative for the revolutionary ranks to turn the backward villages into advanced, consolidated base areas ... and this is possible because China's economic development is uneven (her economy not being a unified capitalist economy), because her territory is extensive (which gives the revolutionary forces room to manoeuvre), because the counter-revolutionary camp is disunited and full of contradictions, and because the struggle of the peasants who are the main force in the revolution is led by the Communist Party, the party of the proletariat.<sup>81</sup>

Mao's position concerning the centrality of the peasantry and countryside is special as he led the Communist Party to victory on the basis of theoretical propositions worked out as early as 1925-6. This was all a long way from what Marx and Engels had ever imagined. And, although towards the end of his life Lenin was beginning to conceive of socialist revolutions outside Europe, he would have had great difficulty in grasping the idea of a revolution that proceeded outwards from the countryside. Indeed, for Mao the move to the cities was specifically excluded until after victory in the countryside, something he had learnt through experience and opportunity after 1927.

However, Mao believed that uneven development also inhibited the growth of Chinese capitalism. The national bourgeoisie was divided between those who sought to appease foreign imperialism or superexploit workers in marginal areas in order to survive, and those who looked ahead to the removal of the imperialist presence as the condition for their own prosperity. This latter strategy had enough in common with Mao's thinking - his idea of resistance

to the principal contradiction, Japanese imperialism, rather than simultaneous opposition to all reactionary forces in China and all imperialist powers - to prevent a united front from appearing to be a utopian venture. All possible disputes had to be exploited between the enemy and its allies or potential allies. As we shall now see, Mao's attitude towards the different imperialist powers active in China stemmed from these same considerations.

#### (iv) The Questions of External Policy

The policy of manoeuvring between imperialist powers, exploiting a temporary coincidence of interests with one in order to weaken the immediate threat, went back to the early days of Soviet Russia, when the Bolshevik leadership feared above all a holy crusade of the whole capitalist world against the new workers' state. The signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany in 1918, on terms far from unilaterally favourable to Russia, gave rise to passionate debate within the Bolshevik Party, with many intransigents denouncing Lenin for an unprincipled surrender to the imperialist enemy. However, in the tradition of the Comintern and the Soviet state, Brest-Litovsk came to stand for a realistic policy of compromise and manoeuvre to gain short-term advantages that would strengthen the fundamental position of

socialist forces as a whole. In his famous pamphlet Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder, Lenin drew the theoretical lessons in simple and direct language that would echo among future generations of Communists throughout the world.

To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complex than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilization of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one's enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating, or conditional allies) - is that not ridiculous in the extreme?<sup>82</sup>

It should be noted that Lenin referred to the utilization of conflicts of interest among enemies, on one hand, and alliance policy, on the other, as two distinct tactics. Mao's United Front doctrine tended to combine the two into a single policy, as I will explain in Chapter Six.

As we have seen, China was the victim not of one but of many imperialist countries. Particularly after the outbreak of the Second World War, Mao further developed the idea of an 'International United Front', which came from the Comintern. Separate imperialist powers, on the basis of their particular interests, could be won over, but only as allies in the specific fight against Japan. Japanese pressure on domestic politics also added to pressure on the activities of the other imperialists in China, who began to display splits that could be turned to the advantage of the revolutionary forces.

The contradiction between Japanese and British and American

imperialism became glaringly obvious after 1937, as Mao wrote in a footnote to 'Policies, Measures and Perspectives for Resisting the Japanese Invasion'. If Chiang turned against the Japanese invaders, this was, Mao stated, because of the "nation-wide popular pressure and as a result of the serious blow the Japanese invasion had dealt to the interests both of the British and American imperialists in China."<sup>83</sup> Because of this inter-imperialist rivalry, and the momentary advantage for Japan, other imperialist countries had to protect their spheres of influence. But the policy of appeasement, as advocated by Chamberlain and others, meant that British imperialism was for long treated by Mao with something worse than contempt as he was afraid of a Far Eastern Munich. If the USA and Japan could enter into a non-aggression pact for the Far East, Mao feared (with some justification) that Chiang or the right wing of the KMT would come to an accommodation over Japan's occupation of parts of China. Fortunately, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, put an end to this danger for the CCP. In a way, the Party needed an extension of the war in order to stabilize the United Front with the KMT, and to conclude similar agreements with foreign powers. Moreover, the entry of the Soviet Union into the war - after a period of confusion produced by its self-defensive pact with Nazi Germany following the demise of collective security - meant that the central force in the international Communist movement would remain actively committed to the defeat of the main enemy of the national liberation

struggle in China.<sup>84</sup>

It should be stressed that Mao had a particular hostility to British imperialism, and as early as 1923 he hoped that the Chinese would recognize that Britain was as much an enemy as Japan. "Don't they [the Chinese] know that the aggression of the English imperialists against China is even more atrocious than that of the Japanese imperialists?"<sup>85</sup> Apart from its commercial interests, Britain also had the position of a colonial power to defend. Disorder in China and success for anti-colonial struggles might well have an impact on other parts of the colonial empire or even on British domestic politics.<sup>86</sup> The United States, on the other hand, was not really tainted by colonial associations with the partial exception of the Philippines - and pursued simple economic gains through trade, which could also be conducted with a fully independent China. At one time Mao considered the idea that the USA might remain neutral in the Second World War, in order to pick up the pieces and put them together when everyone else was exhausted.<sup>87</sup> The conclusion of this phase is to be found in On Policy:

The Communist Party opposes all imperialism, but we make a distinction between Japanese imperialism which is now committing aggression against China and the imperialist powers which are not doing so now, between German and Italian imperialism which are allies of Japan and have recognized 'Manchukuo' and British and US imperialism which are opposed to Japan, and between the Britain and the United States of yesterday which followed a Munich policy in the Far East and undermined China's resistance to Japan, and the Britain and United States of today which have abandoned this policy and are now in favour of China's resistance. Our tactics are guided by one and the same principle: to make use of contradictions, win over the many, oppose the few

and crush our enemies one by one. Our foreign policy differs from that of the Kuomintang. The Kuomintang claims, 'There is only one enemy and all the rest are friends'; it appears to treat all countries other than Japan alike, but in fact it is pro-British and pro-American. On our part we must draw certain distinctions, first, between the Soviet Union and the capitalist countries, second, between Britain and the United States on the one hand and Germany and Italy on the other, third, between the people of Britain and the United States and their imperialist governments, and fourth, between the policy of Britain and the United States during their Far Eastern Munich period and their policy today. We build our policy on these distinctions. In direct contrast to the Kuomintang our basic line is to use all possible foreign help, subject to the principle of independent prosecution of the war and reliance on our own efforts, and not, as the Kuomintang does, to abandon this principle by relying entirely on foreign help or hanging on to one imperialist bloc or another.<sup>88</sup>

Even though Mao was not really strong or influential enough at the time as he was basically ignored by the great powers, he kept this sense of a saving mission and felt protected by the world wide might of the Comintern in Moscow.

A policy of splitting the ranks of the enemy had been advocated by Mao in 1928 in his Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?<sup>89</sup> Closer relations with imperialists were as possible as closer relations with 'die-hards' in a United Front against Japan. He defined three conditions under which the Chinese could defeat Japanese forces: "First, the establishment of an anti-Japanese united front; second, the formation of an international anti-Japanese united front; third, the rise of the revolutionary movement of the people in Japan and the Japanese colonies."<sup>90</sup> It naturally followed that Mao was prepared to ask for and accept aid from those imperialist countries which were

also fighting Japan. He did not mistake this aid as genuine help for the CCP, but in their own imperialist interests, the governments of Britain, the United States and France indicated that they will help China.<sup>91</sup>

There can be no doubt that, although Mao had few illusions about the aggressive capacities of each imperialist power, he hoped that the wartime conditions of cooperation could be extended at an economic level after the defeat of Japan. This is clear from the following report. At the end of the Second World War Mao wrote informing the United States State Department: China's greatest post-war need is economic development. She lacks the capitalistic foundation necessary to carry this out alone. Her own living standards are so low that they cannot be further depressed to provide the needed capital. America and China complement each other economically: they will not compete. China does not have the requirements of a heavy industry of major size. She cannot hope to meet the United States in its highly specialized manufactures. She (the United States) also needs an outlet for capital investment. China needs to build up light industries to supply her own market and raise the living standards of her own people. Eventually she can supply these goods to other countries in the Far East. To help pay for this foreign trade and investment, she has raw materials and agricultural products. America is not only the most suitable country fully able to participate to assist the economic development of China: She is also the only country fully able to participate. For all these reasons, there must not be and cannot

be any conflict, estrangement or misunderstanding between the Chinese people and America ... Neither the peasant nor the Chinese people as a whole are ready for socialism. They will not be ready for a long time to come. It will be necessary to go through a long period of private enterprise, democratically regulated. To talk of immediate socialism is 'counter-revolutionary' because it is impractical and attempts to carry it out would be self-defeating.<sup>92</sup>

The US Treasury Department sent someone to Mao's headquarters to verify his position and found that,

Mao asked whether there was any chance for American support of the Chinese Communists ... The Communists wished to risk no conflict with the United States ... The Communists do not expect Russian help ... Mao thus indicated that the Chinese Communists would prefer [emphases in original] to have an American rather than a Russian orientation. Cooperation between America and the Chinese Communists would be beneficial and satisfactory to all concerned. Lenin wanted good economic relations with the USA after World War I, as Mao wanted after World War II. Mao said that ... they supported the industrialization of China by free enterprise with the aid of foreign capital.<sup>93</sup>

This need for economic links with the United States and the world it dominated was not a mere civil war tactic. John Service has made an illuminating analysis of the brief honeymoon period of first contacts at Yen-an in 1944, when Mao and Zhou Enlai raised the possibility of a working relationship with the United States. In January 1945, they even requested a visit to F. D. Roosevelt to plan in detail military cooperation against Japan. As late as 1949, on the verge of achieving power, Mao's group renewed overtures to the United States concerning economic exchanges. Much



discussion has taken place about whether China would have become the close ally of the Soviet Union in the 1950s if the United States had acted differently.<sup>94</sup> However, not long after the Red Army had entered Beijing, the United States considered China to be another enemy in the Cold War. For his part, Mao was soon declaring that the United States had taken the place of Nazi Germany!<sup>95</sup>

In the face of imperialism and exploitation in the world market, Mao developed the intermediate zone concept. This is not particularly a Marxist concept, nor does it necessarily contradict Marx or Lenin, but it is an example of Mao's strategic vision. We can conclude that although economic cooperation with the United States could have been greatly beneficial to China, the international context of the time meant that Beijing had no choice but to fall in with the two-camp theory of world politics that was being developed by Zhdanov and the Cominform. In a sense Mao's actions in pursuing the Chinese civil war right up to the defeat of Chiang Kaishek left very little room for a subsequent accommodation with the United States.

Nevertheless, Mao rejected Stalin's fear that civil war in China would lead to an escalation of the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. The battleground for the Cold War, in his view, was not a direct confrontation between these two countries, but rather a conflict between the countries, capitalist or colonial, in between. US attacks on the USSR were only camouflage for an attack, firstly on their own workers and,

secondly on countries and colonies in Europe, Africa and Asia: "The United States and the Soviet Union are separated by a vast zone which includes many capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. Before the United States reactionaries have subjugated these countries, an attack on the Soviet Union is out of the question."<sup>96</sup>

American imperialism, Mao argued in the same piece, as other imperialisms before, might appear strong but was weak at the core. Just as the Germans and Japanese had fatally overextended themselves, so too would the United States. He again saw the possibility of a United Front to put an end to American domination.<sup>97</sup> The general historical development had become clear in the Second World War, when the people had defeated fascism, confirming that "the people, and the people alone, are the motive force of world history".<sup>98</sup> In other words, for Mao, when an imperialist power has succeeded in establishing its relative supremacy at the expense of its rivals, it tends to fall victim to a *hubris* which leads it to neglect or overstrain the real sources of its power. The resulting decline therefore has an element of inevitability about it, based on inherent laws of imperialism. In addition, at every point the imperialist power will find itself in contact with opposing interests and hostile nations. To withdraw from acquired positions - to cut down the maintenance of national interest overseas - would be to create a void into which other forces would flow and perhaps start a retreat that would end in a rout. A withdrawal from the exercise of power in a given area is

liable to disrupt an imperialist system which is organically connected; it radically changes the expectations of competing countries, and allies, as well as domestic opposition and anti-imperialist forces all over the world. As in the earlier case of Japan, American imperialism had to be taken seriously from a tactical point of view. But strategically it was, in Lenin's words, a 'colossus with feet of clay', or in Mao's own words a 'paper tiger'.<sup>99</sup>

In these new conditions, Mao drew up the terms for a new international united front, involving at its centre the alliance with the Soviet Union. It is perhaps in his article On the People's Democratic Dictatorship that Mao most clearly expressed his views on this external orientation, and on its relationship to the united front within China.

(1) Internally, arouse the masses of the people. That is, unite the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, form a domestic united front under the leadership of the working class, and advance from this to the establishment of a state which is a people's democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants.

(2) Externally, unite in a common struggle with those nations of the world which treat us as equals and unite with the peoples of all countries. That is, ally ourselves with the Soviet Union, with the People's Democracies and with the proletariat and the broad masses of the people in all other countries, and form an international united front.<sup>100</sup>

In 1949 one imperialist power had been defeated. Imperialist countries, which had wanted to dominate and exploit even deeper, had unwittingly created the forces to defeat a powerful enemy. With this kind of experience, Mao looked to the future in a

confident manner, not only because of the existence of a 'socialist base country', the Soviet Union, but also because his assessment inside and outside of China led to a confidence in ultimate victory not many would have thought possible at any time during the First or Second United Front. Mao's emphasis on the alliance with the Soviet Union and his rejection of Titoism or a Third Way should not be understood as submission to the Soviet Union. The Soviets did not quite trust the Chinese 'nationalists', who were really only 'petty bourgeois'.<sup>101</sup> Nor can one take Mao's eulogy at Stalin's 70th birthday in December 1949 without a large pinch of salt.<sup>102</sup>

Of course, the later rift with the Soviet Union sharply altered the terms of Mao's vision. As the Chinese state engaged in an independent foreign policy and sought allies of its own among the national bourgeoisies of various post-colonial states, the perception of the main contradiction in international politics would change several times. Although this structured the precise relations of China with particular countries - India or Yugoslavia being two dramatic cases in point - it is clear both from the theoretical writings of Mao and the practical policies of Beijing that the concepts of differential contradiction and united front remained at the centre of Chinese thinking in the post-war period, as they had in the period of national liberation and struggle-in-unity with the KMT. In this sense, the record of Mao and the CCP may be regarded as a development of the insights of Lenin on Communist tactics in the epoch of imperialism.

#### (v) Conclusion

As shown, Mao did develop ideas concerning how to tackle imperialism in general. This chapter began with a discussion of his understanding of Marxism. He did not analyze the causes of imperialism, but was interested to counter actual imperialism in China. Even though his understanding of the classics might not have been very thorough, it is clear that Mao understood the basics of Marxism-Leninism. He knew and accepted the universal theory of Marxism, and was engaged in using it for the special circumstances of an Asian country, with a long history, and in the twentieth century. This sinification or nationalization of Marxism-Leninism was a result of paying attention to the reality of China. There were enough examples of imperialism's impact on the country, which Mao would turn into guiding laws for the CCP. Even though China was practically torn from the outside as well as from the inside, this unevenness and the lack of an established structure also helped revolutionaries, in Mao's opinion. One key issue in this context was of course the question of allies in the anti-imperialist struggle and this was related fundamentally to an assessment of China's place in history.

In Russia, Lenin had refused to concede that the development of Asiatic societies might pose something of an alternative to the five-stage schema of orthodox Marxism and this led him to the

conclusion that Russia had been, prior to the development of capitalism, a weakly-distinguished variant of European feudalism. It also led to the related belief that the development of other Asiatic societies (such as India, China, Turkey, Indonesia, and so on) must conform in essential detail to this five-stage development, and that they must again constitute variants of European feudalism. If this was the case, then elements of capitalism could be expected to develop intrinsically and spontaneously within the feudal (or semi-feudal) mode of production which characterized those Asiatic societies. From this perspective, imperialism could not be regarded as having the historical function of disrupting the moribund traditional society and leading to alternative forms of development on the basis of the dissolution of that society. For the necessary development of capitalism within those traditional Asiatic societies would lead to the emergence of class formations (especially a native bourgeoisie) and this would lead to the eventual supersession of the former society with or without the intervention of Western imperialism.

Thus, it would appear logical that a theory of imperialism formulated by Lenin (who perceived Asiatic societies as basically feudal) should have a rather different motivation than that of demonstrating the historical function of imperialism in bringing Asiatic societies out of their millennial stagnation and into the mainstream of world (European) history (that is, Marx's view). Indeed, it is clear in Lenin's book on imperialism that his main

concern was to demonstrate how largely nationalist anti-colonial revolutions in the colonies, inspired by the predations of imperialism, would in turn lead to revolutions within Europe, the heartland of capitalism.

The concept of the Asiatic mode of production was therefore given little credence by the Bolsheviks under Lenin, and this was to have important implications on the manner in which they approached the formulation of policy in the Russian context. During the late 1920s, this concept emerged once more as the question of the revolution in China became a central concern for the Communist International. Basically the question was whether China should be treated as an Asiatic society in which the development of capitalism was only a by-product of imperialist intervention, or as a feudal (or at least semi-feudal) society in which the 'sprouts' of capitalism had emerged much earlier than the intervention of the West and which consequently possessed its own native bourgeoisie and domestic capitalism.

Those who believed that China should be seen as an Asiatic society (like the Comintern agents in China, Besso Lominadze and Heinz Neumann, and the Chinese Communist leader, Qu Qiubai) argued that the Chinese bourgeoisie was a weakly implanted class owing its origin to Western imperialism rather than spontaneous internal economic developments. It was incapable therefore of leading a national democratic revolution. The strategy of the Communists in China should therefore be to ignore the bourgeoisie and press ahead with a 'permanent' revolution in which the proletariat in

alliance with the revolutionary peasantry would push for the establishment of socialism. Accordingly, China could avoid a lengthy period of capitalist development and a democratic revolution under the auspices of the bourgeoisie.

Those who perceived China as a feudal or semi-feudal society where capitalism had developed spontaneously and intrinsically, argued that the native bourgeoisie was indeed strong enough to sponsor a national democratic revolution, and that it was the task of the working class under the leadership of the Communist Party to back this native bourgeoisie in its efforts. This was to be part of the reasoning behind the First United Front (1924-27) in which the CCP had entered, as the junior partner into an alliance with the KMT. The disastrous outcome of conceding leadership of the Chinese revolution to the bourgeoisie did not, however, lead to a concession that the concept of the Asiatic mode of production might be of greater validity in evaluating the Chinese situation than the comfortable assumption that China had been a feudal society and would pursue much the same sequence of development as had Europe. On the contrary, at the Sixth Congress of the CCP (held in June-July 1928) the concept of the Asiatic mode of production was explicitly rejected as having no relevance for China. Chinese revolutionaries thus found themselves working within the rigid five-stage schema which was regarded as orthodox Marxism. This created certain problems for it was evident to some, including Mao Zedong, that Chinese society could not be treated simply as an Oriental variation of European society. Despite this



appreciation of China's historical uniqueness, such revolutionaries had to formulate their strategy and tactics within this orthodox framework, or at least formulate their responses in a manner which did not blatantly contradict that orthodoxy.

The force of imperialism was crucial to Mao and the foundation of his thinking, which was guided by Marx's laws of socio-economic existence. This chapter has raised a number of issues which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter on class analysis and Chapter Six on united front policy. What has become clear is the importance of the concept of imperialism for Mao in the sense that it creates anti-imperialism. In addition, he had to live with the Comintern and ever-changing daily politics. In this broad context, I will now consider Mao's attempt to differentiate between friends and foes, that is, class analysis and his attempt to forge alliances of social groups of varying short and long-term agreement, i.e., the United Front concept. He believed that the correct identification of social forces would decide the partners in the anti-imperialist struggle. How to identify different social forces and how to understand the balance of forces in China was of crucial importance for the success of anti-imperialism and with it the socialist revolution in the country. Class analysis is particularly difficult in China and Mao adapted the concept to Chinese conditions. This became crucial for him in understanding imperialism and how to deal with it. The following chapter will deal with the concept of class analysis in Marx, Lenin and Mao.

# ENDNOTES

1. Mao Zedong, Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, (Foreign Languages Press:Peking), 1975, vol. II, The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party, p. 310; (quoted from now on as Mao, SW, vol., title, p.).
2. See Stuart R. Schram (ed.), Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949, vol. 1, (M. E. Sharpe:Armonk, N.Y.), 1992.
3. See Edgar Snow, Red Star Over China, (Penguin Books:Harmondsworth), 1972, pp. 173-7 and also the rest of chp. 4, The National Period.
4. Snow, Red Star ..., p. 181. In 1956 Mao claimed to have read Feuerbach, Haeckel, Kant, Hegel and Leibniz. Gespräch mit dem Westdeutschen Schriftsteller Gunther Weisenborn, 11.11.1956 in Helmut Martin et al., Mao Zedong Texte, 2nd vol, 1956-57, (Hanser Verlag:München), 1979, p. 78.
5. Snow, *ibid.*
6. Stuart R. Schram, Mao Tse-tung, (Penguin Books:Harmondsworth), 1975, pp. 64-9.
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11. Li Ji, Mao Zedong you geming jia zhuanbian wei gemingjiajian zhe zuejia de biaozi. (The watershed between Mao as revolutionary and Mao as revolutionary and philosopher, Mao Zedong zhexue sixiang yanjiu dongtai, 4, 1987, pp. 37-43; see also Takeuchi Minora (ed.), Mao Zedong Ji (Collected Writings of Mao Zedong) (Hokusha: Tokyo), 1970-72, vol. 4. The texts in this and the previous footnote were pointed out to me and translated by Don Gasper.
12. See Nick Knight, Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism, (M. E. Sharpe:Armonk, N.Y.), 1990, especially the introduction.
13. Robert Elegant, Foreword, in L. Ladany, The Communist Party ..., op. cit., p. vii.
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15. See Helmut Martin (ed.), Mao Intern, (Hanser Verlag:Munchen), 1974, pp. 47-8.
16. Nick Knight, Soviet Philosophy and Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism", Journal of Contemporary Asia, vol. 20, No. 1, 1990, pp. 89-109, here especially p. 104 and footnote 18.
17. Arthur A. Cohen, The Communism of Mao Tse-tung, (Chicago University Press:Chicago), 1964 and Karl August Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism, (Yale University Press:New Haven), 1957 and similar C. Brandt, Stalin's Failure in China, (Harvard University Press:Cambridge, Mass.), 1958 and A. Whiting, Soviet Policies in China, 1917-1924, (Columbia University Press:Stanford), 1954.
18. According to Raymond Wylie's interpretation, Mao was concerned to create "a new variant of Marxism that exhibited a scientific revolutionary content within a Chinese national

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typical Comintern rhetoric denouncing all imperialists as 'mad dogs' (see Schram, Mao Tse-tung, op. cit., p. 214). But, in a way, he and many other Communists must have been relieved when Operation Barbarossa changed the terms of reference for the pursuit of the war. In 1939 he had suggested that Chamberlain was worse than Hitler, quoted in Schram, *ibid.*

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## 5. CLASS AND ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution. The basic reason why all previous revolutionary struggles in China achieved so little was their failure to unite with real friends in order to attack real enemies.<sup>1</sup>

### (i) Introduction

The issue of classes, and their various social and political characteristics, was central to Mao's strategy and to his analysis of how imperialism had shaped Chinese society. Class analysis is, after all, about power: the way in which men and women gain power over others, how they use that power, how they maintain that power, and how those 'others' respond. Mao, among many others in the CCP, had to try to understand domestic classes and their make-up, their relationship with each other, as well as their connection to foreign interests, if he wanted to survive and if the CCP was to give some direction to events. As mentioned in the Introduction, the main question at issue in Marxist theories of imperialism is the interrelation of national and class oppression and exploitation. Imperialism provided the impetus for the fluidity of the class structure. Imperialism stimulated and shaped the rise both of a bourgeoisie and a proletariat while contributing to the intensification of the landlord-peasant contradiction. Imperialism affected the alliances, strategies, and conflicts among various groups in China and the linkage these groups had

to imperialist powers. It could even lead to temporary unification of the various classes, as will be shown in more detail in the next chapter. One's attitude to imperialism, rather than one's economic status became one of the key criteria by which Mao assessed an economic group as progressive or reactionary.

Lenin, as the discussion with M. N. Roy showed, believed that the identification of distinctive classes in colonies was crucial to the success of the revolution. Understanding the balance of forces in Russia had been a key issue for Lenin in the revolution of 1917. The need to identify and assess different social forces was even more difficult in China due to the uneven and unfinished nature of socio-economic developments.

The emphasis in this chapter will be on how Mao attempted to understand and use Marxist-Leninist class analysis in Chinese circumstances, for without using "the fundamental viewpoint of Marxism, i.e., the method of class analysis"<sup>2</sup>, one would not gain knowledge of social conditions in China. This issue is important as it involves changes in Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy.

Certainly neither Marx nor Lenin could have conceived of a socialist-oriented revolution in which the revolutionary forces of the countryside would organize to surround and overwhelm the non-revolutionary cities, with the urban working class passively awaiting their liberation by revolutionary armies composed of peasants.<sup>3</sup>

Mao argued that the activity of revolutionaries could mobilize society in the cause of socialism even where the class basis for a socialist revolution was missing - although he also

recognized that there were constraints on revolutionary activity. Class struggle was part and parcel of China's liberation from imperialism. Marx, however, had accepted that economic reality limited conscious activity: "Mankind sets itself only such tasks as it can solve", Marx wrote in 1859, "since ... the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will also explain how Mao's departure from orthodox Marxism-Leninism affected 'class analysis', one of the conceptual bases of his view of imperialism. Mao's position on the centrality of the peasantry and the countryside should not be seen as simply replacing Marx's view of the centrality of the working class and the cities. In some of his writings, Mao emphasizes the working class and the city as the leader of all the revolutionary classes. This can even be found in the Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan of March 1927 and in Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society, of late 1925. The important point about Mao's theoretical contribution, and this is a position he maintained until his death, is that he brought together Marx's view on the role of the working class with the reality of China - where in the short term the revolution could only be won in the countryside by the peasantry after the CCP had been forced there after 1927. However, he also accepted that in the long term the working class and the cities would be decisive. Besides the issue concerning the role of the peasantry the other issue to be considered is whether, like Marx, Mao focused on the material

base as the primary factor in analyzing the relations of production, or whether he focused on the behavioural aspects of classes whose existence is taken as given. In other words, was his primary concern with the attitude of a given class towards imperialism and the sources of this attitude, rather than with the role of that class in the production process?

In China, the sheer number of peasants and their sufferings demanded that every politician take note of them, and Mao allocated to them a special role. In On New Democracy he stated: "The Chinese revolution is essentially a peasant revolution ... the anti-Japanese war is essentially a peasant war."<sup>5</sup> He believed that the greatest enemies of the revolution were especially imperialism and also feudalism, colluding in oppressing the Chinese people.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, anti-imperialism could only succeed if the peasantry destroyed the rule of the feudal landlord class, and the decisive struggle would have to be fought in the countryside.

Mao believed that the history of modern China was a history of imperialist aggression, and this was shared by many Chinese across the political spectrum. This sentence could have been said by Sun Yatsen or Chiang Kaishek. The intensification of imperialist aggression from the last few years of the nineteenth century bound the radical left and traditional right together in what Mary C. Wright called "intensive anti-imperialist nationalism".<sup>7</sup> Even before the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, the decrepit monarchy was desperately engaged in countering the impact of imperialism. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the years following the First Opium War

(1840-42) China had gone through many stages in relation to colonialism and imperialism: from disregard or disdain bordering on contempt, through resistance and confrontation, defeat, humiliation, and bankruptcy (in more senses than one), to unequal and temporary accommodation in a desperate and determined battle. After the liberation of 1949, the new People's Republic was in Mao's view still constrained by imperialism, and he sought, both in the domestic and foreign policy spheres, to overcome its ill-effects on the country. China, perhaps for the first time in 150 years, was becoming a truly sovereign and independent country.

(ii) Against Imperialism and Feudalism

Together with many other nationalists in China, Mao perceived imperialism as the main disease, the primary contradiction that had to be dealt with before anything else. Of course, imperialist intervention had also hastened the disintegration of feudalism, accelerated the growth of capitalism in China, transformed the country into a hybrid 'hypo-colony' (Sun Yatsen) or 'semi-colony' (Mao). Sun Yatsen saw this as disaster: China was worse off than a colony since "we are not the slaves of one country, but of all".<sup>8</sup> While Mao agreed that China had been plunged into servitude, he recognized (as did his Marxist predecessors) the positive side, or the opportunities created by imperialism. However, he did not find it hard to draw up a final, negative balance sheet on



the effects of imperialism.

In the 1930s and 1940s, many social scientists in China and outside maintained that imperialism was undermining the country's economy (see Chapter Four and its relevant sources). Some concentrated on the impact of imperialism on agriculture, others on the effects of trade and foreign investment, but they agreed in seeing imperialism as the main enemy. The impact of the West meant that traditional China entered an "era of collapse ... and only in the mid-twentieth century could a new historical orthodoxy become established through the application of Marxism-Leninism to China in the thought of Mao Tse-tung".<sup>9</sup> China was often depicted as the virtually passive victim of various forms of oppression. This is apparent in Mao's writing:

the imperialist powers have ... waged many wars of aggression against China ... forced China to sign numerous unequal treaties ... carved up the whole country into imperialist spheres of influence ... gained control of all the important trading ports in China ... dump[ed] their goods in China, turn her into a market for their industrial products, and at the same time subordinate her agriculture to their imperialist needs. [The imperialists proceeded to] exert economic pressure on China's national industry and obstruct the development of productive forces ... They have also secured a stronghold on her banking and finance ... created a comprador and merchant-usurer class in their service, so as to facilitate their exploitation of the masses ... made the feudal landlord class as well as the comprador class the main props of their rule in China ... suppl[ied] the reactionary government with large quantities of munitions and a host of military advisers to keep the warlords fighting among themselves ... poison[ed] the minds of the Chinese people, [with] their policy of cultural aggression ... turned a big chunk of semi-colonial China into a Japanese colony.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, as a result of aggression by foreign powers, Mao concluded China underwent a transformation into a colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

A 'Resolution of the CCP' in 1929 stated that "international imperialism is the real ruler of China's total political and economic life". It added, however: "With the growing aggression of imperialism in China, the basic conflict of interests among the imperialists themselves has also deepened in the past year".<sup>11</sup> Previously, at the Sixth National Congress of the CCP in July 1928 in Moscow, it had been established that the "two major tasks of the revolution at present are the overthrow of imperialism and the agrarian revolution".<sup>12</sup> At the time Mao appeared to accept the positions and policies of the Comintern, although later, due to the nationalist component in his worldview, he came to criticize some of its instructions.<sup>13</sup>

In Mao's view and that of the CCP, revolution in China would even have an important impact world-wide.

The first stage of the Chinese revolution - the bourgeois-democratic one - helps the socialist world revolution, of which it is a major component. The second stage, in the future - the proletarian socialist revolution - will be even more a direct component in the world socialist revolution. At the same time, the Chinese revolution will affect neighbouring countries - large colonies like India, Indo-China, Java, and Korea - arousing the teeming masses of those oppressed nations to political struggle; it will fundamentally shake the foundations of imperialist Japan and England and deal a heavy blow to capitalism in the USA. Therefore, the completion of the Chinese revolution will be the prelude to the victory of the world proletarian dictatorship.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately,

despite impressive development in the initial stage the Chinese revolution finally failed. At this historical stage, it did not have sufficient strength to overcome the numerous difficulties of the period. Among the objective difficulties and causes [of failure], these should be mentioned. The first [cause] is the powerful strength of the

imperialists.<sup>15</sup>

The other objective causes listed in the same resolution of the CCP were the betrayal by the national bourgeoisie, the powerful army led by the landlords, the uneven development of the movement of workers and peasants, and the vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>16</sup>

(iii) Structuralism and Agency

Within Marxist theory, agents such as 'imperial capital', the 'imperial state', with an 'imperial policy'<sup>17</sup> are major determinants of global politics and economics. Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyze the specific form and degree of China's integration into the world system, by reference to the existing class structure, the role of the state, the size, natural resources and geopolitical location of the country, and the historical context. There is always some room for manoeuvre when confronted with imperialism.<sup>18</sup> This is a point that recurs in the Marxist literature on imperialism. Indeed one of the main criticisms of Frank and Wallerstein is that they neglect the aspect of human agency, and replace it with a limiting determinism. An overall assessment of Marx's work (see Chapter Two) shows that he acknowledged human beings, in a particular historical context, to be the makers of their own history. The fundamental contribution of Marx and Lenin was to demonstrate that classes rather than individuals were the decisive agents

of change. Identifying the progressive, wavering or reactionary forces is the first essential task in the quest to influence the direction of history.

The concept of class, or class analysis, was of central importance to Marx and Engels, and also to Mao, as I hope to demonstrate. Class struggle, as explained at the beginning of The Communist Manifesto, was the driving force of history. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles, they had claimed. In the case of China, Marxism began to sink roots only after the May 4th Movement, and the beliefs in parliamentarianism, anarchism and liberalism had failed to yield benefits; at the same time Leninist theory had arrived and with it Comintern propagandists and agents and the Bolshevik Revolution had succeeded.<sup>19</sup> Mao was introduced, as discussed in Chapter Four, to Marxism from reading parts of The Communist Manifesto and Kautsky's Karl Marx's Okonomische Lehren, as well as a history of socialism by Kirkup and, in Yenan, Stalin's History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course. "Once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history", Mao said later, "I did not afterwards waver", and in 1920 he considered himself a Marxist.<sup>20</sup>

Although Mao perhaps misunderstood some elements of Marxism-Leninism at that time, Schram's assertion that he only became a real Marxist in the mid-1930s is a matter of opinion.<sup>21</sup> There certainly are a number of problems with Mao's rendering of Marxism-Leninism at that period, for example in an article of 1923 he elevated the merchants to leaders of the revolution:

The present problem in China is none other than the problem of the national revolution. To use the strength of the people to overthrow the militarists and foreign imperialism, with which the former are in collusion to accomplish their treasonable acts, is the historic mission of the Chinese people. This revolution is the task of the people as a whole. The merchants, workers, peasants, students and teachers should all come forward to take on the responsibility for a portion of the revolutionary work; but because of historical necessity and current tendencies, the work for which the merchants should be responsible in the national revolution is both more urgent and more important than the work that the rest of the people should take upon themselves.<sup>22</sup>

However, it is debatable whether this rare mentioning of the merchants as leaders is evidence that he was or was not a Marxist. Not only because Mao mentioned the proletariat as the leading class of the Chinese revolution innumerable times, but also because the basis of Marxism is analysis in terms of classes and the question of which class assumes leadership in various contexts. Thus it is not uncommon for Marxists to argue that in the face of incomplete capitalist industrialization and external and imperialist pressures the national bourgeoisie should temporarily assume political leadership. The question of the 'national bourgeoisie', indeed, had been the central point at issue in the discussions at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, as was discussed in Chapter Three.

Before entering into a detailed discussion of Mao's approach to class analysis, it is useful to look briefly at the earlier contribution of Marx and Lenin.

#### (iv) Marx and Lenin on Class Analysis

A theme common to all Marxists whatever other differences they may have is that theoretical analysis is crucially, intrinsically related to praxis, to the goal of socialist transformation of society. In the words of Marx in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."<sup>23</sup> It is also worth recalling another frequently quoted passage by Marx:

History does nothing: it 'does not possess immense riches' , it 'does not fight battles'. It is men, real living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving - as if it were an individual person - its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout their work Marx and Engels continually affirmed that historical options exist and choices have to be made. This is a theme taken up by Lenin and with particular fervour by Mao. There may be certain objective preconditions that place revolution on the agenda at a particular time, but the outcome is never determined in advance: revolution can succeed or be defeated as a result of the human choices that are made. It would be misleading to counterpose a 'voluntarist' Lenin or Mao to a unilinear, economistic, or deterministic Marx. Mao did not replace one traditional Marxist axiom by its opposite, but tried to weave together Marxist-Leninist principles with Chinese reality. Marx always accepted the possibility of purposeful political action while Lenin and Mao recognized the importance of objective constraints. Another valuable passage from Marx, which is often only half-quoted to prove Marx's determinism, comes from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis

Bonaparte:

Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted. The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.<sup>25</sup>

Marx did not claim that he had been responsible for the discovery of classes. Indeed, the concept can already be found among the Physiocrats. In his Tableau Economique, (Versailles, 1758), François Quesnay distinguished between the 'classe productive' of the farmers, the 'class distributive' of the landowners, who lived off the land surpluses, revenues and profits, and the 'class sterile' of tradesmen and merchants.

The only claim that Marx made for himself was to have demonstrated: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular, historic phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; and (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to a new society and the abolition of all classes. According to Dahrendorf, the essential point to note is that using Hegelian dialectics "Marx was concerned ... with the analysis of certain laws of social development and of the forces involved in this development",<sup>26</sup> rather than with describing an existing state of society as earlier writers had done.

Thus the concepts of class and class struggle could be said to be at the centre of everything that Marx and Engels wrote. Unfortunately, as is the case with the state, there is no clear-cut definition of class in any of Marx's writings, or

as McLellan wrote: "Considering the importance of the idea of class for Marx, it is surprising that he offers no systematic analysis of the concept."<sup>27</sup> Nor is there any systematic discussion of the relationship between class and political forces. Marx's concept of class includes how people perceive their position (class consciousness) and how they act upon that perception (class organization). The concept of class captures not only the statistical distribution of a people but also its developing subjective and organizational forces. Classes are both made by, and makers of, history in the sense of developing from a class in itself through class consciousness and class organization, to a class for itself. There are some rudimentary paragraphs on classes in volume 3, Chapter 52 of Capital.<sup>28</sup> But the key thoughts are to be found in The Manifesto of the Communist Party and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.

Marx located classes initially at the level of relations of production, that is he identified people according to the relationship in which they stood to the means of production. He believed that people's consciousness of their position, and the level of political activity they were engaged in were additional determinants, but their location in the economic structure was the primary determinant of their class. Classes had an objective base in the economic system and within the larger boundaries of classes, fractions of classes were located. A class was moved to becoming a political actor and gaining class consciousness in the process of contradictory interaction with other classes. Organizations were needed to guide and channel class objectives. Allen Cottrell has argued



that

While the 'Manifesto' affirms a clear and definite proposition concerning the necessary relationship between the basic classes and political forces - one in which the latter must eventually coincide with or correspond to the former - Marx does not actually sustain this proposition ... The 'Eighteenth Brumaire', by contrast, provides a useful account of the many complex forms of concrete relationship which may obtain between classes and political forces.<sup>29</sup>

For Marx and Engels, the whole story of classes began when the development of social productivity gave rise to a surplus, and thus raised the question of how this surplus should be divided. Eventually this led to a division within society itself, with one class being in a position to control and accumulate a surplus that it had not directly produced. In The Communist Manifesto, capitalism is said to have created the seeds of its own downfall, with the proletariat pitted against the bourgeoisie. However, this does not mean that Marx and Engels reduced society to just two classes. To take one example:

In Germany they [the communists] fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie. But they never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in order that the German workers may straightaway use, as so many weapons against the bourgeoisie, the social and political conditions that the bourgeoisie must necessarily introduce along with its supremacy, and in order that, after the fall of the reactionary classes in Germany, the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin.<sup>30</sup>

It is perhaps in The Eighteenth Brumaire that Marx moved most clearly beyond the kind of two-class analysis of society that some authors have seen in The Communist Manifesto and,

with rather more justification, in the 1859 Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Thus, in The Eighteenth Brumaire he discussed the role of the petty bourgeoisie as a transitional class, and paid considerable attention to the small-holding peasants.<sup>31</sup> Not only did he recognize the complexity of the class structure, he argued that the bourgeoisie too should be seen not as a united class but as a class divided in itself, some fractions of which might be available for (temporary) alliances, something which became one of the key issues for Mao. We might say that there is not so much a contradiction in Marx's work as a difference in theoretical level between The Communist Manifesto and his historical writings. The former lays down the ground rules, as it were, while in The Eighteenth Brumaire the theoretical conclusions are tested, adjusted and applied. This reading is supported by the short fragment in volume 3, Chapter 52 of Capital where Marx distinguished three basic classes: the owners of labour-power, the owners of capital and the landowners. He further noted the existence of "intermediate and transitional strata [which] obscure also here [in England] the class boundaries".<sup>32</sup> It is this term 'intermediate strata' which will be discussed by Mao as well, as I will show in this chapter.

Finally, when Marx discussed economic crises in general, in his Theories of Surplus Value<sup>33</sup> he announced that for the purpose of his preliminary analysis he would neglect "the real constitution of society, which by no means consists of industrial capitalists". A little further on, in considering

the growth of the middle classes, he writes:

What [Ricardo] forgets to emphasize is the continual increase in numbers of the middle classes ... situated midway between the workers on one side and the capitalists and landowners on the other ... [who] rest with all their weight upon the working basis and at the same time increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand.<sup>34</sup>

Marx believed that the middle strata (or middle classes, or sometimes 'middle estates') would sooner or later be forced to choose between affiliation with either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. However, he regarded the struggle of the middle strata against the bourgeoisie not as revolutionary, but as conservative, if not reactionary. "If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present, but their future interests",<sup>35</sup> again an issue which confronted Mao.

The peasantry was for Marx essentially a transitory phenomenon as capitalism would wipe it out. Thus he never focused in his thinking on a feudal or semi-feudal society. According to Marx, the relationship between classes depended on the level of development a society had reached. If the issue was movement from capitalism to socialism the proletariat would fight the bourgeoisie. If however the bourgeois-democratic revolution was on the agenda the working class could find itself under bourgeois guidance locked in struggle against a feudal class. However, he never addressed the issue of relations between classes in a country fighting foreign domination, i.e. imperialism. It is true that in the case of Ireland he inferred that national autonomy might be a

prerequisite for the solution of other problems.<sup>36</sup>

Turning to Lenin, we find that in 1919 he gave a general definition of classes as

large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it ... [and as] groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the development of class consciousness was dictated by and related to the position which groups occupied in the socio-economic structure.

One of the problems of class analysis for Lenin concerned the role of the peasantry. Basing himself on a few paragraphs in Capital, he divided the Russian peasantry into a land-owning village bourgeoisie (the Kulaks) and a village proletariat that sold its labour-power to the wealthier peasants. However, this seems like a forced application of the two-class pattern. Marx's discussion of the French peasantry in The Eighteenth Brumaire had posed the theoretical problem in sharper focus:

The small peasant proprietors form an immense mass, the members of which live in the same situation but do not enter into manifold relationships with each other ... Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient ... Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of isomorphous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their cultural formation from those of the other classes and bring them into conflict with those classes, they form a class. In so far as these small peasant proprietors are merely connected on a local basis, and the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community, national links, or a

political organisation, they do not form a class.<sup>38</sup>

This line of argument refers us to the general problem of class-consciousness. In describing the emergency of the proletariat Marx put it in these words:

Economic conditions had in the first place transformed the mass of the people into workers. The domination of capital created the common situation and common interests of this class. Thus this mass is already a class in relation to capital, but not yet a class for itself. In the struggle ... this mass unites and forms itself into a class for itself. The interests which it defends become class interests.<sup>39</sup>

The peasantry, however, was not able to understand the nature of its exploitation, nor articulate its grievances, nor organize itself to change its situation. A similar problem, though with many peculiarities, was raised by the social and political role of odd groups such as the *lumpenproletariat*, a significant actor in the class struggles in France between 1848 and 1850 and the subject of some fascinating pages in Marx's writings on the period.

#### (v) Vanguard Class and Vanguard Party

It is only in the context of Lenin's analysis of capitalism that one can understand his characterization of the proletariat as the vanguard class leading the struggle of all the exploited (artisans and rural proletariat and semi--proletariat included), first against the autocracy and then against capital. The proletariat was the vanguard class not simply because Marx had said so, and Marx never used the term

vanguard anyway, but because it alone was in a position to come to an adequate understanding of the system of exploitation. The socialization of labour, its stark confrontation with massive wealth, its mobility, its convenient lines of communication, its distance from the patriarchal, religious and local ties of village life, formed the objective and necessary conditions for the growth of class consciousness and organization. But they did not form sufficient conditions. Lenin argued that the mass proletariat would spontaneously arrive at trade union consciousness only. In order to acquire genuine consciousness of its position in society and of its objectively grounded revolutionary potential, it needed a vanguard of professional revolutionaries, whose horizons were not defined by the immediate production process, to act as a kind of midwife. It was not necessary that this vanguard should be composed entirely of workers; members of other classes, breaking their ideological ties, could cross over and participate centrally in the revolution. Lenin introduced this 'voluntarist' element by assigning to the Party the task of raising class consciousness among the proletariat where this was latent or not fully developed. While Marx believed that class consciousness came from an objective class situation, Lenin however believed it was possible to foster this consciousness. For this reason he emphasized the educational and organizational tasks of the Communist Party.

In describing the social nature of classes, and assessing their potential role in the revolution, Lenin gave considerable weight to moral, psychological and pragmatic criteria. He never

abandoned Marx's view that in the last analysis it was the proletariat, with the help of the militant party, which would have to accomplish the revolution.<sup>40</sup> In fact, many of his writings on party and class recall Marx's own arguments in the 1847-48 period, when he insisted that although the German proletariat was still numerically weak, it could make up for this by theoretical and organizational sophistication and clear-sightedness.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, this should not be taken as indicating that Marx was for a small group of self-selected militants standing above the proletariat.

Generally speaking, however, Lenin placed much greater emphasis than Marx on the distinction between organization and class. Moreover, this workers' vanguard now had enormous responsibilities: "(1) convincing the semi-proletariats of the identity of interest shared with the proletariat, (2) representing all (emphasis in original) the exploited in the national, hence political, domain, and (3) clarifying and making more apparent the essential polarity into which society was riven."<sup>42</sup>

As capitalism was quite far advanced in Russia, and as the bourgeoisie had shown itself incapable of accomplishing the democratic revolution, this task now fell to the workers. Later, Mao phrased this same issue as follows: "History has proved that the Chinese bourgeoisie cannot fulfil this responsibility, which inevitably falls upon the shoulders of the proletariat."<sup>43</sup> They could not carry it out alone, however, and had to seek allies among the semi-proletarians - a wavering force but one which, as Marx had seen at the time of the

Commune, could be united with the proletariat. Lenin also expected major opposition among the narrow-minded ranks of the peasantry, but he trusted them far more than the discredited bourgeoisie as a potential ally in the revolution. Indeed, after 1918 he declared the peasantry to be an autonomous class, able to engage in alliances and - under the leadership of the proletariat - to share state power. The Communist Party could not only have an impact on the development of consciousness in the proletariat, but in other classes as well. The proletariat could, if strong enough, arouse the peasantry to revolutionary consciousness. In this view Lenin differed with Marx, but on the idea that the proletariat could guide the peasantry, he was close to Marx.

Similarly, writing about China in 1912, Lenin stated that the principal social base for the democratic movement was the peasantry - the objective positions of semi-feudalism requiring struggle against rural-based reactionary bureaucracy.<sup>44</sup> However, mindful that the consolidation of the bourgeois revolution required the development and leadership of a proletarian class, he added: "Whether the peasants, who are not led by a proletarian party, will be able to retain their democratic positions against (emphasis in original) the liberals, who are only waiting for an opportunity to shift to the right, will be seen in the near future."<sup>45</sup> With regard to the position of classes after the socialist revolution, Lenin was generally very circumspect in his analyses and predictions. In conformity with Marx, who understood socialism as a transitional phase, not as a mode of production between capitalism and communism,



Lenin wrote in 1920: "Classes still remain, and will remain, everywhere for years after (emphasis in original) the proletariat's conquest of power." The nationalization or expropriation of landowners or industrialists did not eliminate classes, he added:

The abolition of classes means, not merely ousting the landowners and the capitalists - that is something we accomplish with comparative ease; it also means abolishing the small commodity producers, and they cannot be ousted, or crushed; we must learn to live with them. They can (and must) be transformed and re-educated only by means of very prolonged, slow, and cautious organization work. (emphasis in original)<sup>46</sup>

(vi) Beyond an Economic Definition of Class

Over the years it has become clear that an 'economic' definition of classes is inadequate. One cannot simply 'read off' the shape of political forces from an economic class analysis, since various kinds of national, religious, gender or racial loyalty can (and often do) override socioeconomic ties. Nevertheless, Marx's analysis in The Eighteenth Brumaire is still in many ways a model for disentangling antagonistic contradictions in capitalist society in theoretical terms and a guide for political struggles. Similarly, in Lenin's theoretical and revolutionary activity, he went far beyond a simple application of Marx's general thoughts - something that Marx and Engels themselves would have seen as totally out of keeping with the spirit of their work.

In China the situation was analogous. Marx and Lenin

provided for the Chinese communists, in the selective versions available to Mao and his associates, a framework on which to base their analysis of existing reality, so that they might then use this analysis as a guide in their political struggle. It is not clear to what extent Lenin's view of the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry influenced Mao, but he developed a similar view. For this reason, and some other similarities, Schram has called Mao a 'natural Leninist' as if in Mao's situation one could not really have chosen any other path.<sup>47</sup> The theoretical task of class analysis was difficult in China, however, and the Marxist legacy less immediately relevant, as Marx's writings on the Asiatic mode of production had described a society in which there were no classes: if there was anybody changing society it was the Oriental despot with his gentry, controlling the state machinery. Most Chinese communists however did not commence an analysis of Chinese society or history from this standpoint; rather they saw China as a feudal or semi-feudal society. Marx's concept of an Asiatic mode of production fits well into his own assessment of colonies in the Orient. As they were stagnant, these societies needed capitalism to brake this 'historyless' situation, the Asiatic mode of production helped to justify the 'progressive' qualities of Western intervention. It also tended to deligitimize the progressive potential of Asian revolutions. For Wittfogel in his Oriental Despotism, it also led to the 'Tartarization' of the Soviet Union, especially after Stalin took over, who put an end to any discussion of this concept at a conference in Leningrad in 1931.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Mao

confronted problems in much the same way as Lenin had done, and Marx had written about - from the perspective of how to achieve the socialist revolution. Many of the issues that they had touched upon were taken up again by Mao in China, with resulting similarities and differences. It is hoped that this is made clear in the following pages.

(vii) Mao on Class

Class struggle could be said, suitably transformed, to be the methodological key to an understanding of Mao's conception of the United Front, the mass line, proletarian consciousness, and political participation in social struggle. It could also be related in various ways to national liberation, nationalism and military mobilization. Moreover, as Mao suggested in the first article in his Selected Works, an adequate approach to all these interlinked questions requires the carrying out of a serious class analysis.<sup>49</sup> Mao perceived the actual struggle between classes as political in the broadest sense. Class struggle was a manifestation in intensified form of the economically generated hostility between classes, and the hostility was played out in the realm of politics. Correct assessment of the contemporary balance of forces in Chinese society, and to an important degree also internationally, was essential for the survival of the still small forces of the Communist Party, especially after the collapse of the First United Front. With this in mind Mao asked: "Given the nature of

Chinese society and the present targets and tasks of the Chinese revolution as analysed and defined ... what are the motive forces of the Chinese revolution?"<sup>50</sup>

The Marxist theory of class analysis is very difficult to apply in all societies, and this was so in China, especially given the ambivalence of many Chinese and their apparent preference for shifting allegiances and forging factional networks. For example, while the elite had conservative and reformist wings, these were not clearly bound groups, not to mention groups distinguished by divergent property interests. Moreover, the reformist elite was often connected by ties of sympathy or blood to that key radical stratum of educated people with low status, such as students or educated soldiers. Similarly, secret society members could fluidly establish ties with either the radical or conservative elements.<sup>51</sup> In the orthodox vein, Mao believed the existence of classes and class struggle to be a fundamental and omnipresent factor of all human society except the most primitive. However, the assertion of the fundamental character of class and class struggle could not anticipate the form and intensity that these might assume at particular historical moments; there were clearly varied specific instances of the general rule, a point which I have made earlier concerning Mao's overarching Marxist laws and his sinification of them.

(viii) Classes in Town and Countryside

As we shall see, the existence of many divergent classes, groups and sub-groups created a danger of confusion, but it also offered more options with which to endure difficult times. "So long as these splits and wars [among the compradors and feudal landlords] continue", Mao wrote in 1928, "it is possible for an armed independent regime of workers and peasants to survive and grow".<sup>52</sup>

The problem was of course that the political and military situation changed constantly, leading to a different constellation of forces and perspectives for the revolution. As Mao put it: "The uneven political and economic development in China gives rise to the uneven development of her revolution,"<sup>53</sup> and continuing his analysis of classes of 1926 and 1927, Mao clarified in 1935 many of the central elements in his strategic thinking:

China is in urgent need of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and this revolution can be completed only under the leadership of the proletariat. Because the proletariat failed to exercise firm leadership in the revolution of 1926-27 which started from Kwangtung and spread towards the Yangtze River, leadership was seized by the comprador and landlord classes and the revolution was replaced by counter-revolution. The bourgeois-democratic revolution thus met with a temporary defeat. This defeat was a heavy blow to the Chinese proletariat and peasantry and also a blow to the Chinese bourgeoisie (but not to the comprador and landlord classes) ... The long-term survival inside a country of one or more small areas under Red political power completely encircled by a White regime is a phenomenon that has never occurred anywhere else in the world. There are special reasons for this unusual phenomenon. It can exist and develop only under certain conditions.

First, it cannot occur in any imperialist country or in any colony under direct imperialist rule, but can only occur in China which is economically backward, and which is semi-colonial and under indirect imperialist rule. For this unusual phenomenon can occur only in conjunction with another unusual phenomenon, namely, war within the White

regime ... Two things account for its occurrence, namely, a localised agricultural economy (not a unified capitalist economy) and the imperialist policy of marking off spheres of influence in order to divide and exploit. The prolonged splits and wars within the White regime provide a condition for the emergence and persistence of one or more small Red areas under the leadership of the Communist Party amidst the encirclement of the White regime ... If only we realise that splits and wars will never cease within the White regime in China, we shall have no doubts about the emergence, survival and daily growth of Red political power.

Second, the regions where China's Red political power has first emerged and is able to last for a long time have not been those unaffected by the democratic revolution, such as Szechuan, Kweichow, Yunnan and the northern provinces, but regions such as the provinces of Hunan, Kwangtung, Hupeh and Kiangsi, where the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers rose in great numbers in the course of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1926 and 1927 ... Third, whether it is possible for the people's political power in small areas to last depends on whether the nation-wide revolutionary situation continues to develop ... Fourth, the existence of a regular Red Army of adequate strength is a necessary condition for the existence of Red political power ... Fifth, another important condition in addition to the above is required for the prolonged existence and development of Red political power, namely, that the Communist Party Organisation should be strong and its policy correct.<sup>54</sup>

Divisions within the bourgeois and landlord camp meant that the communists continually had to adapt their relations with classes in accordance with the shifting situation, or rather not pay much importance to them but to their policy interests. Thus the bourgeoisie, condemned at the end of the 1920s as the grave-digger of the social and national revolution, could appear in the mid-1930s as a partly reliable ally in the struggle against Japanese imperialism which took the form of the Second United Front.<sup>55</sup>

The problems of class analysis in China were, Müller has

argued, threefold. First, methodologically, there was no tradition of sociological analysis in China, and much of the relevant terminology had to be developed from scratch. For example, 'proletariat' was rendered into Chinese as lao-tung chieh-chi, as well as lao-kung chieh-chi and also wu-ch'an chieh-chi. Secondly, linguistically, the nature of the Chinese language is such that lao-tung chieh-chi, for example, could mean either the modern 'working class' or 'the class of all those working', i.e. producing something, like workers, peasants or craftsmen, in contrast to those 'not working' like the bourgeoisie or gentry; or 'the working classes', i.e. the different classes of the working people. The Chinese terminology of class concepts was anyway, probably derived from the Japanese.<sup>56</sup> The third problem was ideological. Müller argues that ideological problems in China could only be solved by taking over and propagating the complete theory of Marxism-Leninism, rather than just discrete parts of it.<sup>57</sup> This however would have condemned Chinese revolutionaries to wait until all the works of Marx and Lenin had been translated for them if not to wait until the socio-economic situation in their respective countries was 'right' and 'ripe' for the revolution. If only partial, Mao's knowledge of their work undoubtedly affected his approach to understanding social forces in China.

Class analysis in China, however, at any time after the foundation of the Communist Party in 1921, was confronted with more problems than Marx could ever have envisaged. Asiatic or feudal, semi-capitalist (as in Russia's *obshchina*) or semi-

colonial, capitalists, workers, compradors, peasants and all their shades of differences: it was difficult to see how one could ever get it right categorizing people in different classes, when fighting a social revolution for the peasants or workers - together with a national revolution against foreign imperialists and their Chinese supporters. A further problem is that Mao, himself, in his attempts to define different classes, mixed together criteria related to politics or even life-style with more traditional economic criteria, as will be shown in Section xi of this chapter.<sup>58</sup> In his later work he indicated that one had to differentiate between class background and personal behaviour and the main emphasis should be laid on the latter. To start with class background only would be wrong,<sup>59</sup> as this would limit one's understanding of how a specific group would respond to imperialism. The important point was to agree with the political prospect and goal of the proletariat. Proletarian consciousness could exist independent of one's actual class background. This is the special contribution of Mao to the Marxist concept of class analysis.

#### (ix) Uniting the Masses against Imperialists

In the years up to his arrival in Yen-an, Mao had been able to avoid the dangers within the Communist Party of putschism, in the city and the countryside, left and right opportunism and takeover by the right.<sup>60</sup> But there is a certain consistency in his thinking on nationalism, military struggle, feudalism, the



effects of imperialism on China and the need to come to terms with the Western world in general. These traits can be followed back at least to the time of the May 4th Movement in 1919, when Mao - who at the time was not a Marxist - rejected the Sino-Japanese peace on the grounds that it was signed in the context of the Peace of Versailles. But in The Great Union of the Popular Masses,<sup>61</sup> where he praised the precedent of the October Revolution and revealed his radicalism, he advocated a programme not so much of class struggle but of mobilization of all social groups for the renewal of China, with the unification of the peasants, workers, students, women, primary school teachers, policemen, rickshaw boys to fight imperialism together. In this task of achieving the great union (da tong, the same term used by Sun Yatsen, the Taiping, Kang Youwei and of course Confucius) of the Chinese people, young people rather than workers or peasants as such were to play the main role. In the 'Manifesto of the Third National Congress of the CCP' in June 1923, when Mao was elected to the Central Committee, it was stated:

The Chinese people are doubly oppressed both by foreign powers and by warlords, and the nation's existence, as well as the freedom of its people, are in an extremely precarious state. Not only the workers, peasants, and students, but also the peaceful and moderate merchants feel oppressed.<sup>62</sup>

The unusual thing here is that his class categories are not rigorously identified at the level of relations of production; they are descriptive rather than analytical. This cannot be described as Marxist class analysis, except as a faltering attempt to examine a situation in terms of class roles.

Mao was consistent in fighting imperialism on the basis of unification with the masses - something Lenin saw in the same way, even though he might have been a bit more selective about the partners. Apparently at that time, the intensity with which one suffered imperialist exploitation qualified one as part of the popular vanguard. It is possible that Mao knew about Lenin's Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question, as Chinese delegates had been to the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920.<sup>63</sup> This draft discussed the proletariat's tactics concerning the agrarian problem and analyzed the peasantry. The First Manifesto of the CCP on the Current Situation (June 1922)<sup>64</sup> saw the major problem in China as 'imperial and feudal militarism' against which the proletariat should unite with democratic groups. There was however no analysis of the class base of the groups. Taking advice from the Comintern, the CCP joined the KMT in 1923 in an alliance. Since there was no analysis of the class base of the KMT (see the discussion of Sneevliet's (Maring's) 'bloc-of-various-classes' in the next chapter), considerations of class could not have been a primary motive for the First United Front. Mao discussed class in the context of "the problems of national revolution ... to overthrow the militarists and foreign imperialists".<sup>65</sup> He did detailed class analysis in the context of rural revolution, especially in 1930.

In 1925, Mao retired to Shaoshan and the revolutionary force he found among the peasants had a deep and lasting impact on him. Consequently, in his statement on class in the same year (Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society) he devoted a

major part to an analysis of the peasantry. Up to 1927 and the end of the First United Front, Mao mainly divided China between the masses, or popular masses or Chinese nation, and the rest. Just as Lenin ridiculed the idea of pure democracy, so Mao argued that the operation of democracy should be limited by the exclusion of certain classes from the people. For Mao the term 'revolutionary masses' always meant more than the general populace, it had a progressive connotation, it had class distinctions within it. The 'people' were more like those worthy of being the people. Any notion of democracy which extended to the whole people ignored the clash of irreconcilable class interests.

After 1927 the central task for the Communist Party was to mobilize the 'broad masses' for the struggle against imperialism and the KMT, and to spread the revolution.<sup>66</sup> From 1932 Comintern pressure grew for such a type of cooperation. In 1935 Mao advocated changing the 'Workers' and Peasants' Republic' slogan into a 'People's Republic', again emphasizing the need for unity, which could be characterized with the term 'united front from below'. The 'United Front' was to be based on an assessment of foreign forces rather than an economic, internal class analysis, because the struggle against those forces represented the principal contradiction at the time.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, Mao's distinctive emphasis on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry had begun to take shape in the 1920s. In 1925, a Chinese worker was killed by a Japanese foreman in Shanghai in what became known as the 30th May incident. In the resulting demonstrations more people were

shot, the Chamber of Commerce called for a general strike, and the peasants began to play a very important role in support of the urban demonstrators.<sup>68</sup> Mao later mentioned the influence of these events on his own development:

Formerly I had not fully realized the degree of class struggle among the peasantry, but after the May 30th incident [1925] and during the great wave of political activity which followed it, the Hunanese peasantry became very militant. I left my home where I had been resting, and began a rural organisational campaign.<sup>69</sup>

His Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society (1925), indicates an uncertain grasp of Marxist-Leninist theory. Mao classified some groups on the basis of income and not ownership of means of production. However by analysing class in terms of national revolution, in suggesting the evolution of alliances, in identifying the peasantry and its potential for a positive role in the revolution, and in using (however haphazardly) the concept of relations of production, Mao was operating largely within the Marxist-Leninist paradigm.

#### (x) The Peasantry as the Decisive Force

We will now consider Mao's assessment of the peasantry, which is generally mentioned either as an example of his deviation from orthodox Marxism-Leninism, or his enrichment of it. Remembering novels such as Water Margin and the peasant uprisings described in these, overall, Mao perceived China's peasantry as lacking effective political organization, leadership, and programmes for change. The class struggles of

the peasants, the peasant uprisings and peasant wars constituted the real motive force of historical development in Chinese feudal society. Despite these numerous peasant rebellions, economic disaffection had not been translated into meaningful opposition to the feudal system; consequently, the proletariat in the form of the CCP was essential as a guiding force. Given the reality of China's economic and political life, the peasantry was then able to play a key role in defeating imperialism. "Without the poor peasants, there will be no revolution."<sup>70</sup> For much of the next decade - the Hunan Report had originally been written in 1927 - the peasants became the main force in Mao's theory of the revolution in China, if it was led by the CCP and the working class. This clearly conflicted with Lenin's view of the peasantry as an important but only ancillary force. It also contradicted the Comintern orthodoxy of the time which, though recognizing the centrality of the agrarian question, laid its main emphasis on the role of the proletariat.

Sentences such as "Though not very numerous, the industrial proletariat represents China's new productive forces, is the most progressive class in modern China and has become the leading force [before 1951 the text had read 'the main force', WD] in the revolutionary movement",<sup>71</sup> do appear in Mao's work. Reinforcing the role of the proletariat in On New Democracy (1940) he said that the leadership of the Chinese revolution had passed into the hands of the proletarian CCP from around 1919 with the May 4th Movement. It is difficult to say whether these sentences form the organizing principle of

his thought, and in any case they were sometimes 'edited into' post-war editions. Certainly up to the middle 1930s the CCP in general submitted to Comintern guidance. This guidance was after Lenin's death defined in Stalinist and Soviet national interest terms. The only place where the CCP could physically survive after the collapse of the First United Front was in the countryside. In addition the revolutionary subject proletariat was very limited in numbers. Even though it is difficult to measure misery, at least in people affected there was more of it in the countryside. If the social and anti-imperialist revolution was to be achieved, and if the Party wanted to acquire the leadership of this revolutionary movement, the Party had to accept these realities. Anyway, the CCP had also been forced into the countryside. For those reasons Mao advocated centering the CCP's work in the countryside among the peasantry in those years.

However, not only was final victory not assured without the cities, but with increasing knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist classics, the need to legitimize his status in the Party, and the belief that the CCP represented proletarian consciousness, Mao gave more attention to the working class. However, I think the following quote is typical concerning Mao's faith in the peasants:

It would be wrong to abandon the struggle in the cities, but in our opinion it would also be wrong for any of our Party members to fear the growth of peasant strength lest it should outstrip the workers' strength and harm the revolution. For the revolution in semi-colonial China, the peasant struggle must always fail if it does not have the leadership of the workers, but the revolution is never harmed if the peasant struggle outstrips the forces of the

workers.<sup>72</sup>

Mao's analysis of the Chinese countryside was certainly highly differentiated:

No matter where you go in the villages, if you are a careful observer, you will see the following eight types of people: big landowners; small landowners; peasant landholders; semi-landholders; sharecroppers; poor peasants; farm labourers and rural artisans; *éléments déclassés*; these eight types of people form eight separate classes. Their economic status and standard of living differs, this in turn influences their psychology, so that their attitudes toward revolution also differ.<sup>73</sup>

In this article, he identified three groups of classes: the landlord class and the comprador class, the middle bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the semi-proletariat and the proletariat. He then discussed the interests of these different 'classes'. In a way this analysis and the Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,<sup>74</sup> where he made divisions of rich, middle and poor peasants in terms of their access to the means of production and then assessed their revolutionary potential, does not really conflict with Marx's economic analysis of classes. The difference lay in the definition of the revolutionary subject measured by their attitude against imperialism. In his Struggle in the Jinggang Mountains, Mao pinpoints an intermediate class of small landlords and rich peasants; they are intermediate in the above sense of 'for us or against us'. Even though they have much in common with the thinking of the CCP, they might defect from the CCP because of the 'White Terror' or because of 'the pressure of daily life'. This analysis is also used by Mao for an assessment of the 'vacillating' bourgeoisie.<sup>75</sup> This was not just

a matter of numbers. In a table (deleted in the revised editions) Mao found close to 200 million peasants of one kind or another who, as he stated, supported the revolution. This insistence on numerical majority was not just an attempt to discover grounds for optimism but also to locate the source of a kind of *volonté générale* that would legitimize Mao's revolutionary policies.

Class	Size
Big bourgeoisie	1,000,000
Middle bourgeoisie	4,000,000
Petty bourgeoisie	
1. those with surplus (right-wing)	15,000,000
2. those self-supporting	75,000,000
3. those with declining incomes (left-wing)	60,000,000
Semi-proletariat	
1. semi-tenant peasants	50,000,000
2. "semi-self-supporting tenants?"	60,000,000
3. poor peasants	60,000,000
4. handicraftsmen	24,000,000
5. shop assistants	5,000,000
6. peddlers	1,000,000
(Sub-total)	200,000,000
Proletariat	
1. industrial proletariat	2,000,000
2. city coolies	3,000,000
3. agricultural proletariat	20,000,000
4. lumpenproletariat	20,000,000
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 400,000,000 <sup>76</sup>

A point of interest is the language used by Mao in his Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan. At the beginning of the report he wrote:

In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no



power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants, and evil gentry into their graves.<sup>77</sup>

Language like this is hard to find in Mao's earlier writings. But it was not merely the fury of the peasants which played a part; he also argued that the peasantry was able to organize a coherent strategy through its peasant associations. Mao defended their extremes: "A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery." The peasants were not 'riff-raff but the vanguard of the agrarian revolution.'<sup>78</sup> It was experience, struggles against the big landlords, sometimes including their assassination, which created out of these downtrodden peasants the force which could challenge the feudal power in the country. A collapse of the power of the 'big' landlords was more important than it appeared because these landlords were, together with the 'big' compradors, on the side of imperialism. They hindered the development of productive forces in China, and protected foreign imperialists.<sup>79</sup> The peasant associations, however, could unite the social, anti-feudal revolution with the national, anti-imperialist revolution. Thus, everything depended on the poor peasants:

The poor peasants have always been the main force in the bitter fight in the countryside ... They are the most responsive to Communist Party leadership ... 'We joined the Peasants Association long ago' they say to the rich peasants, 'why are you still hesitating?'. The rich peasants answer mockingly, 'what is there to keep you from joining? You people have neither a tile over your heads nor a speck of land under your feet!' What, indeed, is there to keep them from joining the association?<sup>80</sup>

This Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan gives a preview of Mao's faith in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and the central position he actually assigned to them in the revolution. In 1927, until the Comintern changed its policies in favour of peasant soviets and ordered the CCP to follow suit, Mao was out of tune with his own Central Committee. The centre of action for Mao thus lay in the countryside. The struggle in the cities was undoubtedly important, but the power of feudal landlords had to be destroyed before - or rather together with - the power of the compradors. After all, "the landlord class and the comprador class are wholly appendages of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their survival and growth",<sup>81</sup> and the overthrow of this feudal power was after all the real objective of the national revolution.<sup>82</sup> Mao sometimes called the peasantry the vanguard of the revolution. "The leadership by the poor peasants is an absolute necessity. Without the poor peasants there would be no revolution ... They have never been wrong on the general direction of the revolution, they have never committed a mistake."<sup>83</sup> And virtually twenty years later he wrote:

It is the peasants who are the main source of China's industrial workers ... It is the peasants who constitute the main market for China's industry ... It is the peasants who are the source of the Chinese army ... It is the peasants who are the main political force for democracy in China at the present stage ... It is the peasants who are the chief concern of China's cultural movement ...<sup>84</sup>

Emphasizing the social revolution, the attack on landlords is part of a Marxist-Leninist approach. However, the proposition

that the peasantry could be the leading force of the revolution goes beyond Lenin's view that one can give the peasantry a significant, though subordinate role. What one finds is a sophisticated analysis of the role of the peasantry. In 1929 Mao wrote:

In our opinion it is also a mistake - if any party members hold such views - to fear the development of the power of the peasants, lest it overwhelm the leadership of the workers and hence become detrimental to the revolution. For the revolution in semi-colonial China will fail only if the peasant struggle is deprived of the leadership of the workers; it will never suffer just because the peasant struggle develops in such a way that the peasants become more powerful than the workers.<sup>85</sup>

In Mao's later writings, even when the main strength of the Chinese communists was their peasant-based army, there was a shift to more orthodox Leninist positions on the centrality of the proletariat and its revolutionary leadership of the peasant masses. The peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie, Mao often noted, were quite willing to fight feudalism and imperialism, but unfortunately their political outlook remained limited by the fact that they were small producers.

He saw the petty bourgeoisie (or lower middle class) as small business owners, students, lower government functionaries, self-employed artisans, professionals, shopkeepers and also the peasants. Their thinking developed from the contradiction of, on the one hand, accepting the viability of capitalism as a small proprietor, and on the other, suffering the experience of being squeezed out of the market by the big proprietors and imperialists and this had repercussions for their political actions. Marx and Lenin had referred to

this class as having a vacillating character because although it could be expected to ally with the working class to attack the excesses of big business, it would ally with monopoly capital to defend the viability of capitalism. While the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie formed the numerical mass of the revolution, they could only act successfully if the proletariat and the CCP carried the burden of leadership in the national revolution. Mao explained this as follows:

In an era when the proletariat has already appeared on the political stage, the responsibility for leading China's revolutionary war inevitably falls on the shoulders of the Chinese Communist Party. In this era, any revolutionary war will definitely end in defeat if it lacks, or runs counter to the leadership of the proletariat and the Communist Party. Of all the social strata and political groupings in semi-colonial China, the proletariat and the Communist Party are the ones most free from narrow-mindedness and selfishness, are politically the most far-sighted, the best organised and the readiest to learn with an open mind from the experience of the vanguard class, the proletariat, and its political party throughout the world and to make use of this experience in their own cause. Hence only the proletariat and the Communist Party can lead the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and bourgeoisie, can overcome the narrow-mindedness of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, the destructiveness of the unemployed masses, and also (provided the Communist Party does not err in its policy) the vacillation and lack of thoroughness of the bourgeoisie - and can lead the revolution and the war on to the road of victory.<sup>86</sup>

However, despite emphasizing Mao's role in identifying the revolutionary potential of the peasantry in this section, I want to make clear that Mao was not the first or only one doing this. In his own Party and in the Comintern there were voices recognizing that the fundamental problem of the Chinese liberation movement was the peasant problem. What Mao did was to elevate the importance of peasants in a way Marx and Lenin

had not done and of course these were people who responded to their specific socio-economic situation and not to class struggle per se. Class struggle resulted from high taxes and unexpected surcharges, conscription labour without adequate compensation, compulsory purchase land for public-works projects. "The skill of Communist organizers like Mao lay in transforming a largely fiscal discontent into class warfare, so as to push effectively for revolutionary change under CCP leadership."<sup>87</sup>

(xi) The Leadership of the Proletariat and the Chinese Communist Party

After the United Front with the KMT broke down in 1927, the CCP under Qu Qiubai and Li Lisan looked to the urban workers as the leading force. Mao did not publicly oppose this, but his practical activities pointed in another direction. The task of Communist cadres, who were overwhelmingly from a peasant background, was therefore to provide guidance for the peasantry and other social groups. "The serious problem", Mao declared in On People's Democratic Dictatorship (1949), "is the education of the peasantry".<sup>88</sup> Two points are noteworthy here: first, that it is possible to educate the peasantry i.e. for them to accept the Party's guidance and others into anti-imperialist, anti-feudal fighters; second, that the CCP, by the mid- to late 1930s and above all in the early 1940s, had gained sufficient self-confidence based on its own military strength and the growing anti-imperialist, anti-feudal movement to

assume leadership in this struggle. In the inaugural issue of The Chinese Worker (February 1940), Mao explained this as follows: "Led by its own political party, the Communist Party of China, the Chinese working class has waged heroic struggles for the past twenty years and become the most politically awakened section of the people and the leader of the Chinese revolution."<sup>89</sup>

Peasant revolutions had occurred for centuries, more often than not without success. What was needed was the leadership of an advanced class and an advanced political party, which was provided for Mao by the proletariat and the CCP. In On New Democracy, Mao explicitly addressed the question of when the driving forces and leadership roles of the Chinese revolution had changed. He divided Chinese history into two distinct periods, one before, the other after the May 4th Movement in 1919. In the earlier period the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie were the leaders of the Chinese bourgeois-democratic revolution. They did not succeed and the CCP took over, as Lenin had done in St. Petersburg.

The Chinese proletariat had not yet appeared on the political scene as an awakened and independent class force, but participated in the revolution only as a follower of the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie ... Being a bourgeoisie in a colonial and semi-colonial country and oppressed by imperialism, the Chinese national bourgeoisie retains a certain revolutionary quality at certain periods and to a certain degree - even in the era of imperialism - in its opposition to the foreign imperialists and the domestic governments of bureaucrats and warlords ... and it may ally itself with the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie against such enemies as it is ready to oppose.<sup>90</sup>

Writing in 1940, Mao stated that the leadership of the

Chinese revolution had passed into the hands of the proletariat and the CCP in about 1919 with the May 4th Movement. He described the period from 1927 to 1937 as the one in which the CCP had led the masses toward the revolution.<sup>91</sup> The Chinese proletariat had a rare history, Mao claimed. It suffered triple repression: by imperialism, the bourgeoisie and feudal forces. Having gone through these experiences, the workers were more determined and more influential in their actions. They had not succumbed to the attractions of the labour aristocracy, and under the leadership of the CCP had become, he asserted, "the politically most conscious".<sup>92</sup> One should remember in this context the points made above. Not only were Mao's articles to a certain degree re-written post-1949, but also Leninist dogma demanded the attribution of hegemony to the working class. One should not overlook the practicalities of the CCP's anti-imperialist struggle and the role of the poor peasants, that Chinese workers had until recently been peasants and that even the *lumpenproletariat* had often been positively assessed by Mao. The proletariat in the countryside really was the CCP, in Mao's assessment. A typical example of this operational analysis of classes can be found in Mao's The Situation and Tasks in the Anti-Japanese War After the Fall of Shanghai and Taiyuan (November 1937) written in the context of the Second United Front.

The left wing of the Anti-Japanese National United Front is composed of the Communist-led masses, ... the proletariat, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. Our task is to do our utmost to extend and consolidate this wing ... [to] reform the Kuomintang, the government and the army, ... [to] establish a unified democratic republic, [to] turn partial resistance into total resistance and [to]

overthrow Japanese imperialism.

The intermediate section ... is composed of the national bourgeoisie and the upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie. Our task is to help [it] to move forward and change its stand.

The right wing ... consists of the big landlords and big bourgeoisie, and it is the nerve centre of national capitulationism ... Many of them are already collaborators, many have become or are ready to become pro-Japanese, many are vacillating, and only a few, owing to special circumstances, are firmly anti-Japanese.<sup>93</sup>

If this constellation was understood, one could as a result "develop the progressive forces, win over the middle forces and isolate the die-hard forces."<sup>94</sup>

This shows, it can be argued, that the decisive element of understanding social forces in China depended not on theoretical class analysis, but on the practical attitude of people to anti-Japanese imperialism, and thus attitude towards the CCP, as it was the only force which was in Mao's view unconditionally fighting Japan. Groups such as the bourgeoisie could be included in this struggle, but one had to understand their interests, which would lead them to vacillate, they were not totally reliable, as were poor peasants, middle peasants and of course the proletariat.

In 1939, in an article entitled The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party, Mao had referred to the landlords and upper bourgeoisie as the dominant classes. Then there were the proletariat, the peasantry and the different categories of the petty bourgeoisie. "The attitude and the stand of these classes towards the Chinese revolution are entirely determined by their economic status in society."<sup>95</sup> Mao then examined these three classes, their attitudes toward the revolution,



recommending the way one should deal with them. Although in this instance he emphasized the question of socio-economic background far more often in his writings, for example when in the same year he stressed that "hard struggle" leads to "correct political orientation",<sup>96</sup> Mao stressed that ideological tendencies and attitude toward the CCP and imperialism played a greater role than socio-economic position in defining a class, a point noted already at the end of Section viii.

Before proceeding to a discussion of Mao's analysis of the Chinese bourgeoisie, it is useful to consider his curiously positive assessment of soldiers, bandits, robbers, beggars and prostitutes. For Marx, this *lumpenproletariat* was able to lash out violently only under certain yet unforeseen circumstances. Mao shared the feeling that these 'classless' elements could also be very dangerous and reactionary, being so desperate to survive that they could easily be corrupted by someone with money. The number of these rural vagrants was extremely high in China in the 1920s: about 20 million. In Mao's view, "Brave fighters but apt to be destructive, they can become a revolutionary force if given proper guidance,"<sup>97</sup> not forgetting, that they tend towards 'putschism' and 'vagabond outlook'.<sup>98</sup> And in the Political Resolution at the end of its Sixth National Congress in 1928, the Chinese Communist Party declared:

In their social basis the min-t'uan ('militia corps') and bandits are related to poor peasants. In some places the poor peasants, unable to make a living, are forced to become bandits; furthermore, most of the members of the min-t'uan are employed in this way (by the landlord gentry) in order to make a living. Therefore the Party should strengthen its work among them ... These armed masses should be absorbed and alienated from the hegemony of the gentry and

landlords.<sup>99</sup>

In 1927 in Hunan, Mao prepared for an autumn harvest uprising. At the time he believed that "Objectively, China has long since reached 1917".<sup>100</sup> During the uprising in September 1927, defecting KMT troops, peasant groups, bandits and unemployed miners united to form the First Division of the First Peasant and Worker's Army. When the uprising was defeated Mao was held responsible by the Politburo. Among his faults were mentioned lack of mobilization of the peasantry, military opportunism, disregard for Central Committee directives and the above-intentioned cooperation with bandits. However, in the same month as this condemnation (November 1927) Mao united the surviving troops with those of the bandits Wang Tso and Yuan Wen-ts'ai, who were also members of secret societies.<sup>101</sup> Equally spectacular was the appeal in July 1936 addressed to the Gelaohui (Ko-lao Hui) secret society in the name of the Central Committee, in which a United Front against Japan was proposed. Secret societies were important as sources for recruitment as Mao had experienced in Jiangxi in 1927, but the CCP moved beyond this undependable base as soon as their strength permitted.<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps because of his admiration for the Water Margin (with its description of peasants-turned-bandits, rebels, secret societies and their struggle with the Son of Heaven) Mao apparently believed in November 1928 that by intensifying "political training [one could] effect a qualitative change in these elements".<sup>103</sup> This went beyond anything Marx or Lenin had ever said; as Schram commented, "the idea that rural vagrants

can be transformed by suitable training into the vanguard of the proletariat is hardly an orthodox one".<sup>104</sup> This represents an emphasis on the human will against objective factors which is a shift, indeed a new direction in Marxist thought. In The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party (1939), Mao was apparently clear about the character of the *lumpenproletariat*, seeing some as mercenaries in the hostile camp and others as participants in the revolution. Once they supported the CCP, it was necessary to be on guard against their anarchism and destructive tendencies.<sup>105</sup> Admittedly Mao believed that the *lumpenproletariat* could be transformed, and that its ideological perspective was irrelevant so long as it assisted victory. But the limits of this belief are also clear from a rebuke to nameless comrades in March 1949, and a number of similar references can also be found already in the years 1927-30. "On whom shall we rely in our struggle in the cities? Some muddle-headed comrades think we should rely not on the working class but on the masses of the poor."<sup>106</sup> We would argue that in reality, what Mao meant by proletariat was CCP members and they were after all overwhelmingly peasants. It is indicative that these assessments of *éléments déclassés* have either been cut from the official version of Mao's writings, the Selected Works, or that their importance is downplayed from their original by adding terms such as 'destructive' to secret societies or the *lumpenproletariat*. Post-49, Mao wanted to appear with his Selected Works orthodox and universal. Pre-49, he wanted to achieve the revolution. Without wanting to imply

longstanding consistency in everything he said over the decades, Mao regarded the *lumpenproletariat* as useful but volatile in its allegiance, but nevertheless they were a sizeable group of people worth recruiting.

(xii) The Problem of the Bourgeoisie

In On New Democracy, Mao went to great pains to stress the special features of the Chinese national bourgeoisie, compared with its counterpart in Russia which had been part of the military-feudal bloc. As the national bourgeoisie was to a degree revolutionary, the proletariat could form a united front with it against imperialism.<sup>107</sup> In the same article, however, he warned against placing too much trust in the national bourgeoisie:

Even when it takes part in the revolution, it is unwilling to break with imperialism completely and, moreover, it is closely associated with the exploitation of the rural areas through land rent; thus it is neither willing nor able to overthrow imperialism, and much less the feudal forces, in a thorough way.<sup>108</sup>

In the heat of the struggle in the mid-to-late thirties, Mao had often expressed himself in much sharper terms. If the bourgeoisie had played a positive role, say in the first and second decades of the century, then this had deteriorated rapidly after 1927. At various times he referred to: "The general characteristic of the national bourgeoisie is to vacillate;"<sup>109</sup> "the vacillation and lack of thoroughness of the bourgeoisie";<sup>110</sup> "the national bourgeoisie has become a tail to

the big bourgeoisie".<sup>111</sup> Basically, he maintained, it was always "prone to compromise."<sup>112</sup> It had thus forfeited its privileged place in the fight to destroy feudalism and imperialism.<sup>113</sup> Due to the open conflict with the KMT after 1927, which was based on the compradors and landlords, the focus of the revolution changed to a certain degree against internal forces.

How the CCP would relate to the bourgeoisie, and for that matter to the other classes in China, depended not only on decisions in the Party but also on external events, and this applied to the time before 1949, as well as afterwards. As the Japanese became more threatening in the early 1930s, Mao's analysis of the various classes centred even more around their struggle against Japanese imperialism. The national bourgeoisie with limited ties to foreign capital might be neutral or even support the revolution.

We thus find in Mao's articles a subtle analysis of the class forces in China, their political stand constantly measured by their attitude to the two major issues of feudalism and imperialism but linked also to their economic status. Consequently, his theory of class analysis differed from that of Marx and Lenin. This analysis, which was instrumental in distinguishing friends from foes, did not remain constant, as the feudal, and imperialist balance of forces was itself constantly changing. Some of Mao's most acute insights deal with this dialectic of internal and external politics.

Summing up the question of class relations, we may say that the basic change in the situation, namely, the Japanese invasion of China south of the Great Wall, has changed the relationship among the various classes in China, strengthening the camp of national

revolution and weakening that of counter-revolution.<sup>114</sup>

Mao argued along similar lines in The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party, but here he added that the Japanese aggression threatened the existence of even the warlords and was turning them against imperialism.<sup>115</sup> This development had turned the relations and contradictions between classes in China into secondary problems. They continued to exist, to be sorted out when the anti-Japanese war had ended.

The same is true of the contradictions between China and the imperialist powers other than Japan. Therefore, the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people are faced with the following task - to make the appropriate adjustments with regard to those internal and external contradictions which can and must be adjusted at present so as to fit in with the general task of unity against Japan.<sup>116</sup>

Two years earlier, Mao suggested that a People's Government may include

those who are interested only in the national revolution and not in the agrarian revolution, and even, if they so desire, those who may oppose Japanese imperialism and its running dogs, though they are not opposed to the European and US imperialists because of their close ties with the latter.<sup>117</sup>

Clearly, Mao believed that the widest possible class collaboration was acceptable to defeat imperialism and that internal class struggle was subordinate. In this context he elaborated Lenin's views but asserted the priorities in terms of class relationships which should guide the revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries. In On Practice Mao laid the primary emphasis on practical activity in interpreting the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself. The implications for class analysis are significant - it is not the

physical nature of owning means of production that may change a person's consciousness in its relations to others but their collective relationship to a third phenomenon, here the Japanese intervention.

One can observe a basic pragmatism or empiricism in Mao informing his approach to class, and the same applies, for example, to the national bourgeoisie, i.e. its experience informs its approach to the revolution. Mao's analysis of classes was carried out for particular purposes, to assist in the solution of practical problems of policy implementation, to clarify class relationships as a particular stage of the revolution, to serve as justification for a certain course of political action or to create a very broad base of mass support. Therefore, it is necessary to know the context in which Mao analyzed classes, for a rigorous conceptualization of class in a sociological sense cannot be found. However, there is in Mao a continuity in his underlying assumptions and these are Marxist-Leninist concepts of society and revolution. Whether this represents an undermining or an extension of Marxism-Leninism remains open to question. The Communist Party, which was meant to be the vanguard of the proletariat, according to Lenin, led the revolution to victory while its organic ties with the proletariat were severed to a substantial degree after 1927 and few of its leaders were of proletarian origin. Political power grew out of the 'barrel of the gun' in a peasant war under proletarian leadership. Mao changed Marx's emphasis on economic causes for change. This he described as 'sinification of Marxism', meaning among other things that he

look Marxism-Leninism as a guide, while action, practice, as developed in his On Practice and On Contradiction, generally played the principal and decisive role. In Mao's writings there is a complex, dialectical relationship between practice and theory.

In the next chapter we will look more closely at the whole problematic of potential alliances in China, a discussion which had already been conducted between Lenin and M. N. Roy and later became particularly relevant. But for the moment let me just note the difference between the First United Front of 1923-27 and the second experience after 1936. The CCP was now determined to avoid the mistakes of the First United Front, it insisted on organizational independence, freedom to criticize and independence of its own forces. The Communist Party was able to increase enormously its weight within the United Front as a result of its growth in the previous decade.<sup>118</sup> One of the key elements which had made this possible was the experience of rural guerilla warfare. "Without armed struggle the proletariat and the Communist Party would have no standing at all in China, and it would be impossible to accomplish any revolutionary task."<sup>119</sup>

#### (xiii) The Phases of Revolution

In distinguishing between two phases of the revolution, Mao was in agreement with Lenin's concept of the bourgeois-democratic revolution as a nationalist revolution to defeat



imperialism, followed by the proletarian-socialist one.<sup>120</sup> However, he went further than Lenin, by leaving a place open not only for the KMT but also for the compradors within the New Democracy bloc. According to Mao's perception, Chinese of all classes could be progressive and fight for the revolution, even though fighting for the revolution and fighting against imperialism are not the same. Class struggle could be subordinate to national struggle. He further developed his ideas in the 'People's Democratic Dictatorship' of 1949 which originated during the united front strategy in Yen-an - an idea which can be traced back to Lenin's 'Democratic Dictatorship of the Workers and Peasants' and Stalin's 'Four Class Bloc' and which I will develop in the chapter on the united front. The four classes in question were the workers, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie. Leadership was to be exercised by the proletariat - with its Communist Party as its representative. Although the national bourgeoisie may waver and be excluded from the people if it joined the reactionaries, it would nevertheless be of great importance. Mao also believed that the CCP could use the national bourgeoisie and its expertise for national recovery. Imperialist oppression would provide the framework which would make this development possible. In The Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels had elaborated the progressive role of national unification and an ideology of unification ('nationalism'). Mao went beyond this but remained within a broad Marxist-Leninist framework.

With the change to the 'People's Democratic Dictatorship' and 'New Democracy', there was also a geographical change. In

1949 the focus of activities was no longer the countryside, but changed to the cities. "From now on, the formula followed in the past twenty years 'first the rural areas, then the cities' will be reversed and changed to the formula, first the cities, then the rural areas'." <sup>121</sup> This posed the same kind of questions that had been put in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s in the countryside: who are the friends, who are the foe, who are the wavering forces? However, the old constellation had changed as the focus became the urban areas. <sup>122</sup>

Mao saw great advantage in working with the KMT, the bourgeoisie and others who wanted to 'mend' their ways. In his Analysis of Classes he stated that the 'big bourgeoisie' and 'middle bourgeoisie' were hostile to the revolution. Despite misgivings about the 150 million members of the petty bourgeoisie, however, he believed that they could be convinced by action and agitation to join the revolution. In 1928 he had already accepted the division of the socialist revolution into two phases, with the bourgeois-democratic first which however had to be led by the CCP, as the bourgeoisie did not fulfil its responsibility of thoroughly industrializing China and (as it seemed until the early 1950s) the socialist revolution occurring only much later:

We fully agree with the Communist International's resolution on China. There is no doubt that China is still at the stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The programme for a thorough democratic revolution in China comprises, externally, the overthrow of imperialism so as to achieve complete national liberation, and, internally, the elimination of the power and influence of the comprador class in the cities, the completion of the agrarian revolution in order to abolish feudal relations in the villages, and the overthrow of the government of warlords. We must go through such a democratic revolution before

we can lay a real foundation for the transition to socialism.<sup>123</sup>

(xiv) Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Mao's writings on class analysis in the period from 1920 to 1935 went much further than Lenin had done in assessing the positive characteristics of the peasantry. There is of course no real comparison possible here between Marx and Mao. Lenin included the peasants in the dictatorship of the proletariat, thus broadening Marx's term; Mao went even further and included national capitalists and petty bourgeoisie. His view of the bourgeoisie was guided by an attempt to include these forces in the anti-Japanese struggle. He did not see the victory of 1949 as a victory of communism, but of 'New Democracy' or the 'Democratic Dictatorship of the People'. From 1940 onward the bourgeoisie was told that it was wanted, if not essential, in the coming struggle for national economic, political and cultural development. Later, however, and especially in the (post-) 1951 revised editions of his Selected Works, Mao constantly emphasized the primacy of the industrial proletariat as the mass basis for the Communist Party and as the leading historical force. Numerous references to this leadership are to be found in his writings, and characterizations of the peasantry as an ancillary force. However, this might have been (particularly after 1949) in order to gain legitimacy in Marxist-Leninist circles where the

determinist belief in the industrial working class was still prevalent. Anyway, to describe the peasantry as the main force of the revolution does not in itself mean that working class leadership is repudiated.

In practical terms, Mao had put the peasantry at the centre of revolutionary activity, had further developed Lenin's concept of voluntarism and emphasized a political conceptualization of class. He was not in the first place interested in a sociological determination of class and the question of who owned what; his aim was to find out the status of social groups in terms of hierarchy of power and particularly to what degree they were exploited. This enabled him in turn to assess those groups' potential for revolutionary activity. The level of exploitation and attitude towards the revolution and imperialism were a guide to the determination of class practice.

In On Practice, for example, Mao wrote:

In all class societies, the members of the different social classes also enter, in different ways, into definite relations of production and engage in production to meet their material needs. This is the primary source from which human knowledge develops ... In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of class.<sup>124</sup>

We can say that even for Mao, peasants could not have been the bearers of a socialist future. The bearers of socialism are the ones who possess political consciousness which exists independent of a specific social class and is created through experience and action. The understanding of class interests could only arise with the guidance of revolutionary theory.

However, Mao put much greater emphasis on consciousness and the subjective factors which could form a reactionary or progressive individual. Objective social realities (i.e. economic position in life) could be modified by changes in the individual's consciousness, particularly through practical action, which in the China of the 1920s and 1930s largely meant by means of military action. Indeed, informed by his theory of knowledge and concept of contradiction, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Section ii, Mao believed the most important aspect of class analysis, and certainly of proletarian class consciousness, was not so much objective economic factors as the experience of struggle. Class status, not class origins is for Mao the decisive element, one could argue, and this led him "to superimpose the supraclass categories of friends and enemies upon his delineation of the classes themselves."<sup>125</sup> The ordering element in this was the Communist Party, as the proletariat was thin on the ground, replacing the working class in a way, and at the same time opening the way to new recruits to becoming proletarian, by joining this Party. The primacy of moral qualities is especially apparent in his discussion of the role of declassed elements, and in the Gutian resolution of 1929 (where five qualifications for new Party members are given and only one related to class background).

According to Mao's theory, classes are not defined merely by the formal, legal concepts of ownership and non-ownership, but in terms of a whole complex of social relations, making it a rather subjective form of class analysis. For Mao, politics

and ideology, measured by anti-imperialism had an effect at least equally important as that of economics on one's consciousness. The problem was not so much to justify the existence of a certain number of peasants or *lumpenproletarians* in the revolutionary movements - to some extent there was a precedent for this in Lenin or even Marx - the real problem in Marxist terms was to justify the high specific weight of these layers in the Communist movement and the Red Army.

Mao's strategy envisaged the Marxist-Leninist leadership of the Communist Party, armed and relying upon relatively secure base areas, able to overcome any problems with the allegedly unreliable peasantry and *lumpenproletariat*. Lenin's later writings, where he laid much stress on class struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, would no doubt have been a source of inspiration for Mao had he been aware of them. Lenin was also aware that countries such as China, or Turkey for that matter, were all agricultural societies, and he argued that this fact should be taken into consideration when building up communist parties or other organizations. During the Second Congress of the Comintern he wrote: "There is practically no industrial proletariat in these countries. Nevertheless, we have assumed, we must assume the role of leader even there."<sup>126</sup>

It is not certain that Lenin would have been happy with a Communist Party made up almost entirely of peasants, but at least he had opened the door for such a party. Like M. N. Roy, he believed that as long as it was controlled by workers, their vanguard, or people with proletarian consciousness, the Party could overcome the physical lack of workers. Mao for his part

undermined the universal leadership of the Party by saying that "the masses are the real heroes", compared with whom Communist Party members are often "childish and ignorant".<sup>127</sup>

Because of these departures from Marx and Lenin, Mao has been labelled either voluntarist, populist, peasant nationalist, or all together. The reason for his course of action is extremely simple. At times he seemed physically and emotionally violated by feudalism and imperialism in his country. He needed a concept which would help him to discover the trends and strength of the extremely disparate social forces in China, as well as to understand the strength of imperialism and its internal allies in order to work out a strategy for ending them. Although it might be said that a concept of imperialism and a concept of class analysis are two different things, they are closely related when it comes to political practice. From Marx and Lenin - even in the limited articles known to him in the 1920s - and the other authors mentioned particularly in Chapter Four, Mao acquired a key to understanding the balance of forces in China and the world.

In The Communist Manifesto which Mao had certainly read, he discovered a new way of conceiving past and present. "We thank Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin", Mao wrote in 1949, "for giving us a weapon [to fight internal and foreign enemies]. This weapon is not a machine gun, but Marxism-Leninism."<sup>128</sup> Earlier in 1937 he had concluded that "Marxism-Leninism alone is the compass, which can guide the Chinese revolution to victory (1937),"<sup>129</sup> and: "It was through the Russians that the Chinese found Marxism."<sup>130</sup> The difficulty in analyzing groups

and classes by Marxist criteria in semi-feudal, semi-colonial China also applied to their ideologies, which Mao tried to categorize - again in a rather unorthodox manner:

So long as classes exist, there will be as many doctrines as there are classes and even various groups in the same class may have their different doctrines. Since the feudal class has a feudal doctrine, the bourgeoisie a capitalist doctrine, the Buddhist Buddhism, the Christians Christianity and the peasants polytheism, and since in recent years, some people have also advocated Kemalism, fascism, vitalism.<sup>131</sup>

As a result of the direct or indirect influence of imperialism, classes in China were as difficult to define as their actions were to predict. But this did not discourage Mao. The apparently confusing situation, expressed in the options for different alliances or united fronts, actually presented many more possibilities than existed in a thoroughly colonized country. In an argument anticipated by Lenin, Mao maintained that it was the economically more backward society where class struggles were more intense, the institutional framework less complete, and breakthroughs more likely to take place. Although he was aware of the world-historic role of the proletariat according to Marx, he realized that in China, as expressed already clearly from his Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society onward, it was the peasantry - with the right leadership - which would decide the revolution. The leading role of the working class was mentioned often enough, but the real centres of decision lay in the countryside, where the power of the feudal landlords had to be broken.

Although Mao was suspicious of the peasantry, as mentioned above, he did believe that a Communist Party could exist for



some time with a limited proletarian base, so long as the right consciousness existed. He claimed that the CCP spoke for the relatively small industrial proletariat, the rural proletariat, small and lower middle peasants, the national democratic forces and the people with the right revolutionary spirit. There was in China no traditional peasant community which could be saved and become a stepping stone to socialism, like the *narodniks* believed could happen in Russia. However, Mao celebrated the revolutionary traditions of the Chinese peasantry, which does not mean that he attributed 'proletarian consciousness' to it. This is why the role of the Communist Party was crucial. At the same time, Mao was to a degree hostile to the cities and people living there including the proletariat. This, it can be argued, was a response to the defeat of the 1927 uprising.

There is little either Marxist or Leninist in anti-urban notions. To send workers to the countryside to learn from peasants, as happened during the Cultural Revolution, would have been absurd to Marx. This applies also to Lenin, for whom the proletarianization of the peasantry would only follow after the thorough growth and proletarianization of the working class. Mao's anti-urban notions have sometimes given rise to the accusations of 'voluntarism' against Mao, but it would appear that it was a necessity if the Chinese Communists were to survive and advance. In any case, Mao's voluntarism was not arbitrary - he believed in the ability of revolutionary activity to create the conditions for its own fulfilment. In addition, his writings contain determinist as well as voluntarist elements. Marxism tamed Mao's subjectivism, and

taught him the constraints placed on revolutionary will by socio-economic circumstances. He first discussed this dialectical relationship in On Practice and indicated that he was not oblivious to social and material constraints on revolutionary activity. The belief in subjective will freed him from the necessity of waiting for history to create the 'right' socio-economic conditions for a successful socialist revolution.

The purpose in this chapter has not been to establish whether or not Mao was orthodox, nor has the emphasis been on distinguishing what Mao originally wrote and how he edited it after founding the People's Republic of China in 1949. Rather, it has been attempted to explain the various concepts (initially that of class) which went into building up his view of imperialism. What has been established, among other things, is that imperialism made Mao analyze classes in China primarily in the sense of how social groups would deal with imperialism. Mao introduced following Lenin, but different from Marx, much more emphasis on national differences, national oppression and the national struggle, but is still concerned to maintain the orthodox Marxist importance of class. In the next chapter we will deal with another concept which was necessary in Mao's attempt to deal with imperialism, namely, the United Front. Class analysis, as explained above, was the source of his awareness that it was necessary to differentiate between different potential allies in the fight against imperialism.

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## 6. THE UNITED FRONT IN MAO'S STRATEGY

### (i) Introduction

The question of alliances is a central part of the strategy developed by Mao and a central component of his anti-imperialism. Domestic and international events made the task of guiding the revolution an especially difficult one while the small size of the Party necessitated the formation of alliances. The United Front concept (developed by Lenin earlier), the First United Front of Sun, Chiang and the CCP, and the Second United Front are all crucial in order to understand Mao's development as a theoretician and thinker, as well as his attempt to develop a 'correct' anti-imperialist strategy. This chapter will, therefore, ascertain how Mao and the Party approached the question of alliance and the United Front by examining the role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Chinese politics in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

In The Communist Manifesto Marx had discussed the question of alliances but it was not a matter of great concern to him reading and writing in the British Museum. Lenin of course was much more concerned with the practicalities of identifying suitable partners, both for bringing about the revolution and for conducting Soviet foreign policy. With the advent of the First World War, the international crisis among capitalist powers became decisive and impinged on international revolutionary tactics. Lenin believed that the contradictions

of capitalism had reached a zenith. Monopoly capitalism represented the moribund state of capitalism, and its relations with the colonial world. Europe had assumed a parasitic rentier role. Consequently, Lenin's vision of the course of the national liberation struggle moved from an emphasis on its inherent bourgeois-democratic character to an emphasis on its role in fighting bourgeois imperialism. Thus the alignment of the labour movement and the national struggle was necessary to build a broad-based anti-imperialist United Front. Revolutionary strategy had to confront the objective integration of the world economy through the expansion of imperialist capital. These were concerns which Marx had not experienced. Lenin developed Marx's theory in the conditions of his time. For tactical reasons the result was an emphasis (in the face of weak Asian Marxist revolutionary movements), on anti-imperialist United Fronts. His attitude toward indigenous bourgeois classes of colonial or semi-colonial countries was not uncompromisingly negative, as was that of M. N. Roy in the Comintern debate of 1920 discussed above in Chapter Three.

Chinese politics from the 1920s to 1949 was turbulent, lurching from a United Front to bloody fighting between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang (KMT), in the face of Japanese aggression; reverting to United Front and back again to civil war; ending in the development of the New Democracy concept. On the whole, however, forging the broadest possible United Front was indispensable to Mao's two-fold aim of (a) mobilizing people domestically, (b) confronting imperialism domestically and then internationally. The problem of course

was on what basis the United Front would be constructed and what its long-term goal should be. This chapter will shed light on these questions.

In reading Mao's writings, one is continually struck by the centrality of the concept of the United Front for the CCP from the 1920s to the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 - and beyond. Mao himself even used it retrospectively to account for his early family life:

There were two 'parties' in the family. One was my father, the Ruling Power. The Opposition was made up of myself, my mother, my brother, and sometimes even the labourer. In the 'united front' of the Opposition, however, there was a difference of opinion. My mother advocated a policy of indirect attack. She criticized any overt display of emotion and attempts at open rebellion against the Ruling Power. She said it was not the Chinese way.<sup>1</sup>

On a more formal note Mao said in 1949 that the United Front, the Red Army, and Marxism-Leninism were the three principal weapons of the Communist Party which had enabled it to defeat its enemies in a twenty-eight year struggle.<sup>2</sup> Ten years earlier, he had argued that the United Front, armed struggle, and Party building "are the Chinese Communist Party's three 'magic weapons'."<sup>3</sup> One could even go so far as to argue that Mao's article written in 1919, The Great Union of the Popular Masses, already incorporated the (later clarified) concept of United Front. Schram rejects this connection, however, in his discussion and translation of the article.<sup>4</sup>

Whether in family relations, or as something to be accomplished and perfected, or as something which would bring about victory, the United Front is crucial to an understanding of the twisting and turning policies of the CCP.

This chapter begins by considering the theoretical background to the development of the United Front concept both in the thinking of Lenin and Mao. A brief discussion of Comintern policy towards China is followed by a discussion of the experience of the First United Front, its disastrous conclusion, and the years of struggle by the CCP to survive. The Second (and far more successful) United Front is then discussed, and the whole period up to the Communist victory in 1949, when the concept takes on new dimensions in internal and international policy. It will also become clear that the United Front was important in Mao's struggle for ascendancy within the Party, but as indicated above, this was not the key element in the development of the concept.

(ii) Theoretical Background to the Concept of the United Front

It was Lenin who developed this concept in his thinking and practice. He began by discussing 'temporary' or 'limited' alliances in his 'Left Wing Communism' - An Infantile Disorder; even earlier, however, Marx and Engels had referred to such possibilities in The Communist Manifesto and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the actual term and theory of the 'United Front' only really became part of the general thinking of the Communist movement in 1920-22. The first few years after the October Revolution had been marked, among West European Communist parties, by a confident expectation that Germany and other key countries would soon follow Russia under Communist leadership. Particularly in Germany, this had blended with a

tendency towards extreme political tactics which culminated in the disastrous March Action of 1921, when the mass of workers failed to follow the putschist inspiration of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD). In the aftermath of this action, which coincided with the turn from War Communism to the New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union, the Communist International (Comintern) drew the conclusion that Social Democratic workers would not immediately or automatically join the Communists in a revolutionary assault on capitalism, and that a protracted period of United Fronts between the Socialists and Communists would be necessary, both in order to lay the basis for joint defensive action against capital and to prepare the ground for a further advance of the whole working class. Even before this, Sneevliet, working under the pseudonym Maring, who had been sent to China by the Comintern and had played a leading role during the first plenary meeting of the CCP Congress in Shanghai in 1921, had introduced the idea of 'bloc-within' United Front in the Dutch East Indies in 1916-20 between the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV) and the Sarekat Islam, a popular mass organization of Indonesian Moslems with a Pan-Islamist ideology. This had been highly successful, and to some extent can be regarded as the model for the First United Front (1923-27), as will be seen later on. The Third Congress of the Communist International (1921) marked the victory of this new policy, although the next decade was to witness a series of twists and turns that we cannot go into here.

In the colonial and semi-colonial countries, where



political divisions in the anti-imperialist camp involved parties of different classes, the problem of the United Front was somewhat different. Moreover, it was combined with the problem of the conditions under which socialism could be built, if at all, in these relatively undeveloped parts of the world.

(1) The transition in a colonial country to socialism was possible if, in another part of the world, fully developed capitalist production as well as a revolutionary proletarian movement already existed.

(2) This transition demanded cooperation in the class struggle between the working class in the advanced and less advanced parts of the world. As the proletariat, if it existed as such, was small in numbers - sometimes existing only as a vanguard party - it was necessary to form 'United Fronts' with other, more popular groups and parties, such as the KMT in China.

(3) The transition to socialism, under these circumstances, would be a difficult and painful process, made easier by the increasing number of revolutions in the industrialized world.<sup>5</sup>

The main issue for Communists was which parties and groups could be considered as possible collaborators in a United Front for change. In Lenin's view, the answer depended on the phase through which a society was passing. If the Communists were confronted with the final resistance of feudalism, then they could unite with all forces fighting feudalism - including, after the experience of 1905 in Russia, the peasants.<sup>6</sup> However, Lenin also considered that a convergence of interests in one phase did not remove the possibility of future struggle, particularly in those countries where the alliance included

parts of the bourgeoisie, which as a class would in the end itself have to be eliminated. As we shall see, this element of struggle was developed to a greater extent by Mao than by any other Marxist-Leninist thinker. In Sneevliet's experience, the United Front was not only useful where the Communist Party was still too weak to fight alone; it also allowed 'entryism', in the sense of gaining access to other mass forces within the Front which could be convinced of the correctness of Communist analysis and future policies. In Lenin's view, when considering alliances, one had to be aware of the nature of the revolutionary situation and one had to be adaptable.

Permanent alliances were impossible as at one time or another various social forces would play various roles and one partner of now would be a foe later. To safeguard the revolution one not only would have to come to agreement with the leadership in other parties or organizations, but also with the average party member to pull them over to one's side. The latter approach was called 'united front from below' which becomes a key element in Mao's policies. The former was called 'united front from above' which became the policy after 1936 - without ever neglecting the one from below. Another key element in Lenin's approach was the need to remain separate in a united front, because the opposite side was of course also busy pulling over members of the Communist Party.

A Social Democrat must never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevitably have to wage a class struggle for socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This is beyond doubt. Hence the absolute necessity of a separate, independent, strictly class party of Social Democracy. Hence, the temporary nature of our tactic of 'striking a joint blow' with

the bourgeoisie and the duty of keeping a strict watch 'over our ally as over an enemy'.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, Lenin's views both agreed with and were different compared to those of Mao. In 'Left-Wing Communism' - An Infantile Disorder, Lenin wrote that before the "final and decisive battle" was joined, it was necessary to determine,

whether the historically effective forces of all classes - positively of all classes in a given society without exception - are arrayed in such a way ... that: (1) all the classes hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads with each other, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength; (2) all the vacillating and unstable intermediate elements ... have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy; and (3) among the proletariat, a mass sentiment favouring the most determined, bold, and dedicated revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has emerged and begun to grow vigorously.<sup>8</sup>

For both it was crucially important to find out about the power and lack of it in all classes in a society. The revolution would not happen over night, but was only the last part of a long-term strategy. In this long-term process, the proletariat played for Lenin the key role and middle layers of society merely had to be neutralized. Mao thought that proletarian (or simply 'advanced') consciousness was a vital leadership attribute, but he emphasized the mobilization of an overwhelming majority, including the middle forces and even some of those in the enemy camp, in order to isolate the principal enemy.

Before moving on to consider the experience of the United Fronts in China, we shall now turn to two articles by Mao - On Practice and On Contradiction (1937) - for a general discussion

of his methodological approach as attempted already in Chapter Four. The latter text is particularly appropriate, since it contains a theoretical justification of a new United Front with the Kuomintang (KMT). These articles, based fairly closely on Soviet texts on philosophy, were written at the beginning of the Yenan period, after the experiences in Hunan and Jiangxi of defeated peasant uprisings and the establishment of Soviets in liberated areas. Although Mao had not been centrally involved in shaping the first United Front, these articles contain much that is relevant to the 1920s and the domestic struggle against imperialism, as well as to issues of socialist construction and political economy,<sup>9</sup> the party/masses relationship and the problem of communism and future society. On Practice and On Contradiction were an attempt on Mao's part to establish his credentials as a Marxist-Leninist and a philosopher. He hoped that the theory of contradiction would give guidance for correct theoretical analysis and justification for a correct political line. But, he was also confronting a life-and-death situation for the CCP.

Mao's theories of knowledge and contradiction are crucial to an understanding of how he perceived the driving forces of history, the definition of goals and aims, and the necessary means to accomplish them. Two key elements are the progress of knowledge during the process of social change and the recognition of the contradictions in this process. These conscious factors in turn influence the actual realization of development and change people's idea of how development should be realized.

Mao believed that knowledge is derived in the first place from personal, sensory experience, which can only be gained through social practice. Ideas grow out of practical experience and, in turn, shape that experience:

All genuine experience originates in direct experience ... All knowledge originates in perception of the objective external world through man's physical sense organs. Anyone who denies such perception, denies direct experience, or denies personal participation in the practice that changes reality, is not a materialist.<sup>10</sup>

Sensory experiences have to be worked into concepts, decisions, and conclusions. Nevertheless, neither Mao nor any other empiricist can tell us how this should be done. At the end of this process, however, we have rational knowledge. The dialectic of this theory of knowledge expresses itself in the need to deepen sensory experience and to progress to rational knowledge. Practice is guided by this rational knowledge and expresses itself as social and revolutionary struggle - the form this struggle takes changing according to the historical phase. At one time it might be anti-imperialist struggle (the 1930s), at another, internal class-struggle (1945/6-49), and then struggle to construct socialism (1949- ). Not even in the higher stage of communism does this revolutionary struggle come to an end. The process of gaining knowledge depends to a considerable degree on interaction with the masses (the mass line), as the vanguard of the workers does not possess this knowledge in a ready form. Much later, in 1964, Mao would declare that his revolutionary theory resulted entirely from his years of practice and struggle.<sup>11</sup>

This theory of knowledge led Mao to his theory of

contradiction. Contradictions are in all things, they are the most fundamental law of materialist dialectics. Mao criticizes metaphysical, evolutionary views of change in the world, which comprehend development only as an eternal up and down, where movement is instigated from the outside but things as such remain unchanged. According to this view, for example, class society does not change as such; the reason for any historical change lies with external factors such as climatic or geographical conditions. In a dialectical-materialist view, on the other hand, although external stimuli are important preconditions, change essentially takes place in accordance with an internal necessity - for instance, because class society is impelling the process of change or development. Thus, as we have seen in Chapter Four, imperialism, Japanese expansionism and the October Revolution caused internal development in China, but only because traditional Chinese society was in itself contradictory.

Mao's theory of practice involved a view of life and politics as ever-changing, and therefore rarely in a state of finality, balance or harmony. Disequilibrium and disharmony result from ever-present contradictions in society, the most fundamental of which are class struggles. Already in 1917 Mao had written in Xin Qingnian (New Youth): "According to my humble opinion there is nothing on earth or in heaven but movement."<sup>12</sup> And twenty years later he wrote:

What are the characteristics of the present movement? What are its laws? How is it to be directed? These are all practical questions ... The movement is developing, new things have yet to emerge, and they are emerging in an endless stream.<sup>13</sup>

Contradiction and movement, then, are inherent in all things (neibu de maodun=internal contradiction). Mao wrote in 1958: "If there were no contradictions and no struggle, there would be no world, no progress, no life, there would be nothing at all."<sup>14</sup> Because of the existence of internal contradictions, change is not merely a quantitative but also a qualitative phenomenon. Moreover, there is a 'principal' or 'fundamental' contradiction which forms the core reason for change, the 'particularity of contradiction'. With this 'particularity' one is able to recognize the identity of the dominant movement or issue of the time. This movement or issue, of course, itself contains contradictions and is in constant change. The different contradictions need different solutions, and only precise knowledge of the specific situation allows the correct ones to be chosen, avoiding dogmatism and putschism which might endanger the revolution.

In society, then, there are a variety of contradictions, and it is important to understand exactly how these inter-relate. One key distinction that Mao introduced is between the 'principal', 'fundamental' or 'basic' contradiction (genben maodun=basic contradiction or zhuyao maodun=principal contradiction) and the 'secondary contradiction' (ciyao maodun). The former may change between historical phases, but in each there is only one principal contradiction which remains the same for as long as that phase persists - in capitalist society, for example, the contradiction between the social character of production and the private character of appropriation. This principal contradiction determines the

existence, development and possible solution of other secondary, or subordinate, contradictions.<sup>15</sup>

To discover the 'principal contradiction' is always a difficult task, but only in this way can the essential character and tendencies of a particular historical phase be grasped. This was historically a real problem for Mao, if one did not go beyond narrow empiricism and did not grasp the essence of a phenomenon. Based on this differentiated concept of contradiction is Mao's argument that united fronts of one kind or another will necessarily exist all the time. In the case of the CCP, at his time of writing, the most burning practical issue referred precisely to the need for a Second United Front with the KMT. In On Contradiction Mao saw the CCP and the KMT as the two aspects of a contradiction, whose precise relationship with each other was subject to change. The 'fundamental contradiction' (genben maodun) in China in the 1930s, was between capitalism and socialism. But in the specific period of imperialist aggression by Japan, the CCP and the KMT were on the same side of a contradiction between the great majority (around 90%) of semi-colonial Chinese society and Japanese imperialism.

When imperialism launches a war of aggression against [a semi-colonial country], all its various classes, except for some traitors, can temporarily unite in a national war against imperialism. At such a time the contradiction between imperialism and the country concerned becomes the principal contradiction, while all the contradictions among the various classes within the country ... are temporarily relegated to a secondary [ciyao] and subordinate [fucong] position.<sup>16</sup>

Mao's use of the word 'temporarily' indicates that there is at the same time unity and struggle, although struggle was not



being emphasized at that time. There are always contradictions, dialectical changes and a unity of opposites. As there are always united fronts entailing unity and struggle, the purpose of the United Front of a specific phase is, as explained in On Policy, to solve one contradiction and to go on to the next. In the United Front the CCP should "make use of contradictions, win over the many, oppose the few, and crush our enemies one by one."<sup>17</sup> Hence "the principal contradictions must be distinguished from secondary contradictions; contradictions between the main enemy and other forces as well as 'contradictions within the enemy camp' must be exploited."<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned above, Mao described the United Front concept as one of the three 'magic weapons' (together with armed struggle and party construction, in the Introduction to 'The Communist', 1939) and ten years later as one of three principal weapons which helped the CCP to win the struggles against Japanese imperialism and the KMT. (On the People's Democratic Dictatorship, 1949). This concept was not only important for the time of the First and Second United Fronts, but also for the time of the civil war from 1945 to 1949 and for the People's Republic's foreign and internal policies. According to van Slyke, it became an "integral part of Chinese Communist thought and practice"<sup>19</sup> and he concluded that "the CCP has thought in united-front terms for so long, and it has applied this kind of analysis to various situations so frequently, that the approach has become a habitual, almost instinctive, cast of mind."<sup>20</sup> Schram was in full agreement: "For Mao himself, the alliance of all Chinese for the salvation of their country was

not merely skilful tactics; it was a value in itself."<sup>21</sup>

Having looked at the general theorization of the United Front, let us now turn to why and how the First United Front was formed.

### (iii) The First United Front 1923-1927

When in 1921 The First Congress of the CCP was held in Shanghai, the twelve delegates set themselves a seemingly impossible task: Revolution in China. Of course, they could simply have joined the other, more prominent revolutionary formation, the KMT, but their final goal was not merely independence but socialism. For this reason, the CCP, like most political organizations, introduced constitutional provisions to exclude membership in other parties. This would have made it all the more difficult for the 57 Party members to be told to join the KMT. The KMT was, itself, not exactly a mass party, but the small number of Communist Party members could easily have been swallowed up in the pursuit of nationalism and 'alliance' with the Chinese bourgeoisie, which would have led away from a proper understanding of Marxism-Leninism, that is class struggle. Indeed, much of the CCP's early history is one of meandering between the extremes of left-wing excesses or 'infantilism' in the words of Lenin, and right-wing opportunism.

A purist approach of no compromise and an exclusion of any relationship with other parties or groups had to be however

short-lived. In January 1922 Party members travelled to the 'First Congress of the Communist and Revolutionary Organisations of the Far East' in Moscow and Petrograd and learned of the need to compromise with the national bourgeoisie, insofar as certain of its aims overlapped with those of the Communists.<sup>22</sup> The result can be seen in the 'Manifesto of the Second Congress of the Chinese Communist Party' (July 1922):

The proletariat's support of the democratic revolution is not [equivalent to] its surrender to the capitalists. Not to prolong the life of the feudal system is absolutely necessary in order to raise the power of the proletariat. This is the proletariat's own class interests ... The successful democratic revolution develops the capitalist class, at present in its infancy - capitalist opposition to the proletariat being left to the future ... At present the CCP must, in the interest of the workers and poor peasants, lead the workers to support the democratic revolution and forge a democratic united front of workers, poor peasants, and petty bourgeoisie.<sup>23</sup>

The CCP was certainly not giving the bourgeoisie *carte blanche*; the United Front offer was limited, although in reality the KMT was accepted as the leading force in the alliance. The Party Congress defined the revolution as anti-feudal and anti-imperialist, demanded a bourgeois-democratic revolution as well as a united front against imperialism and militarism. It also decided to join the Comintern officially.

The CCP was enjoined to retain independence, to prepare for the establishment of soviets and to support the poor peasants: "the workers must not become the appendage of the petty bourgeoisie within this democratic united front ...".<sup>24</sup> At the same time however Comintern advice was to join as

individual members. Leninist theory and Stalinist pragmatism clashed - to the disadvantage of the CCP as we will see.

In the view of Sneevliet (alias Maring, the Comintern representative) this did not go far enough in seeking to attract more widespread support. Having come from Indonesia, where he was instrumental in setting up a united front of the 'bloc-within type', and armed with the December 1921 Comintern 'Theses on the United Front'<sup>25</sup>, Sneevliet pushed the CCP to join the KMT as individuals. This required the Party to notify the KMT of every CCP member joining and to reassure the former that its members would not be poached. Sneevliet agreed fully with these conditions, and went considerably further than Lenin on the question of what is permissible in a temporary alliance with the national bourgeoisie. However, Sneevliet and his supporters in the CCP did not command a majority on the Central Committee at the time (August 1922),<sup>26</sup> and they had to employ a variety of tactics and commit ideological acrobatics to gain acceptance for this type of united front by a Communist Party membership which still in June 1922 at its Second Congress preferred to think of it in terms of 'acting jointly' or alongside the KMT.<sup>27</sup>

Sneevliet used the Comintern's (Stalin's) novel idea of labelling the KMT a 'block of various classes', rather than a party of one economic class. Previously, it had regarded the KMT as a loose coalition, a bloc of four classes, the workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. CCP members were thus not being asked to join a bourgeois party but a bloc within which they could represent the workers in their dealings

with other classes. However, a year later, in June 1923, the 'Manifesto of the Third Congress of the CCP' stated: "The KMT should be the central force of the national revolution and should assume its leadership."<sup>28</sup> This was certainly unprecedented in Marxist-Leninist theory. It was essentially a response to Lenin's and Stalin's policy and the wish to avoid challenging Western powers and the Chinese bourgeoisie. It also contradicted all the rules of the book as laid down by Lenin and made the Party into a subordinate body in the United Front, accepting bourgeois leadership, curbing the militancy of urban workers and the rebelliousness of the peasantry. At this time, the options in China and internationally for the Soviet Union were constrained, for it had become clear that the Russian Revolution would remain for some time the only one. The agreement between Sun Yatsen and Joffe (another Comintern adviser) in January 1923 had laid out how the KMT and the Soviet Union could cooperate. Finally, after a lengthy controversy (between Chang Kuo-t'ao, one of the founder members of the CCP and Ch'en Tu-hsiu who had become Secretary General at the Second Congress in July 1922, and after pressure from Sneevliet, who invented this 'entryist' tactic which shaped and one could argue ruined the early CCP, the decision to join the KMT in this unusual enterprise was ratified at the Third Party Congress in June 1923.

Mao was one of the twenty delegates, representing 432 party members, who attended this Congress. After first supporting a minority led by Chang, against the new-style United Front, he then voted with the majority replacing Chang

as head of the Department of Organization - one of whose tasks was to liaise between the CCP and the KMT. There seems to be no evidence that Mao was practically involved in developing this First United Front, nor did he write much about it at the time. Besides the above mentioned article by Mao of 1919 The Great Union of the Popular Masses, one can detect elements of united front thinking in his Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society. His writings of the 1930s and 1940s suggest that he must have felt instinctively at home with the whole approach to revolution via anti-imperialist nationalism, with the socialist goal coming afterwards. In any event, after the First National Congress of the KMT agreed in January 1924 to admit Communists as individual members, Mao worked actively in the KMT. After this First National Kuomintang Congress he became chairman of the Kuomintang Department for the Peasant Question. Mao was criticized at the time (Summer 1924) for being too close to the KMT as a right-winger, i.e. nationalist and consequently he was sent back to his home province - as a punishment, he did not attend the Fourth National Congress of the CCP in 1925 and was not re-elected to the Central Committee - in time to witness, take part in and then to write a report on the peasant uprising there in 1927.<sup>29</sup>

The question to be asked then is why the CCP membership joined with the KMT. The task that the Communists consistently set themselves was, in the first instance, the same as that of the KMT: the eradication of provincial warlordism, the unification of the country and the limitation of foreign power and influence. The key question was whether the methods and

long-term goals of the Communists were better suited than those of the KMT to accomplish these tasks, which were traditionally associated with the bourgeois revolution. However, the domestic bourgeoisie in China, as in Russia, was weak and irresolute according to Mao. Thus, the decision to join the KMT (whatever the enormity of the theoretical and practical mistakes), can be seen both as a recognition of the common ground of national revolution and a realization that the struggle for leadership within that revolution would be a protracted and difficult process.

It is likely that Marx would have approved of a struggle against warlordism, as it would have made possible a thorough development of the capitalist mode of production. And the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the CCP, at least in their majority, felt themselves on secure ground in arguing that the national revolution should be the structuring principle of their activity. The socialist goal had become secondary for the time being, and this seemed to accord with Lenin's and Stalin's way of thinking on this issue.

However, within the United Front the small and inexperienced CCP had no alternative, the Comintern claimed, but to accept the terms dictated by the KMT to gain access to the masses and a degree of political legitimacy. For his part, Sun Yatsen, who had clashed with former supporters in Canton, found himself in difficulties within the KMT and hoped to gain support not just from the CCP but also from the Soviet Union.

The real problems in the alliance began with the death of Sun Yatsen in March 1925. M. M. Grunzenberg, alias Borodin, the

successor of Sneevliet, had been the chief adviser to Sun. He had kept the left-wing critics of the United Front in the CCP under control but had lost his political base with Sun's death. The right-wing of the KMT felt that it had got enough out of the United Front, and that now it was time to assert a clear superiority over its revolutionary partner. Although Chiang Kaishek was coming closer and closer to his goal of uniting all China under one government (particularly with his military victories from 1926 onwards), he was nevertheless unable to stop CCP members and the KMT's left-wing from gaining a majority at the Third Kuomintang Central Executive Committee (CEP) Plenum in March 1927. The Comintern and CCP policy was apparently paying off; in reality, however, the CCP had manoeuvred itself into a corner, where it was unable to move without losing freshly gained influence. With the military right in the KMT becoming restive, the Communists decided to pursue a cautious policy on the agrarian question, contrary to Mao's advocacy of radical land reform with land confiscations. The position of the Comintern was that no pretext was to be given to the right of the KMT to break the United Front, no doubts created in the minds of the left of the KMT about the long-term possibilities of bourgeois-socialist cooperation.

However, during the years of the United Front, the CCP remained active among the workers and the peasantry. While the Comintern wanted a cautious and unprovocative CCP, it had in fact been developing a mass base in the countryside and the cities. At the Fifth Party Congress in April/May 1927 delegates represented some 58,000 Party members. Mao claimed two million



members of peasant associations in Hunan alone in January 1927.<sup>30</sup> The labour movement in 1926 had reached more than one million.<sup>31</sup> In this critical phase, as pressure was put on the KMT for more radical policies and the right-wing in the KMT would feel threatened and end the United Front with the CCP and the whole national government, the Chinese Communist Party naturally turned for advice to the Comintern, which pronounced:

The fear that the aggravation of the class struggle in the countryside will weaken the united anti-imperialist front is baseless ... Not to approach the agrarian question boldly by supporting all the economic demands of the peasant masses is positively dangerous for the revolution. To refuse to assign to the agrarian revolution a prominent place in the national-liberation movement, for fear of alienating the dubious and disloyal cooperation of a section of the capitalist class, is wrong. This is not the revolutionary policy of the proletariat. The Communist Party must be free of such mistakes.<sup>32</sup>

The new line, then, was to urge an intensification rather than a dampening of peasant agitation. But this was inconsistent with the policy of strengthening ties with the left KMT, which had no wish to see a revival of militancy among the peasantry - mainly because so many of the KMT officer corps were drawn from the landlord class. The result of these contradictions in the Comintern line was an insufficient number of allies within the KMT to block the move to the right and the black-balling of the Communists. The CCP may not have been squeezed like a lemon (as Stalin hoped for the KMT), but it was certainly discarded when it was no longer useful to Chiang Kaishek.

The first coup against the United Front came in March 1927. The next month, after Chiang had taken Shanghai, disaster struck the CCP. Unable to prevent the consolidation of a

military regime under Chiang, and a wave of bloody repression, the movement entered a period in the wilderness where revolution was a long way off. Ingenious as he had been with his four-class-bloc concept, Stalin now claimed, incredibly, that the disaster was a success. Not only did the Comintern back the KMT to the bitter end, but also beyond it, when it encouraged the continuation of the United Front with the left-KMT rump in Wuhan. Its Stalinist leadership claimed that the United Front was now purified of the bad influence of Chiang and his cronies, that the bloc of four classes had developed into a bloc of three classes - minus the bourgeoisie. The revolutionary KMT could now convert itself into "an organ of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".<sup>33</sup>

We have not brought into this discussion the internal role China played in the context of the Stalin-Trotsky debate, but there can be no doubt that one of the reasons why Stalin continued with his pro-Kuomintang line was so as not to give ground to the Left Opposition in the Soviet Union. So incoherent did policy now become, and so desperate was Stalin's attempt to keep up the pretence of CCP-KMT alliance, that the increasingly restive peasantry was once more called back by its leaders. As peasants and soldiers clashed, any semblance of a United Front came to an end, with the KMT banners flying high over the prostrate CCP. Soviet advisers left the KMT, shortly to be replaced by Germans.<sup>34</sup> The reaction of the Comintern to the 1927 *débâcle* was to blame the CCP for a faulty

implementation of their correct directive. The CCP had simply become an accessory to the KMT and had become a brake on the mass movement.

(iv) Mao's Lessons from Disaster

It is not easy to disentangle Mao's genuine assessment of the situation in the aftermath of the KMT disaster from the need to maintain Comintern discipline. At any event his writings sought to prove that all was not lost, and indeed that an uprising in Hunan could be successful. In line with the Comintern's new 'class against class' line, he wrote: "Objectively China has long since reached 1917 [referring to the Soviet Union], but formerly everyone held the opinion that we were in 1905. This has been an extremely great error ..."<sup>35</sup> If the future looked bright, it was necessary to learn from past mistakes. This process of learning would have to deal with the first problem the CCP had had when it entered the united front: namely, inexperience. Secondly, the lesson had to be drawn that a key element in any united front should be the preservation of a separate identity and independent action. The third reason for defeat had been the lack of military power, and the fourth had been a failure to win over the wavering middle forces and isolate the small group of reactionaries. A fifth issue which would have to concern the difficulties faced by Chinese Marxists, not so much perhaps in serving Soviet goals as in importing new concepts and ideology from abroad, inflected by the deterministic interpretation of Marx prevalent

among the victors of the first socialist revolution.

Nor was the Comintern exactly helpful with its vague and indecisive guidance. Ironically it was M. N. Roy, who felt much more comfortable with a stance of intransigent opposition to the national bourgeoisie, who had been sent in 1927 to China to solve the mounting problems between the CCP and the KMT. When he failed, he became a scapegoat for Comintern policy on China.<sup>36</sup>

At the Fifth National Congress of the CCP in May 1927, there were complaints that although it had taken the initiative in forming the United Front, and had fought for the unification of the country,

Chiang Kaishek's class, the bourgeoisie, turned the victory [in the Northern Expedition] to its class advantage by bearing down on the masses who constitute the vast majority of the nation. Chiang Kaishek is not only the leader of the bourgeoisie but also the ally of the feudalists. We must therefore oppose him with all our strength ...<sup>37</sup>

The question was how to oppose the bourgeoisie.

This discussion of the First United Front has revealed the questions that every member of the CCP must have asked at the time: where did their strength lie? And, if it was not possible to survive alone in Chinese politics, how could it be done?

The next section will deal with the way in which the CCP eventually moved from its wilderness to begin the climb to power, under Maoist direction and within the context of a United Front - only this time with knowledge gained from previous experience.

(v) The Transitional Phase 1927-1937

The period from Autumn 1927 (Harvest Uprising in Hunan) to the Zunyi Conference in 1935 is sometimes called the insurrectionist phase in CCP policy. The 'First Left Deviationist Line', as it was labelled later on, concerned the uprising in Nanchang, Changsha and Guangzhou. The 'Second Left Deviationist Line' was connected with Li Lisan who accepted Stalin's orders for renewed insurrections in the cities with the countryside playing a supportive role. It ended in 1930. The 'Third Left Deviationist Line' began with Wang Ming's, one of the 'Returned Bolsheviks', take-over of the Party in 1931. These lines all emphasized the primary role of the proletariat, uprising in the cities, dominance by the Party headquarters in Shanghai and the domineering influence of the Soviet Union. The result was the near defeat of the CCP. Only the Japanese invasion (1931) and the Long March saved the Party from total defeat. As Otto Braun (alias Li De, the only Comintern adviser on the Long March) has shown, contrary to legend, the March was not a well-prepared and planned move by the wise CCP leadership, but a desperate attempt to escape from KMT persecution.<sup>38</sup> The Zunyi Conference in 1935 - in the midst of the Long March - represented an important turning point in Mao's party life. At this meeting of the highest-level Communist leadership Mao became chief assistant to Zhou Enlai for military planning, extending his influence dramatically in the Party. The previous military strategy advocated by Otto Braun was condemned and replaced by guerrilla warfare. It also

represents a weakening of the Comintern influence and of Wang Ming over the Party.<sup>39</sup> For the first time an Asian revolutionary movement contradicted the Comintern and Moscow. Following Comintern guidance, the Communist Party had been decimated. Comintern instructions regarding the establishment of tiny rural bases, the use of trial-and-error learning to create Soviets and ragtag armies, to rebuild urban parties and trade unions, to recruit the proletariat were all meaningless and irrelevant. The result had been, Mao wrote in November 1928: "Wherever the Red Army goes, the masses are cold and aloof ... We have an acute sense of isolation which we keep hoping will end."<sup>40</sup>

After the collapse of the First United Front, Stalin and the Comintern had advocated insurrections in the cities and in the countryside. The former Left Opposition under Qu Qiubai supported by Stalin, removed Chen Duxiu in August 1927. In conformity with the advice of the Sixth Comintern Congress, and in the case of Qu Qiubai with the help of Comintern agent Besso Lominadze, the workers in the cities became the centre of activities, and the countryside was meant to play a supportive role only. Qu in turn was condemned as a putschist in February 1928.

In Europe at this time the Comintern retreated into a policy of united front from below. Any agreement with the leadership of Social Democratic parties or unions would lead the masses into fascism, the KPD discovered in 1928. Indeed, social democracy, or 'social fascism', was in a way even more dangerous, since it lulled the workers into a continuation of

bourgeois rule. Even after Emergency Legislation was introduced in Germany after the Reichstag fire provocation in 1933, the KPD and other European Communist Parties continued to reject a united front from above with the Social Democratic leadership. The decisive turn came only with Dimitrov's report to the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935. The Seventh Congress in July-August 1935 thus advocated a change in approach to Social Democratic and other parties - and also to states that were willing to fight fascism, whatever their other policies might be. All prominent communists such as Ulbricht, Pieck, Dahlem and Florin, and without doubt Thälmann, then in a Nazi camp, would have agreed with this self-critical turn. Alas, it came too late for Germany, and other parts of Europe.<sup>41</sup> But in China, where Japanese imperialism was marching forward, it seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to correct the gross mistakes of the previous decade.

In China the situation entered a new phase with the 1931 Mukden incident and the Japanese takeover of Manchuria. A 'Red Army Open Letter', signed by Mao among others, called on KMT troops to rebel against their leaders. And in January 1933 Mao made an offer over the heads of the KMT leadership to join with all willing KMT troops in a cease-fire agreement and a pact against Japanese imperialism.<sup>42</sup> But all such calls for a united front from below, which were designed to exclude Chiang and the KMT leadership, fell on deaf ears among workers and students terrorized by Chiang's secret police into distancing themselves from the Communists. The road to a more substantial move toward

bourgeois forces came only hesitantly, in China as in Europe, and again it was not until 1934/35 that the CCP began to revise its policy of making any agreement dependent on the prior removal or exclusion of Chiang and the top KMT leadership.

As Stalin came to see the danger of war inherent in the rise of fascism, the Comintern advocated common action with Western European bourgeois democracies and was generally more and more inclined to revive the idea of united fronts from above. In China, however, the new Comintern policy hardly arrived at a propitious moment, for Chiang Kaishek, with Hans von Seeckt's advice (one of the seventy German military advisers at the time<sup>43</sup>), was launching his Fifth Extermination Campaign (janmiexing zhanyi, 1933-4) against the CCP. At the Seventh Comintern Congress (1935), Wang Ming called for a united front with Chiang Kaishek, as Stalin was acutely interested in having the Japanese threat against the Soviet borders in the Far East diverted by opening up a front against Japan in China for which he needed Chiang, as well as reenforcing ties with Chiang's KMT, as it was seen by him as a more important player in China than the CCP.

"As is well known", Chalmers Johnson wrote, "the [Second] United Front tactic was ordered at the Comintern Congress in 1935."<sup>44</sup> The use of the word 'ordered', highly appropriate to the period of Stalin's domination, would have been less understood in the early days of the Communist International, when its Congresses were arenas of genuine debate and formation of a majority line - even though Lenin tended to regard decisions made in Moscow as binding whenever they had been



reached. The Bolsheviks, however, as living proof of successful revolution, naturally commanded great moral authority, and Lenin's advocacy of temporary alliances with the national bourgeoisie in the colonies was congruent with, if not crudely derived from, the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. The adoption of the compromise with M. N. Roy at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 was, as we have seen, a prelude to a general turn to United Front tactics which was either expressed in terms of a direct appeal ('from below') to the base of other parties, or an agreement ('from above') with another leadership, or some combination of the two.

As discussed above, this period, which included the First United Front in China, came to an abrupt end in 1928, when the Comintern launched its disastrous so-called 'Third Period' when Social Democrats were categorized as social-fascists.

As the pressure was exerted from Moscow, via the Comintern, and as the situation and relationship among the various classes in China changed under the impact of Japanese aggression, there was a marked shift towards a policy of cooperation with the national bourgeoisie - a policy which, arguably, would have been the spontaneous inclination of Mao throughout, but not in the form of a blank cheque for Chiang. Mao was in favour of a united front policy in order to strengthen the CCP's armed forces, base areas and to maximize revolutionary expansion.<sup>45</sup> The Politburo meeting in December 1935 in Wayaopao which continued developments of the Zunyi Conference formally endorsed this call for an anti-Japanese United Front from above but under the leadership of the CCP and

excluding Chiang, who was still then one of the "running dogs" of Japanese imperialism, because he and the Japanese imperialists might "carry through their policy of disrupting this united front" and because of "Chiang Kai-shek's policy of betraying China".<sup>46</sup> In November 1935 calls for the creation of a government of National Defence and Anti-Japanese Alliance had already been made, which were a direct result of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. In his report in Wayaopao, Mao analyzed the different classes according to their attitude to the anti-Japanese struggle, and came to the conclusion that not only the petty and national bourgeoisie but also pro-British or pro-American compradors could join the anti-Japanese United Front, so long as they were genuinely committed to a struggle against Japanese imperialism. In May and July of the next year (1936), Mao also appealed to the Hui (Muslims) in China and the Secret Society Gelaohui (Ko-lao Hui).

The minority nationalities, and especially the people of Inner Mongolia who are directly menaced by Japanese imperialism, are now rising up in struggle. As time goes on, their struggle will merge with that of the people in northern China and with the operations of the Red Army in the Northwest.<sup>47</sup>

In the Comintern, however, there was an increased willingness to let bygones be bygones as far as Chiang was concerned - something which was more difficult for Mao to come to terms with as his agenda differed from Stalin's. The 'Telegram from the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Red Army' to Chiang Kaishek in Nanjing, sent on 5 May 1936, is given by the CCP itself as the document which represents a clarification on its side and a full orientation for a united

front. The old slogan 'Resistance against Japan and Opposition against Chiang Kaishek' was changed to 'To Force Chiang to Resist Japan' and after the Xian incident in December 1936 to 'Ally with Chiang to Oppose Japan'.<sup>48</sup> By repeated appeals to Chiang and promises to integrate the Red Army into the National Army - alluding to the positive aspects of the First United Front and also softening its land reform policy - the CCP applied increasing public pressure on Chiang to enter into negotiations. These appeals must have seemed ironic to Chiang, for he was with his Fifth Extermination Campaign in 1934 then apparently concerned only with mopping-up operations in his area against Communist forces, and the rest of the Red Army had apparently disqualified itself from participation in the national arena by fleeing to the edge of China.

For Mao, the domestic class contradiction had become secondary due to the foreign policy contradiction between Japan and China. All patriots had to act in common, he declared:

The seriousness of the Japanese aggression ... is so formidable a menace that before it all the forces of China must unite. Besides the Communist Party there are other parties and forces in China, and the strongest of these is the Kuomintang. Without its cooperation our strength at present is insufficient to resist Japan in war. Nanking must participate ... We are obliged to reconsider in detail the concrete formula under which such cooperation can become possible.<sup>49</sup>

Matters finally came to a head in the famous Xian incident - the so-called 'Double 12' of 1936 - when Chiang visited Xian to relieve Zhang Xueliang, a KMT general, of his command as he had shown himself unwilling to fight the Communists while his native Manchuria was still occupied by the Japanese. However,

rather than arresting Zhang, Chiang Kaishek was himself arrested, half-dressed, without his false teeth, hiding in some bushes and with a resulting loss of face. This arrest had not been coordinated with the CCP, which suddenly found itself with the opportunity to present the bill for the massacre of 1927. Indeed, in a first telegram Mao demanded that Chiang be placed on trial. If he later changed his mind and agreed to negotiations (conducted by Zhou Enlai), this was not only because of pressure from Stalin but probably also because of fears that Chiang's possible death sentence would lead to a more pro-Japanese and more anti-communist figure controlling the Nanjing Regime. It was the crucial goal of the CCP to keep the KMT in the war and the Japanese army and the KMT locked in combat. In addition Chiang's arrest appeared not to fit the anti-Japanese mood in the country at large. A CCP advocating the killing of Chiang Kaishek would have appeared unpatriotic. On 23 December 1936 the two sides agreed to the ending of the civil war, the creation of an anti-Japanese United Front, the release of political prisoners and the sacking of pro-Japanese ministers in Chiang's KMT Nanjing government. This represented a turning point for the CCP and the KMT, signifying not only the end of the war and the extermination campaigns by Chiang, but also the creation of the Second United Front. It was the beginning of the end for Chiang,<sup>50</sup> even though in 1937 Mao agreed that he could be the titular leader of such an alliance.

Over the following months, which saw a fresh attack by Japan in July 1937 in North China, Mao gave his attention to the guarantees for the KMT and the demands of the CCP in a

United Front.<sup>51</sup> Whether the agreement would eventually have been implemented without the Marco Polo Bridge incident in July, however, it is doubtful. The attack by Japanese forces on the bridge, Spence argued, "can be considered the first battle of World War II."<sup>52</sup> A United Front for joint resistance against Japan finally came about 1937.

(vi) The Second United Front 1937-1945

It is likely that Mao believed - given the situation in China - in the absolute necessity of a Second United Front from 1927 and so there was no dramatic shift in CCP policy in 1935 or 1937. This was the period when Mao finally established his ascendancy within the Party and the clash with Wang Ming over the United Front was one of the instruments he used. However, the Wayaopao report of December 1935 was consistent with Mao's approach.

A great change has now taken place in the political situation. Our Party has defined its tasks in the light of this changed situation ... Its main characteristic is that Japanese imperialism wants to turn China into a colony.<sup>53</sup>

Relating these trends to his class analysis and theory of contradictions, Mao explained that the two basic contradictions between imperialism and China, and between feudalism and the broad masses, still existed. What had changed was the relationship between the different classes in China.

When imperialism launches a war of aggression against such a country, all its various classes, except for some traitors, can temporarily unite in a national war against imperialism. At such a time, the contradiction between imperialism and the country concerned becomes the principal contradiction, while

all the contradictions among the various classes within the country (including what was the principal contradiction, between the feudal system and the great masses of the people) are temporarily relegated to a secondary and subordinate position.<sup>54</sup>

In these circumstances class struggle took the form of national struggle, but class struggle inside China "must be subordinate to, and must not conflict with, the interests of the War of Resistance".<sup>55</sup> This interrelation of national and class oppression and exploitation is at the very centre of my thesis.

The middle classes, the wavering, unreliable customers with a 'dual character', were very important, if not decisive.

He stated in 1939:

The dual character of the Chinese bourgeoisie in the bourgeois-democratic revolution exerts a great effect on our political line and our Party building, and without grasping this dual character we cannot have a good grasp of our political line or of Party building. One important component of the political line of the Chinese Communist Party is the policy both of unity with the bourgeoisie and of struggle against it. In fact, the development and tempering of the Party through its unity and struggle with the bourgeoisie are an important component of Party building. Unity here means the united front with the bourgeoisie. Struggle here means the 'peaceful' and 'bloodless' struggle, ideological, political and organisational, which goes on when we are united with the bourgeoisie and which turns into armed struggle when we are forced to break with it.<sup>56</sup>

This is what Mao meant by "revolutionary dual policy."<sup>57</sup> It applied not only to the partner in the United Front but also to Communist activities within the Front: neither too much unity as Wang Ming was proposing - nor too much struggle. To continue to call Chiang Kaishek in 1936 a fascist would have been too much struggle; not to give him this label in 1945/6, would certainly have been too much unity.

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It would appear that throughout the turn to the Second

United Front, Mao had to use all his powers to convince comrades within the Party of the wisdom of the new course. A typical argument, at the end of 1935, was that "the tactics of the closed doorism", was the "tactics of the regal self-isolationist".<sup>58</sup> Some idea of the spontaneous contrary ideas within the Party is given by the following ironic presentation of an opponent of the United Front:

The forces of the revolution must be pure, absolutely pure, and the road of the revolution must be straight, absolutely straight. Nothing is correct except what is literally recorded in Holy Writ. The national bourgeoisie is entirely and eternally counter-revolutionary. Not an inch must be conceded to the rich peasants ... Intellectuals are three-day revolutionaries whom it is dangerous to recruit.<sup>59</sup>

When the CCP in February 1937 sent its United Front proposals to the KMT, it coupled concessions with a number of conditions and there was a period of bargaining. It was good that the KMT joined in an anti-Japanese United Front, but a continuation of other, older policies did not need to be approved.<sup>60</sup> The proposals were that the KMT stopped collaborating with Japan; if the CCP gained legitimacy and if the civil war could be stopped, it would be worthwhile making various concessions - especially if one took a long view of revolutionary dual policy, that is unity (now) and struggle not only for the hearts of the wavering middle forces (now), but also against the next group of die-hards (later).<sup>61</sup> The CCP agreed to implement Sun's 'Three People's Principles' (nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood), stop fighting the KMT, dissolve the Soviets, and integrate the Red Army into the national (KMT) army.



As these proposals were framed by references to Sun Yatsen's 'Three Principles', the CCP tried consciously to connect with the First United Front.<sup>62</sup> The CCP now kept control of considerable territory from Yen-an and had a Red Army which, though nominally under National command, was in effect an independent agent. A Party had been built which could serve as an organizational tool in politics and which kept its independence, and the KMT recognized the special status of the Shen-Kan-Ning base, or Border Region. Even though in On the New Stage in October 1938 Mao recognized the leading rôle ('backbone') of the KMT in the alliance but also in the phase of reconstructing China after the victory against the Japanese, at the same time however, contrary to the main report in The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War, Mao emphasized independence and self-reliance in the United Front.<sup>63</sup> This was even more pronounced in The Chinese Revolution and the CCP (December 1939), where he clearly claimed leadership in the United Front.

Summing up the foregoing sections of this chapter, we can see that the Chinese revolution taken as a whole involves a twofold task. That is to say, it embraces both the bourgeois-democratic revolution (the new-democratic revolution) and the proletarian-socialist revolution, i.e. both the present and the future stages of the revolution. The leadership in this twofold revolutionary task devolves on the Chinese Communist Party, the party of the proletariat, without whose leadership no revolution can succeed.<sup>64</sup>

Before that, Mao had declared in May 1938 that the land reform of the CCP was 'irreversible'.<sup>65</sup> This freedom of action, with the ability to initiate policies, shows the dramatic change the CCP had undergone from the humble beginnings of 1921-24 to the

late 1930s. No longer was the Party 'bound hand and foot'.<sup>66</sup> It was able to correct a mistake made by Mao's predecessors, who had followed, according to Mao, Lenin's conception of dual policy in a United Front wrongly. Whereas for Lenin this had meant neutralizing the wavering forces, Mao developed this into an active attempt to convince and win them over.

If the CCP had simply accommodated the KMT, the Communists might have finished in the same position as before; if they had followed the 'struggle line' too forcefully, the KMT and its pro-Japanese forces might have surrendered to Japan in order to fight the CCP together. "Our chief purpose", Mao declared, "is to extend the ground already won and to realize the positive aim of 'winning the masses in their millions for the Anti-Japanese National United Front and the overthrow of Japanese imperialism'".<sup>67</sup> In Current Problems of Tactics in the Anti-Japanese United Front, Mao reviewed the then current situation, analyzed Chinese society and proposed continued united front activities. Together with On Policy (December 1940) one finds that united front policy has become part of virtually all CCP policies. Mao elaborated in Current Problems ... the tactics to be used in the struggle against the right-wing in the KMT, the winning over of middle forces inside and outside the KMT as well as the development of progressive forces in general. It is worth quoting the central passage from Current Problems ... at length for the light that it casts on his thinking at the time.

Winning over the middle forces means winning over the middle bourgeoisie, the enlightened gentry and the regional power groups. They are three distinct categories, but as things are, they all belong to the middle forces. The middle bourgeoisie constitutes the national bourgeoisie as distinct from the comprador

class, i.e. from the big bourgeoisie. Although it has its class contradictions with the workers and does not approve of the independence of the working class, it still wants to resist Japan and, moreover, would like to grasp political power for itself, because it is oppressed by the Japanese imperialists in the occupied areas and kept down by the big landlords and big bourgeoisie in the Kuomintang areas. When it comes to resisting Japan, it is in favour of united resistance; when it comes to winning political power, it is in favour of the movement for constitutional government and tries to exploit the contradictions between the progressives and the die-hards for its own ends. This is a stratum we must win over. Then there are the enlightened gentry who are the left-wing of the landlord class, that is, the section with a bourgeois colouration, whose political attitude is roughly the same as that of the middle bourgeoisie. Although they have class contradictions with the peasants, they also have their contradictions with the big landlords and big bourgeoisie. They do not support the die-hards and they, too, want to exploit the contradictions between us and the die-hards for their own political ends. On no account should we neglect this section either, and our policy must be to win them over. As for the regional power groups, they are of two kinds - the forces which control certain regions as their own, and the troops of miscellaneous brands which do not. Although these groups are in contradiction with the progressive forces, they also have their contradictions with the Kuomintang Central Government because of the self-seeking policy it pursues at their expense; they, too, want to exploit the contradictions between us and the die-hards for their own political ends. Most of the leaders of the regional power groups belong to the big landlord class and the big bourgeoisie and, therefore, progressive as they may appear at certain times during the war, they soon turn reactionary again; nevertheless, because of their contradictions with the Kuomintang central authorities, the possibility exists of their remaining neutral in our struggle against the die-hards, provided we pursue a correct policy. Our policy towards the three categories of middle forces described above is to win them over. However, this policy differs from that of winning over the peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie, and, moreover, it varies for each category of the middle forces. While the peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie should be won over as basic allies, the middle forces should be won over as allies against imperialism. Among the middle forces, it is possible for the middle bourgeoisie and the enlightened gentry to join us in the common fight against Japan and also in the setting up of anti-Japanese democratic political power, but they fear

agrarian revolution. In the struggle against the die-hards, some may join in to a limited degree, others may observe a benevolent neutrality, and still others a rather reluctant neutrality. But, apart from joining us in the war, the regional power groups will at most observe a temporary neutrality in our struggle against the die-hards; they are unwilling to join us in establishing democratic political power since they themselves belong to the big landlord class and the big bourgeoisie. The middle forces tend to vacillate and are bound to break up, and we should educate and criticize them appropriately, with special reference to their vacillating attitude.

The winning over of the middle forces is an extremely important task for us in the period of the anti-Japanese united front, but it can only be accomplished given certain conditions. These are: (1) that we have ample strength; (2) that we respect their interests; and (3) that we are resolute in our struggle against the die-hards and steadily win victories. If these conditions are lacking, the middle forces will vacillate or even become allies of the die-hards in the latter's attacks on us, because the die-hards are also doing their best to win over the middle forces in order to isolate us. The middle forces carry considerable weight in China and may often be the decisive factor in our struggle against the die-hards; we must therefore be prudent in dealing with them.<sup>68</sup>

In the first place, of course, the CCP tried to win over the middle forces to its side simply in order to strengthen the anti-imperialist front and reduce the number of enemies. But there was always a long-term vision of reconstructing the United Front after the main present enemy had been beaten. "We shall be able to expand the progressive forces, win over the middle forces and isolate the die-hard forces."<sup>69</sup>

Despite the great difference between the First and Second United Fronts, compromises still had to be made. It must have been difficult for peasants who had gained from Communist land reform to have to reduce their outpourings of 'bitterness' against landlords. It must have seemed unjust for workers to cooperate with 'yellow trade unions', and to party cadres in

Yenan it must have appeared virtually impossible to work together in a meaningful way with the newcomers from the cities and universities, not to mention to cooperate, on however temporary a basis, with compradors. But the problems were not just on the level of the individual and his/her capacity to think strategically; a dichotomy also appeared within the Party as such. On one hand the CCP tried to gain support and trust from landlords and the bourgeoisie; on the other, the Party tried to strengthen its support in its natural constituency among the popular masses. A move in one direction always threatened a loss of support in the other.

Depending on the audience he was addressing, Mao emphasized either cooperation or leadership with the KMT in the United Front. From the outset, Mao had been quite frank about the use of the United Front by both sides. "Confronted with Japanese imperialism, the bourgeoisie and the Kuomintang are temporarily forced to seek an ally in the proletariat, just as we are seeking an ally in the bourgeoisie."<sup>70</sup> However, this instrumental approach by no means excluded a third level of potential conflict. The animosity or even open hostility by parts of the KMT against the United Front continued virtually uninterrupted. It tried continually to minimize the political success of the CCP. Serious military clashes occurred from 1939 onwards, and the New Fourth Army Incident of January 1941 shows that civil war was never very far from the surface. With this incident the KMT also stopped subsidies for the Border Region and increased the blockade of Yen-an. Mao complained bitterly about the death of his comrades:

To be frank: there is a limit to our concessions; the stage of concessions is over as far as we are concerned. They [the KMT] have inflicted the first gash, and a very deep one at that. If they still care for their own future, they should come forward of their own accord and dress the wound."<sup>71</sup>

After the renewal of military clashes with the KMT, the CCP increasingly found itself in direct competition within the United Front for leadership of the Chinese national struggle. Throughout the period until 1945 relationships between the two parties fluctuated. Each regarded the other suspiciously and prepared accordingly for the new period that would begin after the defeat of Japan. Already in 1940, in an article entitled On New Democracy, continuing a theme from The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party (December 1939), the form the future society would take was being outlined by Mao. Ultimately the Second United Front, conducted both from above and below, enabled the CCP to maximize revolutionary expansion, but stopping short of breaking the United Front. It was one of the most important clues for the CCP's anti-imperialist wartime success.

(vii) From United Front to New Democracy (Xin Minzhu Zhuyi)

Even if it is difficult to take seriously Mao's declaration (at the time of the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943) that the Comintern had supported the Chinese revolution in its most difficult years from 1927 to 1937, it should not be forgotten that Mao had matured politically as a result of receiving edicts from the Comintern and having

discussions with its advisers. What the CCP had borrowed had been transformed under Mao into something appropriate for the Chinese context - as we have seen in the case of policy towards the middle forces. As Fairbank remarked, the way the United Front concept was used in China complemented the guerrilla strategy developed by Mao.<sup>72</sup> It also reinforced Mao's position in the Party and his brand of 'sinification' of Marxism. In Liu Shaoqi's report on changes in the Party constitution Mao's thinking becomes the guiding ideology.

It [Mao's thought] is the greatest achievement and greatest pride of our Party and of the Chinese people in its long struggle and it will bring benefit for our nation for generations ... Mao Tse-tung Thought is the further development of Marxism in the national-democratic revolution of a colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal country in the current era ... Nobody, except our Comrade Mao Tse-tung has been so successful and outstanding in the solution of the extraordinary task of adapting Marxism to China ... our Comrade Mao Tse-tung is not only the greatest revolutionary and statesman of Chinese history, but also its greatest theoretician and scientist.<sup>73</sup>

The United Front concept was applicable to the contradiction with Japan, and served as a constant tool for dealing with a variety of problems. At the time there were two possibilities for China, Mao claimed - either the continuation or the destruction of the fascist dictatorship of the KMT, supplemented by democratic reforms and the construction of an independent, free, democratic, united, rich and powerful new China.

In Mao's article On Coalition Government (1945), he set out the broad lines of the new regime envisaged by the CCP after the end of the war.

In these circumstances, what ought we do? Beyond all doubt, the urgent need is to unite representatives of

all political parties and groups and of people without any party affiliation and establish a provisional democratic coalition government for the purpose of instituting democratic reforms, surmounting the present crisis, mobilizing and unifying all the anti-Japanese forces in the country to fight in effective co-ordination with the allied countries for the defeat of the Japanese aggressors, and thus enabling the Chinese people to liberate themselves from the latter's clutches. After that it will be necessary to convene a national assembly on a broad democratic basis and set up a formally constituted democratic government, which will also be in the nature of a coalition and which will have a still wider representation of people from all parties and groups or without any party affiliation, and which will lead the liberated people of the whole country in building an independent, free, democratic, united, prosperous and powerful new China.<sup>74</sup>

The question which arises at this point is why the CCP should continue to work in a united front or coalition government. The reasons were very practical, for the solution of a whole range of internal problems required a concerted national effort. Who would run the factories? Who would deal with China on the international scene, if China repressed thousands of the national bourgeoisie? Besides, world capitalism was expected to enter a major crisis in the near future, with no feasible solution other than socialism. There was thus no reason to push ahead, for the CCP had suffered from inexperience in the First United Front, without coming to grips with it; it had to avoid making this mistake again.<sup>75</sup> The Party, with the defeat of Japanese imperialism, reassessed the overall situation and again the main contradiction had shifted and this meant that possible friends and foes had changed.

To an increasing extent, the problem after the civil war was that of restoring the economy to pre-war levels and then much later of building socialism in a Third World country. The



concept of 'New Democracy' was first enunciated by Mao Zedong in early 1940 as a specifically Chinese route to socialism, and generally as an idea that might be applicable to societies placed similarly to China within the capitalist world system. This represents Mao's primary concern to integrate national considerations into a Marxist scheme of historical development. In On New Democracy (and also The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party and Introducing 'The Communist') it had been argued in line with Comintern doctrine that a classic bourgeois-democratic revolution was not appropriate for China's situation at the time. Nor was a socialist one however. The theory and practice of wartime united front policies had been worked out from 1937-1940. The result was 'On New Democracy' (1940), which feeds into civil war united front policies in Mao's On Coalition Government (1945) and finally into On the People's Democratic Dictatorship (1949). 'New Democracy' was against foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism, but not against capitalism - which as yet existed only on a small scale.<sup>76</sup> In this context, emphasis was placed upon Mao's original concept of the 'united front' during the Revolution which would involve the Chinese 'national bourgeoisie' in a four-class coalition with workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie.

This doctrine reflected the actual nationalist sentiments of much of the Chinese bourgeoisie, and the tactical use which Mao made of them.

#### (viii) Conclusion

In the struggle against Japanese imperialism and the KMT, the United Front was immensely important, as it provided a framework for navigating the political minefield in China. The difficult decision concerned who should be included in the United Front. Mao gained his knowledge from experience of feudalism and imperialist interference. Japan did not merely occupy part of China; it established businesses in the occupied and unoccupied areas. The social and national questions were thus automatically closely interwoven. Class contradictions were between national bourgeoisie and peasantry/proletariat against compradors. Nevertheless, it had always to be remembered that the national bourgeoisie had a dual character - at one point there could be unity with it, but the possibility of a period of struggle was always there. The First United Front from 1923-27 was formed to overcome domestic feudalism. This could only be a temporary alliance, for with new contradictions friends would change into foes.

The alliance terminology was first developed after 1920, when the revolution failed to occur in Germany. At that time Lenin had looked for allies to bring the revolution about and to protect the newly established Soviet Union. In colonies the issue was different: socialist revolution appeared possible, in the mid- to long-term, but the proletariat was numerically small, and so it was necessary to have access to the bourgeoisie to defeat feudalism. In the Chinese case, the CCP had lost its independence in the First United Front, due to Comintern advice and its own inexperience. Consequently, the

Party suffered a series of defeated insurrections in the cities. As a result of the defeat in 1927, Mao developed an alternative strategy: the peasantry became crucial for victory.

The foreign stimulus to rethink the situation came from Japan's further encroachment on Chinese territory. Johnson is of the opinion that the success of the CCP depended on 'peasant nationalism' only, stimulated by Japanese atrocities. Kataoka agrees with this, except that the locus of nationalism was placed in the cities. Selden in his earlier work discounts the importance of nationalism in the victory of the CCP, emphasizing the attraction of the social revolution for peasants, rejecting to a substantial degree the 'unity' aspect in the united front, and emphasising class struggle in it.<sup>77</sup> In 1964 Mao himself rejected Japanese apologies for the attack on China during the Second World War, on the grounds that this attack had created solidarity among the Chinese people and finally of the CCP.<sup>78</sup>

What I have established in this chapter is how central imperialism was to the United Front, and how instrumental the United Front was in mobilizing anti-imperialist forces against the Japanese. However, it has not been considered whether the peasants would have maintained their anti-imperialist struggle without the promise of a social revolution. One should not overlook the revolutionary nature of Mao's nationalism, the importance he gave to considerations of class and class consciousness. The ultimate goal of his strategy was not the limited one of national liberation, it included social revolution. As a matter of fact, the social revolution could

only succeed if the nationalist problem of Japanese imperialism, or imperialism in general, could be solved first. If the CCP continued to fight the KMT, this would strengthen imperialism in China and for Mao only a united front could mobilize the population against imperialism. The alternatives were clear: Either military alignment with the KMT and defeat of Japanese imperialism or continuous civil war against the KMT and probable victory for Japanese imperialism. An additional bonus of a united front with the KMT was the possibility of the Soviet Union's material support and an alliance with the Soviet Union against Japan. The Comintern, under Stalin's direction, had its own agenda as to why the United Front had to be created and Chiang's life to be spared in 1936. Stalin wanted to keep the KMT in the war against Japan. Chiang in respect of securing 'socialism in one country' was the more important player and the CCP would anyway not turn away from its 'natural' ally - or so Stalin thought. However, as has been shown, the debates concerning Comintern directives on the United Front are one of the instruments Mao used to impose his 'Thought' on the CCP.

That is why there is no contradiction in my writing that Mao was 'spontaneously' in favour of a Second United Front and that he disagreed with Comintern directives which also advocated a Second United Front. Only with an anti-imperialist Second United Front could imperialism be defeated, which would open up the possibility of the socialist revolution being attempted - something which was not directly in the national interest of the Soviet Union and Comintern. For these anti-imperialist struggle was a convenient way of putting pressure

on imperialist states as well as serving to defend the Soviet Union.

With deeper Japanese penetration however, the principal contradiction changed into a struggle against foreign imperialism, not domestic feudalism. The Second United Front in 1936/7-1945 resulted in a changed policy toward the domestic bourgeoisie, the KMT and pro-Western compradors, and less extreme land reform policies. The old danger of being absorbed in the KMT remained, but the CCP had learned from its mistakes. It now controlled territory, had a military force, remained independent, and demanded leadership in the United Front. In this alliance the CCP attracted large parts of the wavering middle forces and was successful in fighting Japan.

The formation of the First United Front had gone against Lenin's view of how and when to form an alliance. It was founded to weaken imperialism in China and Asia, help the survival of the Soviet Union and bring the revolution nearer, but it had led to increased power of the KMT. In the 1930s and the Second United Front Mao had in fact moved on beyond Lenin's concept. Lenin had broadened the Marxist term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to include the peasants. In turn, his formula, 'The Democratic Dictatorship of Workers and Peasants' was further broadened by Mao to include 'national capitalists' and 'petty bourgeoisie' in a transitional stage known as 'New Democracy'. The 'new democratic revolution', therefore, was (in Marxist terms) a species of bourgeois democratic revolution. The socialist revolution would begin at some later stage.

Given the bourgeois-democratic character of China in 1949,

the situation was not ripe for socialism and the United Front was continued into the next phase of reconstructing China after decades of war. It had by then become a genuine element of a long-term strategy. As Mao pointed out: "Any talk about Marxism apart from China's specific characteristics is only Marxism in the abstract, Marxism in a vacuum."<sup>79</sup> Thus he established China's right to a particular interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, and undermined the Stalinist monopoly of such interpretation.

#### ENDNOTES

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3. Mao, SW, vol. II, Introducing 'The Communist', p. 288.
4. Stuart R. Schram, From the 'Great Union of the Popular Masses' to the 'Great Alliance', The China Quarterly, No. 49, January-March 1972, pp. 88-106. Schram argued that Mao's article belongs to his pre-Marxist phase. Concepts such as class struggle, dialectics or the materialist view of history are not mentioned, nor the role of imperialism on the world scene, except in the vague guise of 'the powerful people'. *ibid.*, p. 93. It is also wrong to try to make out, Schram argued, that Mao had been, from the very beginning, the 'great leader and great teacher' and that he invented the united front in 1919. *ibid.*, p. 92. See also Angus W. McDonald Jr., Mao Tse-tung and the Hunan Self-government Movement, 1920: An Introduction and Five Translations, The China Quarterly, No. 68, December 1976, pp. 751-778.
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Programme of Russian Social-Democracy, p. 125 and pp. 114-6; see also Lenin, CW, vol. 10, Our Tasks and the Soviet of Workers Dispute, p. 23.

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20. *ibid.*, pp. 256-7.
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toughness (in 1938), Mao, SW, vol. II, The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War, pp. 195-211, especially p. 200.

61. Mao, SW, vol. I, The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party in the Period of Resistance to Japan, pp. 263-83 and Mao, SW, vol. II, The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War, p. 200.
62. Mao, SW, vol. II, Urgent Tasks Following the Establishment of Kuomintang-Communist Co-operation, pp. 40-5 and Mao, SW, vol. II, For the Mobilization of All the Nation's Forces for Victory in the War of Resistance, pp. 25-8.
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78. See Helmut Martin (ed.) Mao Intern, op. cit., p. 41.
79. Mao, SW, vol. III, Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing, p. 67. Mao quoted from his report to the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee in October 1938, Mao, SW, vol. II, The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War. The whole sentence runs as follows: "For the Chinese Communists who are part of the great Chinese nation, flesh of its flesh and blood of its blood, any talk about Marxism in isolation from Chinese characteristics is merely Marxism in the abstract, Marxism in a vacuum. Hence to apply Marxism concretely in China so that its every manifestation has an indubitably Chinese character, i. e., to apply Marxism in the light of China's specific characteristics, becomes a problem which it is urgent for the whole Party to understand and solve. Foreign stereotypes must be abolished, there must be less singing of empty, abstract tunes, and dogmatism must be

laid to rest ... To separate internationalist content from national form is the practice of those who do not understand the first thing about internationalism." *ibid.*, p. 209-10.

## 7. CONCLUSION

General theories of imperialism are about the relationship between nations-states. The crudest theories of imperialism find it unproblematical that nations-states are actors on the international political stage; they do not hesitate to think in terms of nations-states in and for themselves. Much of the study of international relations has traditionally been conducted in this way. The main concept used is the national interest. But any sophisticated theory of imperialism realizes that nations-states are not homogeneous. The specific contribution of orthodox Marxism is to say that the most important form of heterogeneity in nation-states is class. Others point to differences of gender and ethnicity within nation-states. In Marxist analysis, therefore, international relations have been analyzed also in terms of class and class interests. Thus the main question at issue in Marxist theories of imperialism is the interrelation of national and class oppression and exploitation. This is the case whether or not international relations are analyzed with an explicit theory of imperialism. Hence, although Marx did not have an explicit theory of imperialism, his and Engels' writing on the relations of nations is, of course, full of references to class.

As stated, Marx and Engels did not develop a general theory of imperialist relationships. Nevertheless, their analysis of the working and inherent contradictions of the capitalist economy, contained largely in Capital but also in their journalistic writings, puts forward many important ideas on capitalist expansion into foreign markets and into backward

and exploitable countries. It is clear that, in volume II of Capital, Marx's highly abstracted models of simple and expanded reproduction, do not assume that the very survival of the capitalist system is ultimately dependent upon its expansion into external markets; self-generating increases in consumer demand within a capitalist economy are possible, even if it is true that capitalists will want profits, irrespective where they are made. Their moves overseas, justified among others by the principle of Free Trade, would lead in Marx's and Engels' view to a world market and an international division of labour. The discussion in volume III of Capital also deals already with capital centralisation (oligopolic dominance of each market sector by a smaller number of firms) and capital concentration (mergers and amalgamations into larger capitalist firms) which would in turn lead to the structural form of capitalism which Lenin called monopoly capitalism.

The move to a world market was not seen as negative from a Marxist perspective: not only was it only a safety valve which would not bring a solution to the inherent crisis of capitalism, but it would also integrate overseas areas into the capitalist mode of production and bring them into line for a development toward communism. This is the double mission of capitalism, to destroy, usually in a brutal manner, the old feudal mode of production, and to generate industrialization. That is why they are negative about attempts in these colonies to resist this capitalist penetration. The evidence gathered shows that this penetration was not avoidable and that it was positive. In this view, even if this discussion, especially the published part of it, is open to interpretation, in the

end even in Russia they believe that one has to go through this harsh development before reaching communism. Peasant socialism is not really an option, as the narodniki in Russia believed.

What becomes also clear in Marx's and Engels' discussion of the *obshchina* is their carefully worded response to Russians concerning a skipping of stages. This is because even though Marx was not in the first place involved in practically organising a social revolution, and was not that concerned with alliances to strengthen revolutionary developments, he does not reject *narodniki* out of hand.

What one can draw from the discussion of national resistance in overseas territories is Marx's negative view of nationalism. For Marx and Engels class analysis is prior to national identity. For them, nation is an afterthought which complicates class. Marx's and Engels' ideas about class and revolution were formulated without much reference to the fact that nations existed. Their model is really one of a world capitalist system divided into social classes, particularly workers and capitalists. Nations were to them in general obstacles to the actual realization of this model. Thus in general they favoured the unification leading to the abolition of nations. The less nations the better. But as a practical matter the route to the one-nation/no-nation, only class ideal might take them through a certain amount of national struggle. When they point out that the English proletariat increasingly shares the imperialist outlook of its own bourgeoisie, this confirms the idea that nation for them does not mean very much except as the basis for an ideology which reduces class conflict. Even when they come out in favour of the Irish



independence struggle it is usually only because it needs to be settled so as not to continue to divide the English working class. Their support for the Polish national struggle has to be seen in the same light: it is not in the first place support for a national liberation struggle, but is understood by them as a weakening of Tsarist reaction.

Marx's ideas of capital export and capital centralization and concentration were a starting point for a renewed discussion by Marxists of the post-1870 development of Capitalism. Lenin, in his Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism found the root of imperialism in the fierce competition for greater monopoly capitalist profits, resources and markets, a competition which integrally involved the capitalists' manipulation of state policy and military force. Lenin did not attempt an analysis of capitalism as such, nor does he repeat a discussion of the theoretical issues involved in Marx's reproduction schemes, as this had been done by Marx and Engels. He analyzed the development of capitalism, since Marx's death, of a competitive capitalism which changed into monopoly capitalism. However this was not the only change Lenin observed.

One of Lenin's adjustments to Marx's and Engels' concepts of class is the invention of the labour aristocracy. This explains more fully, in his view, the imperialist attitudes of the working class because it attributes the ideology to material interest (of the working class leadership) but it exonerates the majority of the proletariat from enjoying any objective benefit from imperialism, something Marx and Engels did not argue. Hence this approach identifies the class and the national exploiters (the bourgeoisie in both cases with

their lesser allies, the aristocracy of labour in the imperialist countries and parts of the oligarchy in the colonial and semi-colonial countries). Hence on a world scale the scene is set for thinking not in terms of bourgeoisie/proletariat as Marx and Engels did, with the concomitant of looking for moves towards an integrated world capitalism without nations as the path to world socialism, but in terms of the oppressors (bourgeoisie of some countries plus their allies) against the oppressed (workers, peasants etc.) This move is related to the other main issue of which Lenin's Imperialism diverges from Marx in the idea that the elimination of different capitalist nations is impossible so that the internalization of the economic part of the system is contradicted by the inevitable political separation of nations, especially of course the imperialist nations.

Another difference Lenin observed was that in Russia capitalist penetration and the Russian integration into the world market was not entirely positive. It led, as a matter of fact, to an uneven industrialization in Russia. This led to a combination of different modes of production as well as the existence of a multitude of classes in Russia. Marx was concerned with his concept of class analysis, to analyze certain laws of social development and of the forces involved in this development, class analysis was a tool for the explanation of changes in societies. So if Marx and Engels largely subsumed national struggles within class struggles, Lenin and Marxists after him have a wide range of views in relation to the connection of class and nation. But Marx did not address himself to the question of the internal relations between classes in a situation where a country was engaged in

repelling foreign domination and control.

It was left to Lenin to elaborate upon the nature of revolutions in colonial and semi-colonial countries where pre-capitalist mode of production was dominant. As regards this, one can make two observations. Firstly, he introduced what has been called a 'voluntarist' element by assigning to the Communist Party the task of raising class consciousness among the proletariat where this was latent or not fully developed. Where Marx seemed to lay emphasis on the largely spontaneous development of class awareness emerging from the objective class situation and from interaction with other classes, Lenin stressed the deliberate fostering of this consciousness by a more or less external agent. In doing so he somewhat shifted the focus on class to the ideological level, hence Lenin's emphasis on educational and organisational work by the Party. But it was not only the proletariat whose class consciousness had to be developed. Other classes could become targets of this drive. Revolutionary consciousness could be aroused in the peasantry and he assigned it a positive, albeit subordinate, role, something with which Marx and Engels disagreed.

To what extent if any, Lenin's view of the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry influenced Mao in arriving at a similar conclusion is not clear. Yet there is little doubt that Mao's thinking followed the same direction and, by virtue of his own experiences over the years, Mao came to direct the overwhelming focus of his attention to the peasantry, which in the process developed, for him, and by reason of the circumstances, into the leading class of the Chinese revolution. After all one can argue that Mao did not choose

rural revolution. It chose him. He and some of his colleagues were forced into the countryside in 1927. In 1922-23, before the collapse of the First United Front, he had been a labour organizer.

Secondly, it must be stressed that, in line with Marx's thinking, Lenin saw classes as occupying specific positions in the socio-economic structure and then of having distinct economic bases. Even though Lenin introduced much more emphasis on national differences, national oppression and the national struggle, he is still concerned to maintain the orthodox Marxist importance of class.

By way of background to Mao's analysis, it should be mentioned that, by the turn of the century, significant changes were generally acknowledged to have taken place in Chinese society. There are two major approaches to China's failure to modernise: the domestic-limitation school and the foreign-intervention school. The foreign-intervention approach pinpoints imperialist intervention commencing with the Opium War of 1839-42, as the main obstacle to China's development. Sun Yatsen, Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong were among those who shared the view that however they defined imperialism - Mao saw imperialism as the combination of foreign power and the domestic comprador class and Chiang attributed imperialism to unequal treaties between China and foreign powers - imperialism was the overriding factor retarding and distorting China's twentieth-century development.

The domestic-limitation approach holds that China's development has been inhibited primarily by limitations derived from or associated with its traditional institutions and values. Most of these writers believe that foreign

intervention, however painful or humiliating, was either benign or a necessary challenge to traditional values or systems, and a way to open a path toward industrialization. Marx's Eurocentric linear-developmental approach should also be placed in this school.

During the changes taking place in China the old classes were changing and new classes emerged. The largest numerical class, of course, remained the peasantry. Thus while capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production existed side by side, the latter was clearly more pervasive and enveloped the overwhelming proportion of the population of all the classes and the working class and the peasantry (or elements of it) were deemed to be the most radical in that they were the most inclined towards violent protest action. Of significant political consequence was the condition of imperialist domination to which China was subjected, and as a result Mao claimed that China suffered continued humiliations at the hands of the foreign powers.

This general situation gave rise to a strong feeling of nationalism among the intellectuals and other groups in the society. How was one to cope with all of this? For Mao, the only way to overcome this dire situation was to develop a strategy of anti-imperialism. We have not found any major explicit theoretical change, for example, on the question of nation and class made by Mao, to equal those which Lenin made. But his detailed observations, especially about class and also about alliance policy, do go to a certain degree beyond Lenin, and definitely beyond Marx and Engels. What is interesting about Mao are the implicit theories of the interrelation of class and nation behind his analytical writings and his

tactical positions. This is also the context in which one can place the debate about whether 'sinification' of Marxism-Leninism meant tactical adjustment to Chinese reality or simply nationalism disguised as Marxism.

Again there are two schools. One contends that Mao's thought is to be understood by referring to the context Mao found himself in because Mao's thought developed through his experience of Chinese society and the Chinese revolution and much less through the medium of Marxist theory. The belief is that Mao's roots in his indigenous culture influenced not only his mode of expression but his pattern of thought, hence the structure of beliefs that he held as well as his personal relations. However much he might rebel, the traditional Chinese element never lost its prior claim on this extraordinary complex man, the story goes.

This approach is rejected in this thesis. Not only does it underestimate the influence of the Soviet texts on the Marxist philosophy Mao studied in considerable detail in 1936/7, and that Mao's own philosophy is really unexceptionally orthodox by the standards of the international communist movement at the time. But in addition this school's emphasis on Mao's stress on subjective factors, the human will, and the superstructure at the expense of orthodox Marxism's emphasis on the causal significance of economic factors neglects Mao's repeated statements that the economic base generally plays the principal and decisive role. Lastly, this approach does not explain why Mao, who did flirt with anarchism and liberalism at one time or another, chose Marxism in its Bolshevik version to comprehend the Chinese reality and

develop his strategy of anti-imperialism based on a Marxist-Leninist framework. The adaptation Mao did make cannot be explained as being made by a Confucian under a red veneer, but 'seeking truth from facts' (shishi qiu shi) fits very well into a Marxist approach. Mao took a universal theory and provided it with a national form without detracting from its universal status. The specific manifestation of general principles or laws led Mao to perceive in Marxism a methodology capable of facilitating his quest for comprehension of the Chinese particular.

Mao's confidence in Marxism had nothing to do with the content of Marx's analysis. Such content was necessarily specific to a particular mode of production ( Western European capitalism) at a particular historical moment (the mid-nineteenth century). The historical characteristics of that particular conjuncture described by Marx, such as its class structure and the nature of its class struggle, were perceived by Mao as the historically specific content of Marx's analysis, something which had to be differentiated from the general principles or laws which Marx formulated. It is important to note that Mao regarded such principles and laws of Marxism and Leninism as 'abstract' and not necessarily of immediate relevance or utility in the Chinese context. Therefore, the universal law which asserted the ubiquity of class struggle in all societies except the most primitive would direct attention to the centrality of classes and class struggle within society, but could not suggest how class structure or struggle would be manifest in any particular society at any point in time. The disclosure of the nature of class structure and struggle within such a specific context

could result only from an empirical analysis to disclose the specific 'laws' of that context.

From this perspective, the sinification of Marxism was not a question of the elevation of Chinese realities at the expense of ideology, but the development of Marxism as an ideological system. Thus, although the sinification of Marxism is a culturally charged term, it does not claim cultural privilege over Marxism. Within a different cultural or historical context the same process would have to be made again. Only then can (sinified) Marxism become a guide to action.

It will be recalled that Mao described himself as a Marxist by the summer of 1920. When the communist movement took concrete shape in the 1920's, nationalism, which had as its major objective the liberalization of China from imperialist domination, was a potent force. However, the Communists and Mao realised that the achievement of this objective necessitated as well a social revolution. The perceived relationships between these two revolutions and the various emphases periodically placed on them was significant for the analysis of classes and class analysis. One of Mao's first observations of his class categories is that they were conceived primarily in their relationship to the problems of national revolution to overthrow the militarists and foreign imperialism. His class categories are not rigorously identified at the level of relation of production.

When Mao retires to Shaoshan and observes the militancy of parts of the peasantry, this shows up in an emphasis on the revolutionary role of the peasantry. The landlord and comprador classes are characterized as depending upon



imperialism for their survival and growth and the peasantry is revolutionary because it suffers under imperialist distortions of the Chinese economy. As regards the petty bourgeoisie, it is useful to note that, in addition to owner-peasants, master handicraftsmen and small traders, Mao includes in this category students, primary and secondary school teachers, lower government functionaries and small lawyers. It is well to bear in mind that Mao himself was quite ambiguous about the place of these occupations in the socio-economic structure. The designation is nevertheless in line with Lenin's categorization in the Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question. In suggesting the evolution of alliances, in identifying the peasantry and its potential for a positive role in the revolution and in using (however haphazardly) the concept of relations of production, Mao is operating largely within the Marxist-Leninist paradigm. After all even Marx and Engels do talk about all sorts of alliances in their Communist Manifesto and Mao never repudiates working class leadership. In the Gutian Revolution of 1929, Mao expressed his concern with the prominence of the peasantry. For the purpose of my thesis one other point is important. Mao constantly analyzes class in terms of national revolution. It is anti-imperialism which is the guiding thread through the multitude of classes in China. Claiming that the peasantry could be the main force of the revolution goes undoubtedly beyond even Lenin. Intensifying political training of the *lumpenproletariat* to effect a qualitative change in these elements with its emphasis on the human will as against objective factors does represent a shift, indeed a new direction in Marxist thought. What is clear from the above is that class struggle is part and parcel

of China's liberation from imperialism. Mao's theory of contradiction in a China with a bewildering variety of social strata gives guidance on the crucial issue as to who the friends or foes are in the struggle against Japanese imperialism. This leads to the last part of the Conclusion.

Mao used the word imperialism and imperialists a lot but did not attach equivalent importance to imperialism as a concept. This had been done by Lenin and did not need to be repeated. For Mao the crucial issue was to find a strategy to counter imperialism. He uses 'imperialism' in the way it was done commonly in orthodox communist circles, i.e. to mean capitalism.

This leaves three possibilities concerning Mao as a theorist of imperialism.

1 Mao really had no theoretical ideas about imperialism at all, but found it politically convenient to use anti-imperialist rhetoric.

2 He had a worked-out theory of imperialism which he never wrote down.

3 He had a number of theoretical ideas about imperialism, not amounting to a worked theory, something which practically remained fairly eclectic with some loose debt to Lenin and within a broad framework of Marx's laws, which informed his political tactics and which can be to some extent imputed from examining those tactics and his justification of them.

The evidence of this thesis points to the third of these alternatives. This means that this thesis is not only held together by the class/nation theoretical question but also by a second theme: what has also been explained is the development of revolutionary political tactics to theories

about the relation of nations.

Mao, acting broadly in a Marxist-Leninist framework, has to be credited for developing an anti-imperialist strategy which defeated imperialism and allowed China to 'stand up again'.

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