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Politics and Epistemology in China Since Mao
Brantly Womack

Of the three “great debates” of post-Mao Chinese politics, on democracy, economics and epistemology, the last one became the most politicized and crucial because it was directly related to the basic question of the legitimacy of post-Mao policies. It began with the publication of an article, “Practice is the only standard for evaluating truth,” in Kuanting jih-pao on 11 May 1978. The article was signed by the paper’s “special commentator” (t’e-yueh p’ing-lun yuan),¹ and was reprinted the following day in People’s Daily. However, there was nothing to indicate that the article was in any way exceptional until Teng Hsiao-pin made its theme the centerpiece of his speech at the Army Political Work Conference on 2 June.² After Teng’s insistence on “seeking truth from facts” (shih-shih ch’iu shih) and his criticism of people “who talk about Mao Tse-tung’s ‘Thought all the time,’” but do not emulate his practicality, the campaign emphasizing the importance of practice developed rapidly and in several directions. Conferences were held to explore its significance, new authoritative articles were published which defended and amplified the anti-dogmatic stance, and over the succeeding months a series of rather repetitive speeches by virtually every provincial secretary and military region commander appeared in People’s Daily affirming Teng’s position. Finally, in October 1978, “special commentator” articles appeared in People’s Daily ³ which called for the deepening of the struggle against the “gang of four,” claiming that their poison had affected even some who had opposed them politically.

The belligerent tone of the October articles indicated that serious

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² A new, 1978 designation for an authoritative spokesman. 14 “special commentator” articles had already appeared in various periodicals by 11 May. A number of these received emphatic, first-page treatment in Jen-min jih-pao (People’s Daily), but “Practice is the only standard” was on p. 2.

disagreements existed at all levels of leadership over the extent of post-Mao policy changes. Settling the problem of leadership was a primary task of a Central Working Conference which reportedly met in Peking from 10 November to 13 December. Teng Hsiao-p'ing's supporters scored a decisive victory which was masked by a policy of not officially removing former opponents (yu chin wu ch'iù). Teng's dominance was confirmed both in the allocation of personnel and in the 22 December 1978 communiqué of the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, which met at the end of the Working Conference to approve its results. On the other hand, the communiqué was diffident in its evaluation of the Cultural Revolution, indicating at least prudence if not compromise within the collective leadership. With neither a fresh set of purges nor a clear resolution of all policy issues, ideological reorientation was declared completed and the practical tasks of modernization were placed at the head of the national agenda.

The campaign emphasizing practice as the only criterion for evaluating truth has already been declared officially to be of "far-reaching historical significance." Politically, the debate was probably the most serious internal crisis of the anti-"gang of four" leadership in its first two years. Ideologically, it was the first major attempt to develop an autonomous, post-Mao standpoint which could justify flexibility and reorientation of ideology to the demands of modernization. Although the intensive development of science, agriculture, industry and defence in the "four modernizations" programme implies a greater attention to economics and a secularization of Chinese public life, the prominence of a philosophical problem is curiously appropriate for the present crisis of reorientation in China. Epistemology has returned to the centre of attention for a moment because a root problem for the reorientation of policy has been interpreting the changes that have occurred since Liberation and the requirements and potential of the new period.

I shall begin with a description of the political context of the "Practice is the only standard for evaluating truth" campaign, then explore the ideological dimensions of the new epistemology, including the diminution of the role of ideology. I shall then discuss the tensions between the philosophical content of the movement and its political role, and, finally, I shall evaluate Teng's claim that emphasis on practice is a reaffirmation of Mao's Thought.

The Politics of the Third Campaign to Criticize the "Gang of Four"

The present regime in China is a successor government in two different respects. On the one hand, it is the Chinese Communist leadership after

4. Ch'i Hsin, "Chung-kung wan-ch'eng-le chi chuan-pien" ("The Chinese Communists complete a sharp turn"), Ch'i-shih nien-tai (The Seventies), No. 2 (February 1979), pp. 7-17.
5. Ibid. p. 8.
7. Ibid. p. 15.
the death of Mao, a man who for all his now-admitted human failings was the central architect of the success of the Chinese Revolution and of 27 years of communist rule. Recent praise of Chou En-lai, Chu Te and others is a dilution of the sole emphasis on Mao during the Cultural Revolution, but it is not a denial of his role. The legitimacy and identity of current CCP rule rests on being worthy successors of Mao, and this necessarily implies some degree of continuity in values and policy. On the other hand, the present government not only deposed the "gang of four," it stands diametrically opposed to the attitudes and policies which the "gang" promoted under Mao's protection. Allegations of the economic destructiveness of the "gang's" ultra-left dogmatism have been the proximate justification for a new pragmatic materialism emphasizing productivity, incentives and techniques.

Before May 1978, the contradiction between affirmation of Maoist continuity and rejection of the preceding direction of policy was overcome by claiming that the "gang of four" distorted Mao's Thought and directives and acted as usurpers. There were specific arguments that the political economy of the "gang" was un-Marxist and un-Maoist as well as general charges that they used quotations taken out of context, thereby distorting and displacing the scientific system of Marxism. While this type of critique of the "gang" is, in general, well taken, the thesis that they usurped Mao's leadership is unsatisfactory. Not only does it raise hard historical questions but, in fact, as Professor Tang Tsou has shown, the "gang's" ideology is a logical if dogmatic extension of one major aspect of Mao's political thought.

Although the two tenets of claiming Maoist legitimacy and abjuring the "gang of four" were shared by all factions of China's post-Mao collective leadership, significant differences have existed on the questions of the degree of continuity and the extent of criticism. Divergences can be explained in part by the political backgrounds of various leaders: rather more "Maoist" leaders like Wang Tung-hsing and Hua Kuo-feng owed much of their advancement to Mao, while Teng Hsiao-p'ing's strength was his past leadership experience and his bitter struggle with

8. Ibid. pp. 8, 14 and 16.

9. See for instance Tso Mu et al., "Pu hsu 'suzu jen pang' yung 'fa-ch'üan chung-hsin lun' lai ts'uan-kai wu-ch' an chieh-chi chüan-cheng hsia chi-hsu ko-ming ti li-lun" ("Don't allow the 'gang of four' to use the 'theory of the centrality of legal rights' to usurp the theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat), Ching-chi yen-chiu (Economic Research), No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 11-15.

10. The key slogan which is attacked is "chü-chü shih chen-li" ("every word is truth"). See for instance, "Chih Lin Piao so-wei 'chü-chü shih chen-ti'") ("Reject Lin Piao's so-called 'every word is truth'"). Jen-min, 29 August 1978, p. 2.

the "gang" over modernization. Whereas the primacy of the primarily economic concerns of modernization generally was admitted, there were differences on the requisite extent of superstructural and ideological changes. Undoubtedly a part of the leadership viewed the downfall of the "gang" as an occasion to return to the plans for modernization which had been discussed in 1975, but others, led by Teng Hsiao-p'ing, seized the opportunity for more drastic changes in policy.

The struggle between the two different viewpoints was mostly en passant. The year after the purge of the "gang of four" was dominated by stress on Maoist continuity. This involved the publication of Volume V of Mao's Selected Works and the creation of a Maoist persona for Hua Kuo-feng. The affirmation of Maoism is most clear in a joint editorial of Red Flag, People's Daily and Kuang-ming jih-pao in early 1977, which stressed to all cadres that mastering Mao's speech on the "Ten major relationships" and Hua's address to the second Tachai Conference were the key to correct leadership in 1977. In complete contrast to the "Practice is the only standard" position which would emerge a year-and-a-half later, the editorial concluded, "Whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, we should steadfastly support them, whatever Chairman Mao's directives, we should obey them from beginning to end. We should unite most closely around the Party Centre led by Chairman Hua... and in all activities heed the commands of the Party Centre led by Chairman Hua..." Statements of this sort caused the more Maoist leadership faction to be nicknamed the "whatever faction" (fan-shih p'ai), as opposed to the "practice faction" (shih-chien p'ai) identified with Teng Hsiao-p'ing.

It should be noted however that even the ringing assertion of continuity by the early post-Mao leadership marks several major changes from Mao's last years. First, the works of Mao which were stressed in

12. It should be remembered, however, that Teng also had friendship with Mao going back to the Kiangsi Soviet days. He was first publicly criticized as a rightist by the "28 Bolsheviks" in 1933, and at that time it was for being on Mao's side of a factional dispute. Roderick MacFarquhar in his The Origins of The Cultural Revolution I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) claims that Teng was pushed forward by Mao in the 1950s.

13. "Hu-teh hao wen-chien chu-a-chu kang" ("Study documents well and grasp the main outline"), Hung-ch'i (Red Flag), No. 3 (March 1977), pp. 15-18.

14. This speech was given in 1956 but officially published only in late December 1976. An earlier text had been available from Red Guard publications. See Stuart Schram, "Chairman Hua edits Mao's literary heritage: on the 'Ten Great Relationships'," CQ, No. 69 (March 1977), pp. 126-35.

15. This conflict is seriously over-emphasized by Ch'en Ch'i-hi, "Chung-kung nei-pu ti i ch'ang ta pien-lun" ("A big debate among the Chinese Communists"), Cheng-ming, No. 10 (August 1978), pp. 11-13. He does not give the year of publication of the "Study documents well and grasp the main outline" article, implying that it was 1978, and he does not mention that the documents promoted were Mao's 1956 speech and Hua's Tachai speech. On the other hand, Chen's article was the earliest one to pinpoint the ideological rift within the post-Mao leadership.

1977 dated from the 1950s. Concentration on these works enabled the leadership to use Mao to help divert attention towards practical, economic problems and away from delicate questions of class critique raised in the Cultural Revolution. Secondly, the equality of importance given to the speeches of Chairman Mao and Chairman Hua was an important move beyond Mao’s exclusive dominance of authority since the Cultural Revolution. The new pairing of Hua and Mao was an attempt to legitimize a locus of faithful but equal continuing leadership. Thirdly, the emphasis on Hua as leader of the Party Centre announced a return to collective leadership, further consolidated by the rehabilitation of Teng Hsiao-p’ing.

Balancing the changes implicit in the early affirmations of Maoist continuity were the continuities implied in the early critiques of the “gang of four.” The initial critiques concentrated on the concrete excesses of the “gang”: the falsification of Mao’s directives, especially of his testament, encouragement of hooliganism and disobedience in factories, and displacement of Party leadership with factional manoeuvrings. These criticisms were useful in building a united front against the “gang” because any cadre in China not actively supporting the “gang” could heartily concur with these charges regardless of his own political stance. But the popularity of this kind of criticism circumscribed changes in policy, because united front policy-making is determined by the stance of the most doubtful members of the alliance, in this case the “leftists” who opposed the “gang.” By emphasizing the distortion of Mao’s Thought by the “gang” and their political and economic destructiveness, it was implied that the policy of the current leadership should be a return to Mao’s Thought and a reconstruction of both the Party and the economy.

Initially, Teng Hsiao-p’ing was in no position to assume ideological leadership. Although he had responsible positions in a variety of campaigns, including the Anti-rightist Campaign of 1957, he was not noted as a theoretician. Moreover, criticism of his “bourgeois rightist tendencies” dominated the press in mid-1976, and despite the removal of the “gang” some suspicions about his orthodoxy probably lingered. And in fact the modernization Teng had in mind went well beyond the periods of economic repair in the early 1950s and early 1970s. In order to launch a vastly different programme, Teng had to weaken the Party leadership away from using fidelity to Mao’s directives as the test of legitimacy. The weapon of criticizing the “gang of four” had to be wielded more freely in order to reach all those whose thought was

17. The “Ten major relationships” is a perfect case in point, because according to a usually informed source, Hu Ch’iao-mu was a major collaborator with Mao in writing this 1956 speech. See Sung T’ien-chang, “Pei-ching shih fou p’i Mao?” (“Is Peking Criticizing Mao?”), Cheng-ming, No. 11 (September 1978) p. 6.
18. Under the “gang of four” Hung-ch’i had devoted a special section to anti-Teng essays.
imprisoned by such dogmatic fidelity. Teng’s position was that the “gang of four” had a dogmatic and false system of thought based on absolutizing ideological authority, with the implication (which eventually became explicit) that anyone who put any sort of ideology above practical investigation was still poisoned by the “gang's” influence. Mao’s specific policy preferences were viewed by Teng as part of a previous phase of history and were relevant only indirectly to current problems. The new period of Chinese politics was not to be restricted by its predecessor, and the preceding period was now interpreted as policy from 1957 (the Anti-rightist Campaign) to 1977. This standpoint, elaborated through the “Practice is the only standard” campaign, was clearly in tension with the narrow focus of the first and second campaigns criticizing the “gang of four” in 1977.

At a time of drastic changes in leadership, it is likely that any government, no matter what its hidden agenda, would initially attempt to project an image designed to isolate its opponents and stress wholesome continuity. In China’s case, however, the expansion of the critique of the “gang of four” was not a tactical move of an already consolidated leadership. The initial collective leadership reflected the whole political spectrum of the “united front.” The 1978 shift from a transitional emphasis on continuity to the promulgation of a narrower ideological base for a specific post-Mao reorientation therefore entailed a political struggle between the two extremes of the anti-“gang of four” political spectrum.

The first two campaigns to criticize the “gang” had exposed their misdeeds and bad records. In the New Year’s editorial of 1978 it was announced:

The third campaign now under way concentrates on exposing and criticizing, from the theoretical plane of philosophy, political economy and scientific socialism, the ultra-Rightist essence of the gang’s counter-revolutionary revisionist line and its manifestations in all fields.

This new depth to the criticism of the “gang of four” involved the expectation of a more decisive and fundamental ideological reorientation. The restoration of China’s scientists, intellectuals, and technicians to places of honour and influence during the third campaign provided both the brain-power and an interest group for working out a new relationship between ideology and the tasks of the new period. The ideological attack was led by the “three Hu’s”: Hu Yao-pang, before 1966 the leader of the Communist Youth League, Hu Ch’iao-mu, well-known Party theoretician who became head of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in late 1977, and Hu chi-wei, editor of People’s Daily.

19. The first campaign lasted from winter 1976 to spring 1977, and the second started in March 1977 and lasted until the beginning of 1978. Actually, though, the exposé of “gang of four” crimes has continued.
third campaign to criticize the "gang of four," which lasted from 1 January 1978 to 22 December 1978 became a time of confrontation between those who wanted to start a new paragraph in China's post-Liberation history and those who wanted to start a new book.

That the "special commentator" article, "Practice is the only standard for evaluating truth," published 11–12 May 1978, became a chief bone of contention is due as much to the opposition it provoked as to its content. Although most "special commentator" articles were written by a theory study group at the Central Party School under Hu Yao-pang, this was written by Hu Fu-ming, an instructor at Nanking University, and privately submitted to Kuang-ming jih-pao. The newspaper referred it to Hu Yao-pang, who edited it with the author. It is a very carefully written article, with numerous well-chosen quotations from Mao and Marxist classics, but its message is one of practical creativity and seeking truth from facts rather than from books. Although this was not presented as an attack on Marxism-Leninism — because as science it does not fear factual investigation — it was an unwelcome message to those whose attitude was that of returning to the true, pre-"gang," Mao Tse-tung Thought.

Increasingly scandalized by the pace of change, the Maoist faithful decided to oppose this article and called it "heresy." Propaganda chief Li Hsin said of the article, "in theory it is absurd, in ideology (su-hsiang) it is reactionary, in politics it cuts down the flag." It was charged that the "intellectual fetter" which the "practice faction" wanted to remove was Mao Tse-tung Thought itself. Besides Li Hsin, the active opposition included the Central Propaganda Bureau chief, Chang P'ing-hua, the former editor of People's Daily, Wu Ling-hsi, the general editor of Red Flag, Hsiung Fu, and his assistant general editor, Hu Sheng. There was, however, no public dissent. Disapproval was shown by inattention rather than by rebuttal. The whole subject of the criterion of truth was ignored in Red Flag until mid-autumn. In private, however, opposition was dogged, at lower levels as well as at the centre.

Teng Hsiao-p'ing's speech at the Army Political Work Conference in early June was a bold answer to the objections raised against "Practice is the only standard" and the beginning of a broad attempt to reorient Chinese thinking towards an explicitly post-Mao era. The body of Teng's speech is devoted to demonstrating to those "who constantly talk about Mao's Thought" that Mao always emphasized the primacy

24. Ibid.
26. See "T'an-t'an ch'ou-hsiang k'en-ting, chu-t'ou-ting ti wen-t'i" ("Discussing the problem of approval in general but concrete rejection"), Jen-min jih-pao Special Commentator, Jen-min 22 September 1978, p. 2. Also Sung Chen t'ing "Lun kao chu Mao Tse-tung szu-hsiang ti ch'i chih" ("On raising high the banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thought"), Jen-min 27 October 1978, p. 3.
of practice. Teng's exposition of Mao's Thought appears accurate and solid, and clearly disproved the charge that emphasis on the primacy of practice is un-Maoist. However, Teng, in the part of this report dealing with political work in the army, confirmed the suspicions of Party members worried about policy continuity. He claimed that political work in the army must be adapted to the needs of a new period, defining the new period as that of a national army at relative peace. Since what Teng termed "the new period" had in fact extended from 1949, he was criticizing in a fairly open way Mao's advocacy of guerrilla strategy since Liberation. This put Teng on the side of P'eng Teh-huai in the military debates of the 1950s, and thus it is not surprising that six months after Teng's speech P'eng was restored to honour.

Teng's un-Maoist opinions on military policy were not the greatest shock to Party leadership in the summer of 1978. In July his supporter Hu Ch'iao-mu gave a key address on the economy which recommended sweeping changes, including learning management methods from advanced capitalist countries. Also Chinese agricultural policy moved away from the Tachai model of development. In fact, Chinese policy was not being deduced from reading Mao's "latest directives."

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1978, the first secretaries of the various provinces and the regional military commanders each contributed an article to People's Daily on the importance of practice in seeking truth. Many organizations and provinces held large educational conferences for cadres, using "Practice is the only standard" and Teng's speech as texts. Meanwhile the new journals Che-hsüeh yen-chiu (Philosophical Studies) and Ching-chi yen-chiu (Economic Studies) ran conferences on the theme of practice as the criterion for truth. Obviously a massive campaign was underway to turn all levels of Chinese leadership away from the ideological habits of the Cultural Revolution and towards an uninhibited confrontation with the tasks of modernization.

The final and sharpest phase of amplifying the primacy of practice

27. This article was not published until 6 October, the second anniversary of the purge of the "gang of four."
28. This particular point had already been suggested in the "academic" press in March 1978. Hsiao Liang, "K'o-hsüeh chi-shu wei-shen-ma pu shih sheng-ch'an li? " ("Why aren't science and technology productive forces?"). Ching-chi yen-chiu, No. 3 (March 1978), p. 23. Despite this early introduction, Kuang-ming Jih-pao reported on 23 September that while people were accepting foreign technology, many still suspected that using western management techniques was too bourgeois. Chang Hsüeh-mo, "Tan-t'an hsueh-hsi tsu-pen chu-i kuo-chia ti ch'i-yeh kuan-li " ("Discussing the study of enterprise management in capitalist countries"), Kuang-ming jih-pao, 23 September 1978, p. 4.
29. For instance there was a meeting in Canton involving over 170 cadres which lasted one month and attempted a Yenan-style rectification on the basis of "seeking truth from facts." Jen-min, 6 October 1978.
30. There was a philosophy conference in June (Jen-min, 7 July 1978), and an economics conference in August (Ibid., 2 September 1978).
began in October. At this time the implications of stressing practice as the only standard were made more explicit, and it was announced that criticism of the “gang of four’s” “revisionist system of thought” had only just started. The emphasis on the primacy of practice was now combined with the critique of the “theory of genius,” and the “gang’s” system of thought was declared identical to that of Lin Piao.  

The criticism of the theory of genius attacked the idea that anyone’s thought transcended his historical circumstances and could be applied at all times and at all places. Mao had criticized this theory when Lin Piao first propagated it in 1970, and it was claimed that in China’s new period talking only about Mao’s thought would be un-Maoist and a lingering poison of the “gang of four” and Lin Piao. The linking of Lin Paio and the “gang of four” as “one thing” (i hui shih) was an important (and contested) move, because Lin’s formalism and hero-worship had already been condemned by Mao himself and the speciousness of ultra-loyalty was quite clear in his case.

Unlike all previous critiques of the “gang of four,” the target of this renewed effort was not just the “gang” or its political accomplices. As a commentator for Liberation Army News put it, “the problem is not only with persons and units with “gang of four” problems, but also with units and persons against the “gang.” Although Teng’s June speech had already implied a major rift in the anti-“gang” leadership, the Otober campaign was the first public admission of a post-gang political struggle. Every level of leadership seemed to have its share of cadres who had either been rendered too cynical about ideological questions as a result of the “gang” interlude, or who had a simplistic, fundamentalist notion about what upholding the Thought of Mao Tse-tung meant.

The “Practice is the only standard” campaign did not end with a

31. The criticism of Lin Piao and the “gang of four” had been linked as early as 31 January 1978 (Chieh Szu “Fan-tui hsing-shih chu-i” — “Oppose formalism,” Jen-min, p. 3) and had been semi-authoritative since 18 May (Shen T’ao-sheng, “‘Szu jen pang’ yü Lin Piao”—“The ‘gang of four’ and Lin Piao,” ibid., p. 1).

32. The major article on this theme is “T’ien-ts’ai lun ho shih-chien lun ti tou-cheng” — “The struggle of the theory of genius and the theory of practice”). Jen-min jih-pao Special Commentator, Jen-min, 30 October 1978, p. 2. This article may have been written some months earlier because it refers to problems still existing “more than a year after the fall of the ‘gang of four,’” whereas 6 October 1978, was the second anniversary of their fall.

33. Ibid.

34. The counter-slogan was “two arrows shot at the same time” — implying that there was no systemic connection between Lin and the “gang” — was attacked in Jen-min jih-pao, 4 October 1978.

purge of the losing faction.\textsuperscript{36} Despite the menacing overtones of the October essays, leadership tensions were evidently treated as "contradictions among the people." By mid-November the reversal of verdicts on the T'ien An Men Incident became the centre of attention, and shortly afterwards the posters of Peking's "Wall of Democracy" raised urgent questions about the limits of ideological change and the reversal of past verdicts. However, the November-December meetings of the Central Committee did mete out a number of rewards and punishments related to the campaign.\textsuperscript{37} Hu Yao-pang became a member of the Politburo, head of the Central Secretariat (the importance of which has been reinforced), and head of the Central Propaganda Bureau (supplanting the influence of Wang Tung-hsing and Chang P'ing-hua). Hu Ch'iao-mu is now one of two assistant secretaries to his colleague, in charge of the Committee on the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, and a member of the Central Committee. Hu Chi-wei assumed general editorship of \textit{Red Flag} in addition to his \textit{People's Daily} responsibilities. Other lines of work were found for theorists of the "whatever faction." As an observer of this phase of Chinese politics has commented, "a very clear tendency of these personnel shifts is that – with the exception of Hua Kuo-feng – almost everyone who acquired power in the Cultural Revolution period has lost real responsibility."\textsuperscript{38} The author is perhaps too kind to Hua Kuo-feng.

Given Teng Hsiao-p'ing's dominance of the Central Committee meetings, it is remarkable that the communiqué of 22 December was not a more radical document. It makes sweeping reversals of Cultural Revolution verdicts\textsuperscript{39} and promises a future free from such disturbances, but the general re-evaluation of the Cultural Revolution has been postponed indefinitely.\textsuperscript{40} Mao was officially declared to be fallible, but his pre-eminent place of honour in Chinese ideology was also recognized. Whether these ideological balancings were signs of politeness, concessions in areas deemed unimportant, or compromises to avoid further struggle is unclear. Some elements of compromise – perhaps tacit or temporary – do seem to have been involved. The failure of industry

\textsuperscript{36} The most prominent dismissal of October, that of Wu Teh as mayor of Peking, was probably not directly related to this campaign. Wu was criticized primarily for his complicity in the T'ien An Men incident of 5 April 1976, and more generally for being "feng p'ai" – of the "wind faction." The "feng p'ai" was criticized as early as 6 January 1978 in \textit{Jen-min jih-pao}.

\textsuperscript{37} The following information on personnel shifts is primarily from Ch'i Hsin, "The Chinese Communists complete a sharp turn."

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.} p. 9.

\textsuperscript{39} Peng Teh-huai, Tao Chu, Po I-po and Yang Shang-k'un are mentioned by name.

\textsuperscript{40} "As for the shortcomings and mistakes in the actual course of the (Cultural) revolution, they should be summed up at the appropriate time as experience and lessons so as to unify the views of the whole Party and the people of the whole country. However, there should be no haste about this. Shelving this problem will not prevent us from handling all other problems left over from past history in a down-to-earth manner . . ." 'communiqué,' p. 15.
and especially agriculture to meet expectations in 1978.\textsuperscript{41} Doubtlessly the urgency to concentrating on modernization tasks; it would seem that the "practice faction" was constrained by this urgency to bury the ideological hatchet brandished in October.

Now is an appropriate time to take the decision to close the large-scale nationwide mass movement to expose and criticize Lin Piao and the "gang of four" and to shift the emphasis of our Party's work and the attention of the people of the whole country to socialist modernization.\textsuperscript{42}

Whatever role ideology plays in this new phase, questions of "heresy" are not likely to arise.

\textit{Ideology, Intellectuals and Philosophy in 1978}

For a variety of reasons the "gang of four" was more difficult to criticize ideologically than to depose politically. Not only had they been promulgating their views and damning deviations with the apparent authority of Mao for several years, but they had devoted special efforts to controlling or dismantling theoretical institutions: universities, research institutes and the press. Moreover, their forays into theory were often persuasive and close to Mao's own writings. It is therefore not surprising that the first and most self-confident critiques of the "gang of four" were of their personal hypocrisy and economic damage. The early theoretical critiques which involved citing different Mao quotations, pinning bad labels on the "gang,"\textsuperscript{43} and emphasizing their bourgeois collaborationist pasts, was to be sure a complete negation of the "gang," but it remained dependent on their style of analysis. A thorough eradication of their influence required a change in the dominating role of ideology and a rebuilding of a professional corps of social scientists. "Practice is the only standard" was crucial to both of these tasks because it provided a realistic and plausibly Maoist ideology.

A major ideological problem of the new "four modernizations" period was shifting attention away from the primarily theoretical problems which had preoccupied Mao and China for the previous 20 years and concentrating on the primarily practical problems of stimulating productive forces. Not only were ideologists faced with a large and

\textsuperscript{41} The disappointment in agricultural performance has been expressed in the press. According to Ch'i Hsin, "The Chinese Communists complete a sharp turn," p. 16, agricultural difficulties have caused authorities to double their estimates of the necessary state investment in agriculture during the 10-Year Plan. The same source alleges that 77% of enterprises did not meet the 1978 goal of matching their previous peak performance.

\textsuperscript{42} "Communiqué of the Third Plenum."

\textsuperscript{43} At various times the "gang of four" has been called pragmatist, bourgeois, idealist, fascist, feudal, fake left real right, etc. In most criticisms, an understandable argument is given for assigning the author's favourite term of abuse, but the question of which of these terms is the most accurate description is not raised.
delicate task of repair work on Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung Thought, but their criticism was expected to transform the role of ideology in Chinese public life. New emphasis on the primacy of material progress gave an ironic urgency to ideology because it was now called on to justify a shift of attention away from itself. Anxiety for correctness in thinking was to be replaced by concern for useful production, but this had to be justified intellectually and within the horizons of Maoist thought. Overwhelming discontinuities at the level of policy had to be portrayed as transcendent continuities in practical method. Emphasis on practice rather than on fidelity as Mao’s own approach, combined with the premise of a new historical period, was the crux of reorientation.

One urgent reason for changing the role of ideology was that scientists and intellectuals, who had been among the chief victims of ideological intervention during the Cultural Revolution, now were expected to be key contributors to modernization. In order to arouse the enthusiasm of the intelligentsia, political security had to be assured as well as material resources. To some extent political security could be increased by specific policy changes. Guarantees that political work would not exceed one-sixth of work-time for specialists and directives to Party units in academic and research units to respect technical work as the primary task were important for limiting routine political interference. Of more general significance were Teng Hsiao-p’ing’s statements at the National Science Conference that “brain workers” were part of the working class and that scientific work was in itself revolutionary. But the new epistemology of “Practice is the only standard” was more fundamental still. Rather than being a hedge against the excesses of ideological dominance, it proposed internal limits to the role of ideology. An emphasis on practice not only gave a higher evaluation to experience, thereby helping to legitimate the return of old cadres to power, it also gave a much more autonomous role to expertise. If practice were the only standard for evaluating truth, then political opinions about objective reality must be secondary to experimental research.

Since ideology in China is in the domain of social sciences, it might be anticipated that social sciences would be more suspicious and conservative than natural sciences regarding a diminution of the role of ideology. This was not the case. Undoubtedly some individuals viewed the change with ambivalence, but in general social scientists appeared to be enthusiastic leaders in the transformation. The “Practice is the only standard” movement itself apparently emerged as a spontaneous – albeit officially welcome and encouraged – radicalization of the assigned task of criticizing the “gang of four.” When the Party Centre called for the theoretical critique of the “gang” and resurrected

44. “K’o yen chi-kou tang ti kung-tso i k’o yen wei chung-hsin” (“The Party in scientific and technological organizations ought to take science and technology as the central task”), Jen-min jih pao, 20 October 1979, p. 1.
the journals *Philosophical Studies* and *Economic Studies* at the beginning of 1978, repair of the Maoist edifice with a new stress on Mao's practicality was probably the expected outcome. The first few issues of *Economic Studies* were devoted to putting materialism and attention to production back into official Maoist political economy. But China's philosophers and political economists were members of the intelligentsia, and the intelligentsia was interested in guaranteeing an ideological climate which would value their specialized contributions and preventing the dangerous dominance of ideology. Despite their ideological expertise even the social theorists could share this desire because for the past 20 years they had been at the centre of the storm – but as its victims rather than its managers. The professional role of social sciences also demanded a less highly ideological context, and the new context was used and developed by social scientists. The earliest statements of a number of controversial policies first appeared in apparently unofficial academic articles or were listed as one of a number of positions taken at professional conferences. However, professional autonomy was a more delicate matter for philosophy and social sciences than for natural sciences because their object was clearly the social superstructure.

Apart from the general effect of ideological secularization on the intelligentsia the 1978 developments had specific benefits for social sciences. The new practical approach to social policy demanded a tremendous institutional expansion as well as a new atmosphere of professional freedom of discussion. At the beginning of 1978 the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was established in Peking, and its new head Hu Ch'iao-mu gave the Academy the same basic goal as for the rest of China: basic modernization by 1985, and world prominence by 2000. Implicit in this goal were promises of stability, growth and a distinctive professional contribution to China's modernization. The significance of these changes for individuals and specific programmes within social sciences ranged from basic reorientation to resurrection. As a whole Chinese social sciences expect to expand so rapidly that training new members will be a major task. The 2000-researcher Academy was in the process of adding eight new research institutes to its original 14 at the end of 1978, had been promised a 24-storey building and expected to have 20,000 researchers by 1985. China's whole con-

46. Previously it had been the Social Sciences Division of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

tinent of 20,000 workers in social science and ideology was expected to grow to 200,000 within the same six years.

Politically there is little doubt where the support comes from for the surge of social science. Hu Ch'iao-mu, who recently has been a major innovator in his own right in economic policy, mentioned in his report to the Academy in early 1978 that Teng Hsiao-p'ing would personally take part in the National Propaganda Work Conference expected at the end of 1978 or early 1979. Leadership in the research institutes is dominated by pre-Liberation Party cadres, while most junior-level staff are post-Liberation, pre-Cultural Revolution graduates of Chinese universities. Few have happy memories of the "gang of four," Lin Piao, Ch'ien Po-ta, or K'ang Sheng.

Political history aside, however, it is evident that a large, professional research establishment in social sciences is not threatened per se by a critique of the dominance of ideology. The justification of modern social sciences is not the importance of social questions, for that is rarely denied. Rather, professional social theorists and researchers are necessary because the correct answers to social questions are complex and difficult to obtain. The "gang of four" emphasized the importance of correct thinking but not its difficulty; the 1975 campaign to "study the dictatorship of the proletariat," was launched with thousands of worker-theorists. In fact, from the early criticisms of Wu Han in 1965 onwards, the theoretical criticisms of the Cultural Revolution found complexity suspect and simply attributed ideological shortcomings to bourgeois influence. The most tragic victims of the Cultural Revolution were persons like the historian Chien Po-tsan 48 whose commitment to Marxism and to reality led him to sophisticated innovations vulnerable to Cultural Revolution attacks.

A key slogan for granting intellectual elbow-room to social scientists was the revival of Mao's 1956 slogan, "Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." 49 Appropriately enough, there have been a number of different interpretations published in 1978 on the application of this slogan to philosophy and social science. The first 50 was by a commentator (Teng Li-ch'ün) of Philosophical Studies


49. Actually, the slogan "Let a hundred flowers blossom" was first used in 1951.

50. Pen k'an p'ing-lun yuan, "Pi-pan 'szu jen pang' ti wen-hua chuan-cheng chu-i, chi-chi k'ai-chan pai chia cheng-ming" ("Condemn the 'gang of four's cultural dictatorship, actively develop a hundred schools of thought contending"), Che-hsüeh yen-chiu, No. 4 (April 1978), pp. 9-12. The next issue of Che-hsüeh yen-chiu revealed indirectly on p. 3 that the "commentator" was Teng Li-ch'ün, a vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Science.
who emphasized that "the boundary between academic and political questions should be strictly drawn."\(^{51}\) The author's intent was to guarantee a realm for academic discourse which would be beyond the interference of political consideration, provided that socialism and the Party were not attacked. This professionalistic interpretation of the "two hundreds" slogan was criticized from all sides by a reader, Ai Ti, whose letter \(^{52}\) was printed six months later in *Philosophical Studies*. Ai attacks the commentator's position because questions of politics and of social science cannot be separated, much less "strictly separated." Ai claims that eliminating the bad influence of the "gang of four" requires the correct handling of political questions, not the removal of political considerations from academics. One might imagine that Ai's attitude would make him prefer a smaller compass for the "two hundreds" policy, but the opposite is the case. Ai interprets Mao's "six conditions" for debate (most importantly, support for socialism and the Party) as standards for judging opinions rather than as criteria for censorship. Ai would allow views to be expressed without restriction, with the expectation that lively debate by the masses would eventually locate the truth.

With the publication of Ai Ti's letter, the new "two hundreds" policy in social sciences had become its own beneficiary. Two positions were clearly delineated, a professional one which staked out the limits of academic discourse and a more populist one which allowed even broader expression but with no protection against political debate.

The evidently authoritative position on the use and limits of the "two hundreds" policy was enunciated by Chou Yang, like Teng Li-ch'ün a vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, at a national philosophy and social science meeting \(^{53}\) in September 1978. Chou counterposed the openness of the "two hundreds" policy to the numerous "forbidden zones" (*chin-ch'iü*) of intellectual life under the "gang of four." He emphasized that "science has no forbidden zones," \(^{54}\) but condemned the bourgeois absolutization of freedom. Although Chou states that "we will only forbid views which directly oppose socialism and the Party," \(^{55}\) the impression given is that the Party will have an active role of persuasive guidance. Although in some respects Chou's position appears to be a compromise between the two described earlier, I think it can be considered a new alternative, emphasizing the

52. Ai Ti, "Tsan-yang li-chieh 'pai hua ch'i fang, pai chia cheng-ming' ti fang-chen?" ("How should the policy, 'let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend' be understood?"), *Che-hsüeh yen-chiu* No. 10 (October 1978), pp. 60–62.
role of the Party rather than of professional or public opinion. All three positions are much less censorious than any earlier post-1956 orientation. However, the question of limits of criticism under the "two hundreds" policy remained a painful contradiction, as indicated in the following statement from April 1979:

Bad, anti-Marxist works must be subjugated. Letting a hundred schools of thought contend permits the criticism of Marxism.  

The latitude and autonomy of social science research promised by the revival of the "two hundreds" orientation was given a strong epistemological and political base by the "Practice is the only standard" campaign. With this approach ideology and social science require constant, systematic investigation. Correctness is more problematic, mistakes are less imputable to political errors, and discussion is more necessary. A dynamic pluralism of viewpoints becomes more desirable than pure unanimity. This attitude can be seen in newspaper reports of various seminars held by social scientists in 1978. In many, a series of basic problems is enumerated and it is admitted that their solution remains unknown. Often majority and minority positions on policy issues are described. Strong arguers for a certain position will occasionally admit that they have no solution at hand for important subsidiary problems. But the most interesting example of the new professional spirit was an article in Economic Studies which delved into the contradictions of current agricultural policy, pointing out that the new premiums offered to more productive brigades necessarily increased the present great disparity of rural incomes. As China's professional body of social opinion becomes more autonomous it might well develop a more rigorous and critical attitude towards current execution of policy.

Despite the importance of political tensions over reorientation, the need to reduce the dominance of ideology, and the professionalization of social theorists, the "Practice is the only standard" campaign was not simply a confluence of these forces in the guise of philosophy. The epistemological problem addressed by the campaign had been rendered acute by the extent of reorientation since the death of Mao, and attention to this problem produced major developments in Chinese philosophy. Although no philosophical problem is ever "solved," the response of theorists in 1978 can be viewed as an aspect of intellectual modernization: a greater sophistication of concepts and logic in response to societal change and complexity.

Other philosophical concerns of 1978 demonstrate that the centrality of epistemology was intentional. The campaign to criticize the idealism of the "gang of four" led naturally to the question of the


criteria of valid knowledge, because the "gang" had claimed in their time that they alone were the true materialists. To some extent this claim could be countered simply by reference to the Marxist classics. But regardless of whose interpretation of the classics is considered as the more solid, this arena of debate concedes too much to the dogmatists. It absolutizes the classics into a transhistorical scripture and at the same time abstracts the problem of correct political attitude from that of concrete contextual appropriateness. The new materialism of post-Mao China required not only doctrinal legitimacy, it also needed a more practical standard of truth.

The liberalization of philosophical discussion through the "two hundreds" policy also required an epistemological foundation, particularly in juxtaposition to the ferocious attacks on the "gang of four." If liberalization were justified by relativism, then why forcibly drive the "gang" from the market-place of ideas? If liberalization only exists for "correct" views, then the slogan of letting a hundred flowers blossom becomes in practice merely letting a different flower dominate. As we have already seen, there have been a number of different answers to the question of the scope of permitted discussion. The epistemological root of all the positions is basically the same, and identical to that behind Mao's original formulation: truth is difficult to know, and is inextricably bound to unpredictably changing historical contexts. Practice is not only the measure of truth, it is the process of debate, trial and error through which liveliness of thought centres itself on a correct grasp of objectivity.

The basic importance of epistemology can also be seen in two apparently unrelated directions which Chinese philosophy took in 1978. From the first issue of Philosophical Studies an attempt was made to reintroduce serious consideration of western philosophy. For example, the works of Kant and Hegel have been emphasized. The best example of this interest is an article on Kant's Ding an sich written by Li Tse-hou. Apart from learning about and from western philosophy, Chinese philosophers have recently directed their attention to an "alliance with natural science." In this area the published work so far has empha-

58. See, for instance, Chang Wen, "Hsüeh-zsu Tzu-pen Lun chung kuan-yü sheng-ch' an li ti lun-shu" ("Study the discussion of productive forces in capital"), Che-hsüeh yen-chiu, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 49-60.
59. Li Tse-hou, "Kuan-yü K'an-te ti 'wu tsu-t'i' hsüeh-shuo" ("On Kant's doctrine of the Ding an sich), Che-hsüeh yen-chiu, No. 6 (June 1978), pp. 43-53. Li has also recently published articles on Yen Fu, the T'ai-pings, and aesthetic theory in Li-shih yen-chiu, Jen-min jih-pao, and Kwang-ming jih-pao.
60. See Pen-pao p'ing-lun yuan (Commentator), "Chia-ch'iang che-hsüeh kung-tso t'ung tsu-jan k'o-hsüeh kung-tso ti lien-meng" ("Strengthen the alliance of philosophical work with that of the natural sciences"), Che-hsüeh yen-chiu, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 45-49. Also Wen Chi-tse, "Tsai hsiang k'o-hsüeh chi-shu hsien-tai-hua chin chün chung, che-hsüeh kung-tso che yao tso hsüeh shen-ma?" ("What should philosophy workers do in advancing troops towards modernization of science and technology?"), Che-hsüeh yen-chiu, No. 5 (May 1978), pp 5-7.
sized the epistemological problems of science and the patterns of theoretical change in science. It appears that it is not only the current prestige of the West and of science which prompts such inquiries, but also the quest for more sophisticated notions of truth and certainty.

The initial statement of the position that practice is the only standard for judging truth was seminal in that it breached a key “forbidden zone” of epistemology, but it was only the beginning of the process of elaborating an epistemology intended to be both non-dogmatic and Marxist. The basic position is not far from man-in-the-street realism: knowledge is about things which exist objectively, but complexity and change in the objective world limit our ability to grasp truth. Ontologically this view emphasises the primacy of objective existence over subjective ideas: in methodology an experimental flexibility is preferred to dogmatism.

This commonsense position evoked some challenging philosophical questions as well as the political tensions described in the first part of this paper. The most basic of these was whether correct theory could also be a standard of truth. This seemed to pose a serious dilemma. If correct theory could be used to judge truth, then the standard of practice was unnecessary in areas where correct theory had already been attained. But if correct theory could not be used as a standard, what use did it have? The answer was that theory was correct and useful insofar as it grasped practice, but that any theory is relative to its historical circumstances and thus cannot by itself serve as the standard for judging other theories. Other knotty questions were raised and answered concerning the relationship of logical proof and proof from practice, and whether the standard of practice was limited to current experience or included historical experience. The basic question, however, was that of the effect of the standard of practice on the leading role of ideology, and the answer was more satisfactory as pastoral Marxism than as epistemology:

... since things constantly develop, practice in a changed reality constantly develops. Therefore one should use universal things as a guide, use correct theory as a compass for studying and viewing new things, and use the world view and method of science as the general guide for understanding, in order to apply concrete analysis to concrete matters.


62. The Chinese identify these positions with materialism and idealism respectively, following Engels, but it should be noted that as described thus far St. Thomas Aquinas was a realist.

63. See "Kuan-yü chen-li piao-chun ti wen-t'i" ("On questions about the standard of truth"), a collection of answers to readers' questions. Che-hsüeh yen-chiu, No. 8 (August 1978), pp. 16–20. Some of the questions are also discussed elsewhere.

64. Ibid. p. 17.
The initial epistemological position of the "Practice is the only standard" article was amplified and improved upon in a more systematic way by two series of philosophical articles. The first was a set of 11 articles on dialectical materialism published in *Kuang-ming jih-pao* from 2 May to 8 September 1978. These study materials written by the Philosophy Department of Jen-min University are of uneven quality, but several advances are made. First, a strong defence is made of the slogan "i jen wei erh" (one divides into two), which in general was interpreted as looking at both sides of a contradiction. It is defended against the "gang of four's" charges of syncretism (che-chung chu-i) by a detailed analysis of Mao's theory of contradictions. Another advance is made in the summary of the new epistemology in the last article in the series. Its detailed treatment of the inseparability of absolute truth and relative truth amounts to a replacement of a simplistic theory of reflection (still present in a much restricted form in Mao's "On practice") with a carefully constructed dialectic which attempts to avoid both dogmatism and relativism.

A more eye-catching development in epistemology was an open argument between Li Chun writing in *Kuang-ming jih-pao* and Fu Tso in *People's Daily*. In this dispute two sub-tendencies of the basic realism, namely flexibility and objectivism, were counterposed to each other. Li argued forcefully that truth can only approximate reality because reality is more concrete and complex than language and thought is limited by historical context. He attacks the assumption that truth can completely and adequately capture reality as idealist and metaphysical, saying that it creates a tendency towards book worship and subjectivism. The article attempts to provide a new foundation for the "Practice is the only standard" viewpoint by emphasizing the structural differences of cognition and reality.

Evidently this novel argument scandalized Fu Tso, who responded two weeks later in *People's Daily* with a complete rejection of Li Chun's article. Assuming that Li's argument involved a separation of truth and reality, Fu argued for the reliability of scientific truth and against


subjectivism, and also criticized the ferocity of Li's denunciations. Fear of losing an unproblematic claim to objectivity caused a misapprehension of the precise epistemological point. Not only did Fu misinterpret Li's argument, but his use of examples and quotations was sloppy.\(^{69}\) In a western academic forum one would await a reply with relish, but Li's counterattack 10 days later in Kuang-ming jih-pao was unique in Chinese philosophical disputes. Li re-emphasized that he did not intend to advocate separating truth and reality but a more careful attention to their structural differences. Scientific accomplishments are based on the reflection of reality, but not on a perfect reflection; therefore advances often come from unexpected directions and from anomalies that were at first thought to be insignificant. Li insists even more strongly on the close relationship of his viewpoint to using practice in evaluating truth, but there is no disparaging tone towards opponents of his first article.

Since open disagreement is so rare in the Chinese media, this dispute over epistemology was scrutinized carefully for political overtones.\(^ {70}\) But there was no firm indication of any, and I do not think that the debate was primarily a screen for political struggle. Rather, recent ideological changes in China have been rapid and fundamental, and this must have the effect of driving some Chinese thinkers to more sophisticated positions on the validity of knowledge. The political utility of such speculation is neither immediate nor unequivocal; Party toleration of it admits, in effect, that fundamental questions of ideology are deep and complex enough to require relatively autonomous specialized attention. The institutional rebirth of the social sciences seems to be accompanied by a new consciousness of a professional mission in theory. In a time of bewildering ideological change, philosophy regains its mission of interpreting the world.

**Politics and Philosophy: The Unity of Opposites**

Although the conjunction of Chinese philosophy and politics in 1978 has been an alliance of mutual benefit, the interest of these two perspectives in the thesis that “practice is the only standard for evaluating truth” is very different. Politically the campaign was used to develop and enforce a new consensus upon which a post-Mao policy framework could be built. Since the death of Mao there had been uncertainty and division concerning the evaluation of policy; promotion of the standard of practice and criticism of the standard of Mao's previous policy judgments created a new basis for public discussion. From the perspective of politics the “Practice is the only standard” campaign was

\(^{69}\) In one place Fu quotes a fairly well-known passage from Engels' *Anti-Duehring* completely out of context.

\(^{70}\) However, the only article I know of on the dispute did not seem to find any. Li Hsin, “Pei-ching liang pao ti i pi-chan” (“An editorial war between Peking's two papers”), Tung-hsiang, No. 1 (October 1978), p. 34.
primarily an ideological consolidation of the Teng Hsiao-p'ing "practice faction" to the exclusion of the Cultural Revolution "whatever faction."

Philosophically, the content of the movement was a questioning of certainties. The universal pretensions of theory were dissolved into the flux of practical realities. Space for epistemology was justified by the ineradicable uncertainties of conceptualization and the limitations of historical conditions. Immediate corollaries of this view were the necessity of allowing pluralism in discussion and professionalism in practical investigations. A not too distant corollary was that leadership cannot be absolutely correct or universally appropriate. The replacement of Maoist policies was justified not because Mao was a long-hidden feudal element who had just been rooted out (although some current analyses could be rewritten in that direction), but because he was human and therefore made mistakes and his policies were designed for a different, earlier period.

The establishment of political certainty and philosophical doubt in the same campaign led to some interesting ironies. Provincial leaders were required to write articles approving thought liberation in order to demonstrate fealty to Teng. Arguments demanding greater sophistication in ideological analysis invidiously swept all opponents under the "gang of four" label. A campaign against allegedly widespread habits of ideological tyranny had itself no public opposition. The "gang of four" cynicism that the person in power commands truth has been replaced by a new view of truth, but power commanded the change. On the question of freedom of speech for the opposition, a Hong Kong spokesman for the "practice faction" has claimed that in the summer of 1978 opponents were invited to state their views but none came forward, implying that they perceived that their position was indefensible in public debate. It is more likely though that opponents within China restrained themselves because of the disadvantages and risks of debating uphill. In the freer forum of Hong Kong there was at least one interesting attack on the "Practice is the only standard" thesis. Reflection on these ironies can lead to the type of contradiction that gives dialectics its charm: the critique of dogmatism can itself be dogmatic.

The effect of consolidation politics on the philosophical movement has been a tendency to absolutize the new standard of truth. But there has also been a reciprocal effect of the intellectual content of the new epistemology on politics. Its sophistication provides a much firmer support for protests based on the practical effects of policy. The demand for practical investigation of a policy is now harder to deny. Moreover, if

71. See Chung-kuo ch‘ing-nien (Chinese Youth) Special Commentator, "Tso pao-wei ho fa-yang she-hui ch‘iui-i min-chu ti chan-shih" ("Protect and develop fighters for socialist democracy"), Jen-min, 22 October 1978, p. 3.


73. Tu Wei "Shih-chien pu shih chien-yen chen-li wei-i piao-chun" ("Practice is not the only standard for evaluating truth"), Chi‘i-shih nien-tai, No. 2 (February 1979), pp. 18–20.
the difficulty of achieving correctness is admitted, more attention must be paid to the policy-making process. "Practice is the only standard" thus provides ideological underpinning for tendencies to institutionalize policy influence and to provide expertise. Finally, the truth of the present leadership will undoubtedly be put to the practical test of its own modernization goals. At least from 1979 onwards, significant inadequacies in modernization progress should lead to pressure for the reconsideration of policy.

The "Practice is the only standard" campaign has been the key to the ideological reorientation of 1978. The pressures of this political role have shaped the campaign as much as its epistemological content, but the process has been reciprocal. Politics and philosophy have been bent rather than broken by this interaction because of basic commonalities: both politically and ideologically China has become more secular, professional and diversified. Now that the political task of ideological reorientation has been declared basically completed, there will probably be less direct interaction and hence more autonomy for each - but within the common ground of the new reorientation.

**Conclusion: Beyond Mao**

To a great extent, the ideological reorientation of 1978 was a necessary reaction to the predicament of post-Mao Chinese politics. As the communiqué of the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee put it:

The lofty task of the Party Central Committee on the theoretical front is to... integrate the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought with the concrete practice of socialist modernization and develop it under new historical conditions.74

In retrospect it seems inevitable that the death of Mao would require a fundamental change in the role of his thought in Chinese politics. Given a leadership based on opposition to the "gang of four," it seems equally necessary that it would attempt to create theoretical freedom of action for present policy makers by mediating the formerly direct authority of Mao's pronouncements, and in particular his "latest directives." The necessity of reorientation on the one hand and of maintaining at least the appearance of Maoist legitimacy on the other make it difficult to evaluate ideological continuity in the new modernization period. The arguments against continuing Mao's political authority beyond the grave are themselves based on his thought.

As I have argued elsewhere,75 the emphasis of Mao's epistemology was on the primacy of practice and on continually forming and testing


subjective opinion by interaction with the objective world. Even the origins of Mao's emphasis on practice were practical: his theoretical formulation was preceded by years of active policy-making frustrated by the "book-worship" of dogmatic superiors. "Seek truth from facts" is a key Maoist slogan, and Teng Hsiao-p'ing's temerity in departing from received Communist Party practice does not exceed Mao's own boldness at Chingkangshan, Kiangsi, and Yenan.

Although the pragmatism of the "Practice is the only standard" approach does not exceed the pragmatism of Mao's own politics, there is room for significant divergence between the two systems of thought in three areas. First, in the area of specific policy judgments there are obviously wide divergences. It is at this level that most of the "criticism of Mao" occurs. Although Mao also changed his judgments and - more commonly - passively allowed major shifts in policy, the scale of current policy changes stamps the present age as definitely beyond Mao. Policy transformation is defended against the charge of un-Maoism by the argument that Mao's different policy judgments were conditioned by his different historical conditions. This justification, as we have seen, is directly related politically and philosophically to the "Practice is the only standard" thesis.

A deeper question inextricably related to the evaluation of policy divergence is whether the values encompassed in Mao's thought and expressed in his revolutionary activities are preserved in the post-Mao reorientation. This is a more difficult problem because the expression of values is also conditioned by historical circumstance and yet it is expected that values will remain basically constant. This is an aspect of the new materialism of the post-Mao era which deserves closer scrutiny than can be given here. Suffice it to say that Mao's basic substantive political commitment was to the ultimate power of the mobilized masses, and this led him after 1949 to subordinate the societal role of specialists to mass politics. Mao's opposition to social stratification and segmentation was based on the view that any lasting change in China's political economy would be the work of the masses. Experts were invaluable as a tool of change, but as early as 1921 Mao perceived a tendency of intellectuals to form a self-interested class to the detriment of the masses.76 The justification of current policy towards specialists rests on a change in historical circumstances: previously intellectuals were bourgeois, but over the past 29 years the overwhelming majority have been raised in the new society or have been effectively re-educated. But only a Stalinist could be complacent with the logic that the possibility of class formation disappears with socialism. The nest of questions involving the role of specialists and stratification seems to me to be the major area requiring further research on values.

The third area of possible divergence between Mao and the emerging post-Mao position is the role of practical flexibility within a more general system of politics. Mao was not simply a philosopher of pragmatism, and so pragmatism by itself is no guarantee of basic continuity with Mao. His emphasis on practice derived from his concern for correct revolutionary leadership. Thus practice is the only standard for correct (appropriate, successful) action. Secondarily, practice is the standard for utilizing theory, since theory includes principles of action. Mao did not question or fomally measure the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism, but through his emphasis on the particularity of contradiction he distanced the determination of concrete policy from the direct authority of the classics. As a result, Chinese Marxism has had a split-level structure which is indicated even in its name – Marxism-Leninism Mao Tsetung Thought. Since “thought” (szu-hsiang) has connotations of application and currency, probably the time is approaching when the term “Maoism” will make its official debut. But the thinking of the present period is far more burdened with an ideological past than Mao’s was, and hence the orientation of its practical standard is first the validity of theory and secondarily the correctness of action. Discussion and even specialization are more important to this view than to Mao’s. One might also expect that increasing sophistication would tend to redefine the simple commitment to revolutionary values, although it might replace them as policy criteria by an equally naïve notion of situational necessities.

Another useful perspective on the relationship of the present period to Mao’s thought is the periodization of Mao’s politics into pre- and post-Liberation phases. The harmony between the current outlook and Mao’s politics is strongest for the pre-Liberation period. During this period Mao’s predominant concern was the practical means of revolutionary success, and the present leadership’s emphasis on the practical requisites of modernization also is an attention to social means. By contrast, from 1957 Mao was faced primarily with questions of social ends and revolutionary values because the abandonment of the Soviet model faced China with the challenge of finding its own path to communism. Although the values of the 1957–76 period stemmed directly from the whole course of Mao’s revolutionary experience, they (and Mao) had a very different relationship to the continuing development of Chinese politics. The undesirable material effects of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution caused political retreats, but Mao’s commitment to the values behind them was radicalized rather than diluted. The practicality of “On practice” was emphasized during this period, but as an encouragement to active utilization of thought than as epistemological critique.

Similarly, the slogan “one divides into two” in its 1964 usage against the philosopher Yang Hsien-chen 77 was fundamentally different from

its 1978 usage. They have in common a positing of the universality of contradiction and the interdependence of aspects, but the 1964 slogan emphasized the role of active struggle, whereas Kuang-ming jih pao's articles stress the more pacific and reflective virtue of looking at both sides. Emphasis on practice as implementational activism in the defensive service of revolutionary values has been replaced by an epistemological doubt which allows practice to be innovative in values. In the Kiangsi Soviet in the early 1930s Mao faced exactly the same problem of practical innovation. His battle for survival in the base areas had led to his creation of a workable rural strategy, but the mantle of ideological correctness was worn by the Stalinist "28 Bolsheviks," who correctly perceived its heretical tendencies. The failure of Russian experience applied to China and Mao's own success eventually led to the articulation of his new paradigm in Yenan. But Yenan was at least one historical period removed from the Maoism confronted by the "practice faction."

It is too early to tell whether the present reorientation is the watershed of a secularizing trend in Chinese thought and politics or an intense temporary reaction to the dogmatism of the "gang of four." Although commitment to the "four modernizations" is undoubtedly a long-term and universally held priority, this general direction could be pursued within a variety of ideological perspectives. The decision to end the Third Campaign to Criticize the "Gang of Four" will not end the role of ideology in Chinese politics, but it should permit the articulation of differing but compatible views. Barring a return to Cultural Revolution politics, the arena of ideology should move from the front pages of the "three newspapers and one journal" to a more professional forum where discussion is possible. Great advances in the conceptualization of Chinese politics can be expected from this trend, but the question of whether the new period is Maoism under new conditions or the decisive victory of expertise over redness must be measured by practice.