

## **Historiographic Analysis on Two Major American Journals on the Cultural Revolution in China, 1960-1979**

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### **Abstract**

Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the mainstream academic has produced a heap of analysis to explain how the momentous historical event started. This article presents the findings of how the Cultural Revolution started from the historiographical viewpoint of two American journals, *China Quarterly* and *Monthly Review*. The *Monthly Review* is a socialist journal whose authors have sympathized and even supported Mao's action, and some writers published in the *China Quarterly* have also argued for the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. The sympathetic stance is rarely seen in the academic field after the 1970s. This study serves as a review to provide the alternative view from the *China Quarterly* and the *Monthly Review* on the Cultural Revolution, one of the most important events in the history of contemporary China. Thus, this research critically reviews the purpose, reasoning, and theoretical approaches of these American authors to present the readers how and why these authors had come to their conclusions on the Cultural Revolution.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Revolution, Monthly Review, China Quarterly, Maoism*

### **1. Introduction**

The Chinese Cultural Revolution, spanning from 1966 to 1976, is a significant event in the history of contemporary China that shaped the future politics of the Chinese Communist Party. It signifies the death of Mao's "politics in command" strategy to rule China with ideological causes which hailed egalitarianism to the extreme. Since then, egalitarianism faded in China's political stage, while modernization has become the priority of Chinese politics to accelerate development of Chinese society. The current Communist Party as well as China's scholars have a negative response to the Cultural

Revolution. This article seeks to provide the viewpoints of authors from the *China Quarterly* and the *Monthly Review* to reckon a fuller picture of the Cultural Revolution.

With the increasingly availableness of the details of the Cultural Revolution, China studies have shifted their attention to the complexities of the events. Some have directed the fanatic violence to the structural weakness of the state power, others have claimed that collective action under the circumstances was not possible with game theory to comply to what the leader had wished for to happen (Walder and Lu, 2017: 1154-1155). For example, Andrew Walder has shed important lights on how the students formulated their collective choices under Mao's political mobilization tactics (Walder, 2019). The China researchers has moved from interpreting how the leaders initiated the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, to focusing on how the motives of the students and workers are shaped.

This article deals with the original question: Why did Mao Zedong start the Cultural Revolution? While Mao's intention could not explain directly on what happened during the Cultural Revolution, the questions raised interest recently since many scholars have compared current Chinese president Xi Jinping with Mao. Articles have frequently addressed similarities regarding the ruling ideologies and styles of the two leaders, and Xi himself has mentioned the importance of Mao in his speeches and his works (Xi, 2014; Perry, 2021). However, from the perspectives of the earlier generations of China scholars, their interpretation of Mao drastically differs that of China's current political stance led by Xi. This article attempts to analyze and present the perspectives of the Cultural Revolution from the American scholars who published their articles in the 1960s and 1970s from two journals – the *Monthly Review* and the *China Quarterly*. From their critical view on the Cultural Revolution, the article presents the differences between Mao's ideology and the ideology of the current Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

## 2. Literature Review

One of the reasons for the negative, and sometimes prejudiced view of Mao and the Cultural Revolution, is argued to be a result of both the political sphere of the United States and China after the 1980s, where the political sphere of both countries had been opposing Maoism. Kang (1997) suggested that the current academics from the left were silent to avoid trouble from *realpolitik*, implying that revolutionary ideas from Mao were unacceptable in the mainstream academics. The political sphere of neoliberalism in the United States has shaped the discourses of both Western and Chinese interpretation of the Cultural Revolution, and this phenomenon has been reinforced by the constant supply of documents and personal experiences of

the Chinese intelligentsia about their dreadful treatment under the tyranny of the Red Guards, guided by their hatred to Mao. Mao has been interpreted as a nationalistic leader to modernize China but also a tyrant reminiscent to a feudal China emperor. The Cultural Revolution was perceived to be his sole grand scheme to destroy his comrades and return himself to absolute power (Gao, 2008: 32).

William Hinton had provided a critique on a China study performed by Western Chinese specialists to show an example of the prejudice of China scholars.<sup>1</sup> In his memoir, *Through a Glass Darkly: U.S. Views of the Chinese Revolution*, Hinton recounted that he had been targeted by his American peers when he voiced his support with Mao's China (Hinton, 2006: 22). He attributed the cause to a manifestation of American exceptionalism, with one American China scholar going as far as to claim that it was a "first-class disaster" to let China into the hands of the Communist (ibid.: 23).

Hinton also critically reviewed the influential book on Mao's China *Chinese Village, Socialist State* written by three China specialists, in his work. The three biggest criticisms laid by Hinton on *Chinese Village, Socialist State* were twists and misinterpretation of objective events. Firstly, with regard to the policy of land reform, the three authors only interviewed the opinion of a Kuomintang boss, a large landowner, and a liberal university professor (Hinton, 2006: 39) that often-overlooked exploitation towards the peasants and ignored class structure within feudal China.

Secondly, with Hinton's exceptional experience and understanding of agrarian statistics and land reclamation techniques, he discovered the miscalculations and thus erroneous conclusions in the book (Hinton 2006: 40), and even if the data were presented correctly in other parts the authors seldom regarded the difficult situation in undeveloped China, such as unreasonably comparing the living standard of third world China to an advance capitalist country. The authors also unjustifiably accuse the CCP, by blaming all social and economic problems to Mao's regime.

Hinton did not shy away from acknowledging the mistakes performed by the party and Mao, but from the example he presented, he claimed that many China scholars tended to link any societal problems to the party with exaggeration, such as claiming unborn people as actual deaths occurred in famine. Hinton claimed that this approach by the three American scholars have become the way many other authors approach Mao's China and the Cultural Revolution.

The huge economic success in China in Deng Xiaoping's era, as well as the new empirical data and new interests of researchers have changed the narrative on the Cultural Revolution study. From the objective success of the new ruling elites, many commentators portray the Cultural Revolution as an obstacle for China's development. The origin of the Cultural Revolution was

understood to be a power struggle with Mao simply wanting to seize power (MacFarquhar, 2006: 599).

To provide an alternative view than the current mainstream China studies, this article revisited some of the earlier arguments of the reasonings behind Mao's Cultural Revolution, where few research has been conducted until recently. This article puts more emphasis on the *Monthly Review*, since mainstream scholars seldom interact with the *Monthly Review* due to its radical stance and thus the *Monthly Review* is less well-known. The purpose of the article, therefore, is to recover the lost insight from the two journals, with a critical comparison between the respective findings of the two journals.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study is constructed as a historiography to examine critically how American scholars recorded, described and explained the events of the Cultural Revolution published in two journals, the *China Quarterly* and the *Monthly Review*, while some of the publications from the *Monthly Review Press* will also be included in the discussion. This study involves data collection and data analysis, specifically on the articles from both journals to illustrate the questions and objectives. As the complexity of the Cultural Revolution can not be explained within one discipline, so did the scholars employ different lenses and methods to understand the Cultural Revolution, especially in the fields of economics, political science, history and sociology. The resulting phenomenon of this variety of research provided an opportunity for the interception between different theories and analytical tools.

The Cultural Revolution, and to some extent the history of contemporary China, became the focus of American authors of the 1960s and 1970s to search for the answer on modernity. A series of social changes and phenomena occurred during the modernization of a country – division of labour for more efficiency, functional differentiation of institutions, the specialization of social systems, and enhancing individualism, etc. Many of the scholars perceived the Cultural Revolution as a solution to what all developing and developed countries were facing. Since the main purpose of the research is to present how these authors theorize the Cultural Revolution, a qualitative research methodology is adopted to understand how the researchers approach the matter. By looking at the research interests, it can answer the question of how the Cultural Revolution was seen in their era.

### 4. Short Introduction to the Cultural Revolution

Following the failure of the Great Leap Forward in 1961, resulting in extreme natural calamities but no less attributed to human error shouldered by party and government members, China decided a period of economic recovery

was necessary to consolidate and readjust the excessive tendencies of the Great Leap Forward that occurred in the rural area. In January 1961, the Ninth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee declared a retreat from the Great Leap Forward to rescue the devastated agricultural sector ravaged continuously for three years. Mao Zedong has personally admitted his mistakes during the Great Leap Forward and resigned to the “second-line”, leaving most of the reconstructing responsibilities to premier Liu Shaoqi.<sup>2</sup>

New economic policies which required centralization, strict control over other systems in the society, and the management bureaucracy that was criticized and had been dropped in the Leap were resurrected to conform with the central planning. Capitalist production methods that were suppressed and condemned as anti-socialist and rightist before appeared again after 1961 in the form of large portions of private owning plots to restore incentives (Brugger, 1994: 112). From the perspective of the new leadership led by Liu, their task was to increase the productivity and regulation over the economic sector with a hierarchical organizational structure. Mao, on the other hand, was increasingly frustrated by Liu's faction on how they employed commandism in the industries, a term he used for describing the strict control of management over workers.<sup>3</sup>

Power struggle among the Communist Party played a necessary role in the orchestration of the Cultural Revolution, but the imminent question is why Mao chose the Cultural Revolution as the stage to realize the power struggle. Power politics fall short to explain Mao's action, since it failed to explain why Mao allowed the total devastation of the party state and governmental structure within months after the event started. The authors in the later section will demonstrate that it was instead ideological differences with the new policies that the Cultural Revolution became the means for Mao to regain his power.

Based on different contexts, the definition of Maoism can change, but the concepts of mass line and self-reliance, which arguably are the central doctrines of Maoism, are particularly important in the discussion.<sup>4</sup> Mass line can be interpreted as a form of populist ideology which presupposes the role of the Party to be subordinated to the will of the people, with the primary mission to assist its people to construct socialism. The state should not “command” the people to construct socialism, but the people, in Mao's opinion, should rely on themselves to reach socialism. The following *Monthly Review* and *China Quarterly* sections will mainly discuss how Maoism can be realized during the Cultural Revolution, and the risk and cost for the realization.

## **5. Result Findings: *Monthly Review***

The *Monthly Review* is the longest American socialist journal that published critical analysis of world issues with Marxian analytic framework since 1949.

The *Monthly Review* has since attracted important figures like Albert Einstein and Fidel Castro to publish in their journal. The longest serving editor of the *Monthly Review*, Paul Sweezy, co-published a highly influential Marxian work *Monopoly Capital*, a book that provided a critique to modern US capitalism. This work became a famous and representative Marxian economics for writers and the journal, and the term “Monthly Review School” appeared to describe the ground-breaking analysis on a generation of monopoly capitalism that replaced competitive capitalism.

The *Monthly Review* has since become one of the most authoritative sources of Marxist and socialist scholastic journal in the United States. Besides Sweezy, this article also explicates the works of Charles Bettelheim and William Hinton. Hinton’s over a decade life experience in the early period of relatively closed Communist China has allowed him to produced one of the most authoritative first hand descriptions of Chinese societies. During the Cultural Revolution, Charles Bettelheim, another *Monthly Review* author and a prominent French Marxist, was offered a valuable chance to document the working culture in a Shanghai industry in 1972. The works of the editors, as well as Hinton and Bettelheim would be used as primary materials of this section.<sup>5</sup>

*Monthly Review* editors argued that industries in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc were working under capitalist production methods (Sweezy and Huberman, 1964: 580). Harry Braverman (1974: 3), who acted as the president and director of the *Monthly Review*, criticized how the Taylor system<sup>6</sup> readily adopted since Lenin to exploit the workers as rigorously as scientifically positioned by the inhumane time and motion studies it recklessly employed to labour. The extreme division of labour separated what Marx characterized as central to human – the integration of the planning and execution part in production.<sup>7</sup> Such a production method where management was responsible for the former and workers for the latter had resulted in a production process being dull, repetitive, and uninspiring for the daily workers. Braverman referred this production style as commandism – the will of the worker must be totally subordinated to its superior for the sake of efficiency. A new exploitation was formed where workers were stripped away their power over the production process.

The Chinese Communist Party was facing the same problem as their Soviet counterpart. Since state ownership does not automatically guarantee that the party will cultivate socialist values in the future as demonstrated in the Soviet Union, many *Monthly Review* writers argue that a true socialist state must rely on its relationship with the mass that entrusted their power to itself (Bettelheim, 1971: 73). The function of the party must remain subordinate to the will of its people and assist their struggle against the exploiting class of the society. The task of the party was to educate and assist the workers to

abandon the capitalist thinking, an exploitative ideology that surrenders the workers' control and knowledge and opinion to the management or the ruling stratum (Bettelheim, 1971: 74).

## **6. Cultural Revolution and Socialist Construction**

In management professor Barry Richman's account, who had an exclusive opportunity to observe the Chinese industry during the Cultural Revolution at first-hand, he argued that the visited industry was a place not only for production but also for "political indoctrination" which included teaching illiterate workers to read and write, and workers were getting more in touch with the production process that were exclusive to the management in capitalist factories (Sweezy and Huberman, 1967: 10). Other "peculiar" events that Richman discovered was a lack of bonuses awarded to the management level, while awards were given for those workers who helped their co-workers. Different strata of people, unlike the Western counterparts, had similar living style in the way of dressing, travelling methods and dining. Richman was most surprised when one manager was cooking dumplings one day for his co-workers (Sweezy and Huberman, 1967: 14).

The editors in turn argued that these were the features that should exactly be situated in the correct path of socialist construction, and a humane way of how industry should be running. Richman pointed out that the production level in China were much lower than their counterparts in the United States and the Soviet Union, and he expected that this egalitarian production method could not last long; for one it gave up the rationality that was so intrinsic to modernization and the division of labour that promotes it, on the other hand his belief in the natural selfishness, the economic man, was inherently incompatible with the Chinese production relation that was solely sustained by political consciousness (Sweezy and Huberman, 1967: 14-15). The management and specialist would not be satisfied to share the same status as his/her subordinates in a normal capitalist relation.

The editors reject Richman's two arguments. Their analysis on the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia concluded that it was primary for the workers to control the production process and there should not be a social division of labour between mental and manual. Worker's control should not remained at the legal level of dictatorship of the proletariat, but they should both obtain the knowledge of the mental part of production and participate in the management process. As Richman observed, the increased active participation of workers in the production process enhanced the workers responsibility, identification, commitment, and loyalty to the firm became the primary advantage in the socialist organization of management (Sweezy and Huberman, 1967: 16). Their argument also fundamentally challenged the economic man that

Richman derived from the logic of capitalism. As Marxists, the editors believed that the central human life should be to fulfil their ability, both physical and manual, in the production process.

In another article, Sweezy again points out the difference between the capitalist mode of thinking and the socialist ideals he championed. In Chinese urban areas, industries are organized at state level and represents ownership of all people. During the Cultural Revolution surplus value from Chinese enterprise directly flows to the state, bonuses and profit related piece rates are removed. Where in capitalist society profit is the sole motivation for businesses, this bottom-line thinking, the editors said, was absent in China since the goal of the production was not to generate profit but to produce for the sake of the welfare and development of the society. More often many industries lost money by lowering the output price and supporting the other industries, and since profit making was no long a criterion for judging the success of the enterprise, welfare to workers is provided as well as decent salaries with no correlation to profit making or results (Sweezy et al., 1975: 2-15). The profit motivation was removed and instead the party sent down revolutionary committees to enforce political motivation.

Bettelheim's visit to China in 1971 had reported on the results of Chinese attempts to fundamentally alter the management and organizational practice. The theories and the slogan to combat the capitalist mode of production were long in existence since the Great Leap Forward, but Bettelheim argued that the actual practice was never accomplished due to the active interference by Liu Shaoqi's faction (Bettelheim, 1974: 8-10). Bettelheim claimed that the bourgeois line headed by Liu refused to remove capitalist elements such as forcing the submission of workers to the management, and the introduction of profit motives. After the downfall of Liu's faction, the active material incentives were eliminated during the Cultural Revolution. This was not accomplished by a direct top-down decision commanded to every industry by the central party committee. Instead, conforming to the mass line tactics, different institutions such as the Red Guards, worker's management team and the Revolutionary Committee were guided by the Central Committee to conduct political work to convey the thought of Mao Zedong to the workers.

One of the major purposes of the new institutions was to propagate the thought of Mao Zedong. The thought of Mao Zedong, which later was codified and transformed into Maoism, had always been present since the beginning of the Communist rule. However, few workers understood the essence of the theory as they never received the chance to practise it before the Cultural Revolution. The old party committee, who was supposed to help the workers and supervise the management to prevent capitalist elements, portrayed the mass as the guardian of Marxist-Leninist thought who stood



above the mass who often refuse to accomplish political works and help the people understand Maoism (Bettelheim, 1974: 24).

In Maoism, self-reliance did not entail the concept that one should not seek help from others, but the key idea was to draw out the creativity of the workers, giving them the confidence to speak up for his opinion. Workers were encouraged to solve the daily production problems by their own experience, thereby overcoming the rigid rules and guidelines written by the experts and professionals that were often alienated from the manual workers (Bettelheim, 1974: 37). Due to the social division of labour inherited from capitalism, the scientists and technicians often interfered with the innovations of the workers since they were deprived of the opportunity of practical experience of manual work, just as how the workers were deprived from mental work (Bettelheim 1974: 81). A three-in-one team consisting of cadres, technicians and workers acted as the medium to remove the social division of labour by gathering opinions from the experience of all parties, often through rigorous discussion of details on the production process.

The mass line concept advocates that industrial process must involve everyone to engage in the political struggle against the limited vision of the specialists and managers, so that true democracy can be achieved in the workplace, where workers can decide on a more humanistic working environment and serve their community better. One example Bettelheim showed was that demand for coal in the area he investigated exceeded the production rate of the factory. While the factory manager was conservative with changes that might jeopardize the profit rate in the past, the workers investigate themselves the needs of coal in the community under the guidance of the revolutionary committee, workers' management team and the three-in-one teams (Bettelheim, 1974: 69). In the experience that Bettelheim observed, the management and workers had transcended the economic goals that strictly followed the quantity of production and profits, to produce what the people really need in their daily life under political motivations (Bettelheim, 1974: 67).

The central thesis of Bettelheim in this book is to demonstrate the correct way of transition to socialism. The transformation of industrial management should not be viewed as narrow management technique, but it stressed the importance of production relation to achieve the elimination of class and division of labour. Both Sweezy and Bettelheim had responded that the nationalization of private property in legal form and a comprehensive economic plan could only provide the necessary condition for socialist construction (Bettelheim, 1974: 98). Moreover, he argued that the fundamental purpose of socialism is to break the chains of the workers from economic exploitation. The goal of the communist party, under the influence of the Cultural Revolution, was reshaped to enforce politics in command over

pure economic development so that enterprises could transcend the profit motive and indeed serve the interest of the whole population (Bettelheim, 1974: 99-101).

Besides political reasons, the stratification of education, culture and particularly production process were inherited from feudal society, where the people have been taught to submit to authority in Confucianism. Before the Cultural Revolution, Hinton documented that any ideas from the workers had to pass through multiple bottlenecks and judged strictly by cost efficiency, while the incentive system that focused on the individual level often pitched the workers against each other (Hinton, 1973: 32-33). During the Cultural Revolution, the strawman like management system was removed and instead the team leaders worked with the workers side by side to augment the morale (Hinton, 1973: 35). Everyone was encouraged to study and discuss the issues they found, and the production rate was also enhanced when the workers also took up the responsibility that the specialist and manager previously dictated (Hinton, 1973: 36-37).

For Hinton, the approach of Mao was a very practical method to socialist construction. In the beginning, the radical faction pushed unreasonable egalitarian ideals and led to complete chaos. The conservatives, without commitment with the situation of the mass argued only for the sake of production and efficiency and demand obedience and subordination of the mass. Both factions undermined the potential for the workers and peasants for cooperation and realize their own ability through participation in socialist construction, including not only manual production but also learning, planning, investigating and discussing the concrete reality that was rooted in collective activity of the mass (Hinton, 1994: 8-9). Hinton provided the following quote from Mao to elucidate what the correct party line should be:

... only an instrument involved in, but not dominating, the dialectical process of continuous revolution.... The party does not stand outside the revolutionary process with foreknowledge of its laws. "For people to know the laws they must go through a process. The vanguard is no exception." Only through practice can knowledge develop; only by immersing itself among the masses can the Party lead the revolution (Mao, 1997: 20 quoted in Hinton, 1994: 14).

## 7. Result Findings of *China Quarterly*

The *China Quarterly* was established to match with the increasing interest in China after the Sino-Soviet Split after Stalin's death.<sup>8</sup> The *China Quarterly* is a specialised journal on China issues and is widely perceived as one of the top journals for China issues for over 50 years with contributions by prominent China scholars such as Franz Schurmann, Ezra Vogel, Benjamin

Schwartz and Andrew Walder. Schwartz, in a collection of *China Quarterly* articles, describes several schools of thought that attempted to perceive the goal of the communist party: a totalitarian view to explain the main goal of the party was to obtain and maximize power, to stretch the reach of the party apparatus to the civil society and institutions from universities to basic rural organization; a nationalistic view to seek for national unity through party guidance to strengthen the Chinese identity that were long lost after the wars and invasion in the last decades (Schwartz, 1965: 4). These theoretical approaches, however, cannot differentiate Mao's China with other socialist states. Instead, Schwartz (1965: 14-15) presented that interpreting with respect of modernization and the Maoist vision were critical to explain party actions.

Modernization, Schwartz explained, drawing from classical sociologist Max Weber, was a process to rationalize the social action in forms of education, legal system, politics, economy, etc. The function of rationalization is the specialization of various areas of competence, so that norms and practices could be developed autonomously to hire talents and establish its own institution. By having separate entities that specialize in their own field, judgement and operation broke from the traditional method to facilitate a modern state that encompasses industrialization, professional bureaucrats, and a new legal system that fosters social and economic development. However, Schwartz also pointed out that modernization sometimes might be sought as an end but not a means to it, which led to the unquestionable priority of modernization over other qualities of a society such as equality and moral values. What he implied was that the drawbacks of modernization were sometimes overlooked by developing countries like China, or the pursuit of modernization might only benefit a small group of people, leading to social and economic stratification. Maoism tried to counter the negatives of modernization. Modernization stressed functional differentiation for evolution of the system such as the Taylor system for better efficiency,

This point is picked up by multiple American China specialists to explain why Mao brought down the party apparatus that was built alongside modernization. Certainly, there were discontent between Mao and his comrades and the power struggle had been an important factor that led to the Cultural Revolution, but a better reason was required to understand the steps that Mao took to destroy the party and government that he created and preserved his power. Schurmann argued for Mao when he saw the detrimental effect of excessive organizational controls. Drawing the examples of the ever-growing state power in both the United States and the Soviet Union because of centralized decisions, the United States faced its consequence of losing the value of democracy that always clashed with the power state, including radical movements and apathy of the mass to politics (Schurmann, 1973: 521).

Ezra Vogel's survey on the cadres after the revolutionary period also expounded the fundamental difference between the Maoist's vision of a perfect cadre and the reality. As the Communist came into power, many new and more complex tasks required a different type of cadres than those in the Yan'an period that operated less in touch with the mass but more with fellow officials. New cadres were slowly turned into administrative bureaucrats to cope with national problems. The new organization absorbed a lot of non-revolutionaries to handle the massive daily tasks, while old revolutionary cadres were often incapable to perform the bureaucratic tasks. Both aspects reduced the revolutionary characteristics in the Party. The term cadre was slowly devoid of any revolutionary implication and began to simply mean a state employee of a particular rank (Vogel, 1967: 50). The new wage system offset the revolutionary ideals and values and into a system that rewards money according to the work done, but not the sentiment that developed from the praise of the mass. The new school systems that trained and recruited new cadres adopted a traditional educational system that stressed the results and school performances recorded by their teacher that fostered more routinization (Vogel, 1967: 57-58).

The fundamental contradiction of Mao's vision of the revolutionary society and the standardized bureaucratic organisation led by Liu was resolved by means of the Cultural Revolution. Max Weber was correct to theorize the tendency of bureaucratization in any modernizing society (Vogel, 1967: 59). Nonetheless, the undying spirit of Maoist vision was prevalent in the working process. Before the Cultural Revolution, the Maoist spirit injected energy into the routinized administrative process to prevent rigidification of the cadre, even though the organizational structure consistently demands risk averse and disciplined decision making (Vogel, 1967: 60). It was until the Cultural Revolution that both forces came into direct conflict. For Schurmann, the Cultural Revolution ultimately boils down to the wrestling of the correct behaviour of the people, by the Maoist and the modernists (Schurmann, 1973: 506).

Despite the criticisms given to the modernization process, Mao, Schurmann claimed, was idealistic since the leader imagined the peasants would easily give up the material incentive into moral and collective incentives without the coercion of party organization (Schurmann 1973: 540-542). Mao's view on the corrupted nature of organization was influenced by the experience of the Soviet Union. However, his trust on the self-reliant and mass initiation of the peasantry, without the party mechanism as the practical ideology that served to realize the goal of the Maoist, remained to be a vision (Schurmann, 1973: 509). For Schurmann, as radical as the pure ideology had become it could not be realized without at least some form of organization.

## **8. Some Success in the Education Institution**

The institution that had been in the vortex since the eve of the Cultural Revolution was within the levels of education. The event that sparked the Cultural Revolution happened in the universities, where stories of students who came from poor peasants and revolutionary soldiers families were forced to leave school due to their unsatisfactory academic performance. More importantly, students showed their grievance against the party organization when those who belonged to poor backgrounds were reallocated to villages under the *hsiafang* campaign implemented by the Party organizations (Schurmann, 1973: 588).<sup>9</sup> Not only did the incident instigated sharp contradictions between the Party and the unprivileged students, but the educational institution also had a life changing impact on the ideology of their subsequent career which made controlling this instrument of ideology inculcation more critical for Mao (Schurmann, 1973: 582).

Criticism of the educational institution prior to the Cultural Revolution was elucidated by Marianne Bastid. The poor peasants and the students who were offered the chance to attend school because of socialist policies were often overwhelmed by the rules of the schools, usually due to their lower educational and cultural background. The tuition fees were heavy for many families who could not afford repeating a class and poor students usually had low performances, while most peasant families were desperate for their children to earn income for the family (Bastid, 1970: 18). The heavy curriculum was stressful for students which was said to be bookish, but the most crucial aspect was that it served few practical usages for the life of the peasants. Even if the curriculum produced “successful” elites, they were virtually alienated to the peasants’ life; either the knowledge the elite possessed were unhelpful to the peasants to solve their daily problems, or the elites had its selfish political and economic motives that could not serve the interests of the mass (Bastid, 1970: 20-21).

Robert McCormick documented how the new revolutionary committee was sent down to reform the education system in the Fudan University (McCormick, 1974). Previously, even though the admission system allowed students from different social strata to receive education, the students with higher cultural background performed significantly better with the harsh education system set up one-sidedly by the teachers. The revolutionary committee tackled this in two ways. Firstly, they organized make-up class and special coaching to aid the students facing difficulties (McCormick, 1974: 135). Secondly, examinations were replaced by collective group work and written examinations. After the students displayed their basic knowledge on the subject in written examinations, the students were formed into groups led by the teacher. Each student had to answer questions given by the teacher

in front of their classmates and teacher, then they collectively discussed and criticized the answer repeatedly (McCormick, 1974: 139). This examination method had successfully placed more significant on the collective process than the traditional individualistic competition style. Besides changes in assessment, the curriculum for the students frequently involved manual labour in the industries and rural communes as political education to include physical labour to resolve the division of labour problem expounded by Braverman.

McCormick concluded that the educational reform followed the thought of Mao Zedong where he placed confidence on the ability of each student to initiate and innovate the learning process by themselves (McCormick, 1974: 140). Peter J. Seybolt (1971) also agreed with McCormick by referring to the central thesis of Maoism that the socialist revolution must involve the great majority of the people who were also the intended beneficiaries. He argued that though the modernization of China had led to the emphasis on the importance to train elites, but those who were unprivileged were the ones desperate to be educated to change their lives (Seybolt, 1971: 666).

If the educational institutions were to fit the demand of most of the people, Seybolt argued that they must also reform themselves to adopt curriculums that were integrated with factories or communes so that the knowledge it produced could be employed, and not limited itself to the realm of theory as most contemporary schools did (Seybolt, 1971: 667). The integration with practice also served another function. By giving the correct methods and practical guidance to the students, it shook off the dogmatic view of the passivity of the student whose job was solely receiving knowledge from the teachers. The students, in the new education system, were encouraged to solve the problems creatively and effectively according to their own environment. Seybolt concluded that the implication of this style of learning was self-reliance, where the mass could confidently accomplish their task without relying on the professionals and specialists that led to class division but also alienation of the mental and physical labour (Seybolt, 1971: 668).

For Bastid, the struggle to control the educational institutions from the mass means that knowledge was no longer controlled by the elites, since,

The struggle for production can be successful only in a real political society, where the majority of people are concerned and are able to understand and even share in decisions related to the collective life. The advent of such a political society requires the suppression of the elite which monopolized state power, giving the illusion of the existence of a political society but actually usurping the rights and also the duties of the people below. To eradicate the roots of any established elite, the youth must be trained to be versatile, responsive to concrete challenge and unconceited. That does not prevent society from having leaders, but one motto of the "leading group"

will be dynamism: they must “dare” to innovate not content themselves with what is already established (Bastid, 1970: 45).

Seybolt and Bastid’s perspective raised the question on whether the more egalitarian and balanced approach to provide education to the bottom stratum required political indoctrination. The contemporary view on the massive circulation of the writings of Mao Zedong was condemned as cultivating the worship of Mao and brainwashing, and solely served as the political tool for Mao’s power struggle. However, if one accepts the premise of Schurmann that modernization would lead to political centralization and resources would be concentrated in one area, then political thoughts were necessary to counteract this natural tendency. Not only the thought of Mao Zedong provided practical application to the mass on their daily activity, but its political ideology helped the mass understand they too deserved the right, as the master of the country, education and economic opportunities that were once only limited to the privileged.

## **9. Linking the Cultural Revolution to Contemporary China**

Already we saw a complete overturn in the education policy in China, where nowadays students were judged unanimously by the *Gaokao* (Chinese university entrance examination) system where one examination determines the future of the student’s life. The overtly competitive and individualistic nature of the *Gaokao* had allowed the rich and urban children who could afford better education to succeed the social capital from their parents. Even with the top education fees and unaffordable for normal families, many parents still spent their fortune to ensure that their children could score good grades in the *Gaokao*. Even with the free education provided by the government, the existence of private institutions had made China as having one of the most commodified education systems in the world.

Seybolt and Bastid’s perspective raised the question on whether the more egalitarian and balanced approach to provide education to the bottom stratum required political indoctrination. Moreover, resorting the assessment of the student to a singular examination method was already questioned and deemed to be redundant especially in European countries. In retrospect, the education method of the advance countries often resembled more of the Cultural Revolution style than the current Chinese method. They encourage students to learn more than books and examinations, conduct outdoor activities to establish dimensional advancement for the students’ thinking that had great advantage to induce the learning speed and interest of teenagers. Schools in China tended to focus on “teaching” the skills to solve the questions in examinations. There were indeed advantages and disadvantages

in both realms. However, it was disappointing that contemporary China had disregarded every element that were progressive in the Cultural Revolution.

On the other hand, conformist and commandist working culture has proliferated in contemporary China. Industrial giant Foxconn has managed to not only have absolute control over the working process, but essentially every aspect of the worker's life from leisure to living places. Besides the absurd working time at around 12 hours per day, the company also has the right to raid worker's room, barred them from breaks over not meeting production targets (Ngai and Chan, 2012). Worse of all, this working hour system had been endorsed by mainstream media and companies as the "correct and respectable" working system for the people. The once richest Chinese man Jack Ma, who gained his international fame as the creator as Alibaba, had even commented on this system as a "huge blessing" for the workers (BBC, 2019). Often, the workers were submitted to "voluntary working without over-time payment", afraid of being sacked if they do not comply with the employers. While the harsh working hour system was illegal in the labour law, there have been minimal measures done by the state to improve worker conditions.

Due to the rapid development of the Internet, information flow was very difficult to control by the authority even though the government had employed massive surveillance technology to keep things under control. For example, another e-commerce platform Pinduoduo in China was criticized venomously by online users on social media back in January of this year. The incident was first marked by a sudden death of its staff on the road home, but soon escalated into national news when it was discovered that the staff had been forced to work for 30 hours nonstop by the manager which directly caused her death (NetEase, 2021). The response of Pinduoduo sparked even more anger when the company claimed that it was the "rules" of society for the lower class to compete with their lives for a better life, while ignoring the death and subsequent suicidal cases in its company. It was not uncommon to see radical comments on the Internet regarding the nature of socialism in China, while some netizens even referred to the policy of Mao's era and compare it directly to the working conditions nowadays.

## 10. Conclusion

Writers from both journals were attracted by the disparities between China and the United States, particularly in the economic system, to write how socialism works in China. For the *Monthly Review* Marxist and socialist writers, they constantly sought to find solutions to transform their own capitalist society into socialism. This implicit urge drew the *Monthly Review* writers to look for the successful strategies in China that could be applied elsewhere, and hence their hopeful interpretation of the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile,



scholars from *China Quarterly* like Schurmann were interested in the type of organization and practical ideology required to drive the society into obeying the socialist values and the rule of the CCP. Their approach, on surface, sought no more than to display their analysis of the Chinese society with their respective theoretical framework. Nonetheless, they often drew similarities and lessons that the Chinese experience may offer to the capitalist world.

Self-reliance and mass mobilization were the Maoist strategies to combat commandism and a mechanism to allow decisions to be made by the people directly. In the short period of time, some success had been made to revert the capitalist tendencies. Both Bettelheim and Hinton highlighted new policies including removal of piece rates and actively inviting the workers and peasants into collective decision making in the production process. *China Quarterly* writers such as Seybolt and Bastid examined how the new education system, with more egalitarian and open-minded approach, provided the knowledge the poor students needed to increase the living standards of their families. The educational direction in the Cultural Revolution frequently required the students to become active in their ideological thinking to realize that the socialist construction requires constant critical thinking on what type of education really benefits the people, not only those with power or knowledge.

In the end, the Maoist strategy was deemed to be unsustainable, and the destruction outweighed the possible achievements in the Cultural Revolution. The post-Maoist leadership, with the damaged reputation on Mao's failure, resorted to pragmatism instead of ideological struggle. From Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, the party and government has constantly suppressed critical re-examination of the past to foster the environment to modernize China. Modernization brings economic growth and high living standards, but often with the cost of people having less saying in their lives. From education to work and to the newly introduced social credit system, every Chinese is carefully monitored, routinized, and standardized in a commandist style. This article does not evaluate which system is a superior one, as the many *Monthly Review* scholars and the new editor have been reasonably supportive of China's economic growth and sympathize with China's social problems (Samir, 2013; Foster and McChesney, 2012). The direct comparison is not very useful due to drastic differences of the backgrounds of the two societies. The article reminds how and why the Cultural Revolution is crucial for contemporary Chinese history, and a reflection of capitalism and modernization.

## Notes

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1. William Hinton possessed abundant experience of the Chinese countryside during Mao's period, where he stayed for over ten years and work closely with the Chinese peasants. Hinton's work *Fanshen* and later *Shenfan* had shed important light on life in the Long Bow village, while the latter work was especially important as it included the transformation during the Cultural Revolution.
2. Liu Shaoqi was originally the successor of Mao before the Cultural Revolution; he was referred to be the "organization man" by the first editor of the *China Quarterly*. The organization man signifies the preference of the premier to have overruled decision with bureaucracy, which was seen by Mao as conservatism. Please see MacFarquhar, R. (1997), *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, 1961-1966*, Vol. 3. p. 3.
3. The Liu faction here generally refers to the party members who weighted the importance of development and modernization over Maoist socialist values and agreed on Liu's strategy to incorporate state bureaucracy into the main drive of development, as opposed to the mass line tactics in Maoism. Most of the Liu faction members, such as Deng Xiaoping, was purged during the Cultural Revolution.
4. A part of Maoist thought has been based on an experimental success of the Anshan Constitution, which was a was a major attempt to implement Maoist strategy of mass mobilization in Chinese industries. The experience in the Anshan steel complex was taken as a prime example of how the experience of the management strata and the workers could coordinate so that the voice of the manual labour could influence the production process.
5. Again, the editors we referred to are the establisher of the *Monthly Review*, Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman. Sweezy was regarded as one of the most influential Marxian economists in the 20th century and his major works consist of critique of American capitalism. Leo Huberman also produces several important works in popular history with a socialist perspective.
6. Taylor system, also known as the scientific method of management, is a theory that analyzes the working process to achieve more efficiencies. Opponents of the theory, such as Braverman, argues that the Taylor system treats labourers as machines, micromanages them and ignores their human needs.
7. In essence, Braverman argues that the mental part of a labour process refers to the decision making, directing, and controlling how the production process should be executed. The manual part is the physical side of production. The separation of both became the major procedure for division of labour.
8. The *China Quarterly* journal was originally a branch of the Soviet Survey organized and published by the Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF). Most articles published in the journal contained the highest quality of China specialists during the time by mostly American scholars.
9. The *hsiafang* campaign allocates the intellectual and leadership elite into rural and industrial working place to exercise manual labour work with the peasants and workers. The intention was to both help educate the illiterate mass and to create experience of manual work for the privileged. This movement was very controversial and became one of the most criticized aspects of the Cultural Revolution.

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