

From Situational Dialectics to Pseudo-Dialectics: Mao, Jiang, and Capitalist Transition

Barbara Foley



Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin visits a photo exhibition in Beijing to mark the 80th anniversary of the Communist Party of China.

Addressing the July 1, 2001, celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CCP), Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin set forth his theory of the "Three Represents," in which he proposed that, by Constitutional amendment, capitalists be allowed to join the CCP. Although some 120,000 so-called "private entrepreneurs" already belonged to the CCP, the vast majority of these were Party members at the time when they became capitalists; Jiang was calling upon the CCP to admit to its ranks businesspeople who had amassed their profits entirely outside the Party fold. The press outside the PRC had--and continues to have--a field day.[1](#)

Although Jiang's speech met with initial approbation in the PRC, it soon became clear that he was encountering significant opposition within the ranks of the CCP leadership. At an inner-circle conference held at Beidaihe in August 2001, an open rift occurred between Jiang's forces and a substantial number of the Party's leftist elders who, in a "Letter of the Fourteen" addressed to the Central Committee, declared that Jiang's call for admitting capitalists "in no way constitutes a 'creative renewal' of Marxism, but rather, an outright negation of its basic principles." At the 15th Plenum of the CCP in October 2001, Jiang's proposal for a constitutional amendment permitting the recruitment of capitalists to the CCP was not even brought forward in order to avoid making the General Secretary publicly lose face. But Jiang's initiative is far from dead in the water; the doctrine of the "Three Represents" is being enshrined as Jiang's signal contribution to post-Mao CCP theory, alongside Deng Xiaoping's "Four Cardinal Principles," and it will set the agenda for the 16th CCP Plenum in October 2002. Moreover, practice has kept pace with--indeed, as happens typically in China these days, has outstripped--theory. Soon after Jiang's speech, the *South China Morning Post* reported that the CCP was being

"swamped" with new applications for membership, some even from businessmen in Hong Kong. The All-China Federation of Labor Unions then heaped praise upon private entrepreneurs, once seen as enemies of the working class: four of the recipients of Labor Day honors in May 2002 were businessmen--two of them Party members--singled out for their "contributions to China's economic development." Numerous new recruits from the business class will participate in the October 2002 plenum. Despite continuing opposition from forces within the CCP--as well as widespread dissatisfaction among the populace at large--appearances suggest that Jiang is going to win, indeed, that he, along with the forces within Chinese ruling elites for which he speaks, already has won.[2](#)

One could cite any number of indicators that the PRC has become for all practical purposes a capitalist country, and that even the residual features of the socialist "iron rice bowl" are rapidly being eroded. Income disparities have widened at one of the most rapid paces in the world: where in 1981 Gini Coefficient poverty index was 0.33, in 1994 it passed the critical point of 0.4 and is now over .45, greater than in India or Bangladesh. Annual per capital income is \$900, but most people scrape by on about \$200, while there are already 1.2 million households with incomes of \$100,000 or more and the wealthiest 20 percent of the populations receive half the income. There are thousands of Mercedes-driving, mansion-building multimillionaires in China, and Forbes now compiles a yearly list of the super-rich. Although some 5 million jobs were created in China in 2001, most of these were in the export sector and in any event did not keep pace with rising unemployment. About half of the PRC's state workers have been laid off, with more to come, judging by the recent decision to sell off the country's top 500 remaining SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) to foreign investors. The official unemployment rate is nearly 5 percent--about 7 million--though this does not include the 12 million laid off from SOEs; many investigators in the West put the unemployment rate at 25 percent in the cities, and some think it may be double that figure. Twenty million urban workers lost their jobs in 2001 alone, and a recent government "white paper" predicts that another 20 million will lose their jobs over the next four years as unemployment rises to new highs. Moreover, there are 150 million "surplus" rural workers; between 80 and 100 million workers--displaced peasants without residency status, "illegal aliens" in their own country--roam the country looking for work; if they are lucky, they labor 11-14 hours a day for subcontractors who often do not pay them for months; they have no minimum wages or job safety protections. It is largely the labor of such a reserve army of unemployed that has raised the glittering monuments to progress in downtown Shanghai. Youth unemployment is particularly severe, having risen from 50 to 70 percent over the past two years; 70% of the jobless workers are now under the age of 35. While there were great gains for women from 1949-76, now the unemployment rate for women is about twice that of men and there is the highest women's suicide rate in the world. There has been a wholesale dismantling of the public health system, which is now one of the worst in the world, with barefoot doctors eliminated from the rural areas and public health facilities largely closed down in the cities. Safety conditions on the job have nearly disappeared, as has been witnessed by the explosion two years ago of a rural fireworks factory, masquerading as a school, in which scores of juvenile employees died. Ten thousand workers, it is estimated, perish in China's mines every year.[3](#)

In the midst of this immense amassment of capital and impoverishment of workers and peasants--which should be viewed as a kind of present-day primitive accumulation--corruption is the rule of the day, and the alienation of the Party from the masses is becoming a source of great concern to the CCP leadership, who are themselves part of the problem, not the solution. While it is difficult to get accurate data, it has been estimated that between \$60 billion and a staggering \$360 billion has been taken from the public till through the privatization of SOEs, a process of "asset-stripping" in which Party members,

or their near relatives, are often the direct beneficiaries. While the PRC remains in name a proletarian state, a late 2001 survey by the prestigious Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) determined that the Chinese population can now be divided into ten sectors, in which the great majority of workers and peasants inhabit the bottom three levels. Meanwhile, the CCP is well represented among the top echelons of administrators, where Party membership varies regionally from 75 to 100 percent; almost 90 percent of Party officials have at least a college degree, as compared with 16.4% in 1981. Most of the 65 million Party members have landed in the richest 10 percent of the population, with annual incomes averaging 300,000 yuan (\$65,400), whereas the average urban worker earns some 6,000 yuan. At the highest levels, privatization has been spearheaded by the offspring of Party leaders. Jiang Mianheng, son of Jiang Zemin and popularly dubbed "China's digital princeling," masterminded the deregulation of the telecommunications market; Li Xiaopeng, eldest son of National People's Congress Chairman Li Peng, is President of the nation's largest independent electricity producer, Huaneng Power International. The children of Premier Zhu Rongji and Vice President Hu Jintao work, respectively, for Morgan Stanley and J. P. Morgan. Indeed, one observer opines that the CCP's elite "are preparing for the day when all hell breaks loose, trying to get foreign passports and sending their children and wealth abroad." One of Deng Xiaoping's granddaughters, a naturalized U.S. citizen, took a year off from Wellesley and enrolled at Beijing University as a foreign exchange student in order to "learn more about her Chinese heritage."[4](#)

The only bright spot in this dreary landscape is the growing rebelliousness of the Chinese working class. In 2000, according to an internal CCP report, there were over 3,000 incidents of worker uprising, on average about 80 per day. Over the past months, workers have occupied many SOEs--from toy factories to textile plants to the famed Daqing oil fields--to resist privatization and retain both jobs and "iron rice bowl" securities. The government has responded with promises to improve the safety net and stamp out corruption, but the processes of privatization are if anything accelerating, and even official sources estimate that unemployment will rise dramatically over the next few years. The crisis in leadership is dire: while there are indications that the strikes are being coordinated by an emerging generation of labor militants, and that strike leaders are establishing ties with left-leaning intellectuals, the repression has been sharp and probably will increase with the rising tide of class struggle. Supporters of Chinese socialism who believe that the die has not yet been cast--that leftist forces within the CCP can eventually win out, and that workers and peasants can once again travel the road to communist egalitarianism--are, I believe, fooling themselves if they think that these things will happen without another revolution.[5](#)

Although I could argue more fully the case that the PRC has undergone capitalist restoration, I have chosen in this essay to concentrate on Jiang's speech because it distills not only the movement toward capitalist restoration that began with the 1978 ascendance of Deng Xiaoping, but also the pseudo-Marxist rationale for what emerges more unabashedly every day as a grab for power and wealth by the new ruling class in the PRC. In Jiang's apologia, the echoes of the language of socialist construction and the invocation of communism's founding fathers ring so hollow that one is inevitably reminded of Marx's famous characterization of Louis Napoleon's resurrection of the tropes of the French Revolution as the rhetoric of farcical repetition. Rather than simply savor the irony of these echoes, however, and point to the ways in which the dominant elements in the CCP leadership cruelly distort the legacy of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao, what I wish to investigate are some of the ways in which this legacy is in fact vulnerable to such opportunistic appropriation. In particular, I shall propose, the CCP's current elevation of the Mao of 1936-49--especially the Mao of "On New Democracy"

(1940)--points to a peculiar tangency between Jiang's overt project of building up capitalism and certain nationalist, stagist, and productive forces determinist tendencies characterizing the project of social revolution in China from the very outset--tendencies that, while unique to China in many ways, also cannot be viewed apart from the entire strategy of the Third International in the era of the Popular Front. These tendencies have, further, been given theoretical justification in an economist reading of Marx and Engels and a pragmatist reading of Lenin, as well as in a class-collaborationist deployment of various dialectical categories developed by Mao, especially the notion of non-antagonistic contradiction. That these theorists and practitioners of modern communism were revolutionaries, while CCP leaders from Deng to Jiang have betrayed the revolutionary movement, only renders all the more urgent the need to understand the extent to which past theories and practices in the Communist legacy have contributed to this defeat. It is at our peril that those of us who remain convinced that capitalism is antithetical to human welfare and committed to bringing into being "a better world" ignore the lessons to be learned from the farce being boldly performed in the boardrooms of Shanghai and Beijing.[6](#)

Two methodological observations. First, I am aware that significant limitations accompany the text-based mode of political analysis that I am undertaking here, especially when I suggest that there is not merely a correlative but, to some degree, a causal connection between the discourse articulated by Jiang and its precursors in, especially, the texts of Mao. It is one thing to show that Jiang echoes and appropriates the rhetoric of Mao. It is quite another thing to demonstrate that Mao's theories of the late 1930s and 1940s--which I shall here term "situational dialectics"--both reflected and shaped a political practice which, however inadvertently, opened the door to capitalist restoration in the PRC--that is, to prove through historical evidence that the self-serving opportunism of the forces represented by Jiang is rooted in the un-self-serving opportunism involved in the CCP's chosen historical strategy for building "socialism with special Chinese characteristics." This argument would necessitate a lengthy critical survey of the New-Democratic period, of 1950s-1960s socialist construction, and especially of the Cultural Revolution, which furnished the immediate crucible out of which emerged the counter-revolutionary forces represented first by Deng and then by Jiang. Such a survey, while readily extractable from the extensive scholarship on modern China, is clearly beyond the purview of this essay. Lacking this supporting narrative, my comments here possess for many readers, I recognize, the status of hypothesis, and hypothesis alone.[7](#)

Second, what is at stake in this theoretical-cum-embedded-historical enterprise--and what supplies much of its rationale--is a larger inquiry into the status of what are usually termed "mistakes" or "errors" in movements to establish egalitarian societies run by the producers over the past century and more. If one is willing to grant for the moment my hypothesis--namely, that flawed policies and doctrines in the era of Mao may have ended up, however inadvertently, both contributing to and rationalizing wholesale capitalist construction in the era of Jiang, and thus constitute "errors"--the question then becomes, could, or should, the CCP in the 1940s have done anything different from what it did? If a theorization--and consequent course of action--emerges as having been erroneous in hindsight, does this make them erroneous at the time when they were formulated? What kinds of judgments are we in the present entitled--or, for that matter, required--to make of our predecessors?

Of particular concern in this inquiry into the meaning and status of "error" in revolution will be the relationship between external and internal contradictions, as these have played themselves out in left-led historical movements. To what extent can policies

and practices that turn out to have been errors in hindsight, but that are traceable to constraining external conditions over which revolutionaries had no control, be seen as "errors" at all? Does there need to have been a clear and practicable alternative in order for a chosen course, and mode of analysis, to count as mistaken? Correlatively, does an error performed for a second time--after it has been dubbed an error in critical or self-critical retrospect--invite the same assessment it was accorded in its first occurrence? Also involved in this inquiry is the relationship between a retreat and a stage, a specific tactic and a generalized strategy. If a communist party and its mass base are unable to move toward the left, either before or after a revolution has been made, and if they are forced to implement policies that objectively move them to the right, does this situation need to be codified as a necessary stage in the process of making revolution, or can--should--it simply be called a step backward? Do revolutionaries grappling with the complex contradictions of a given conjuncture, both internal and external, have a responsibility of some kind to their successors, such that posterity will not view what was undertaken as a temporary expedient to be understood as a strategic guidepost for the future? Finally, the particular theoretical error which, I am proposing, was involved in Mao's New-Democratic strategizing--namely, the doctrine of "non-antagonistic" contradictions among the great majority of the "people" constituting the "nation"--continues, in my view, to require critical scrutiny, insofar as, albeit in altered form and under variegated circumstances, stagist nationalism continues significantly to guide leftist practice to this day. I therefore hope that the following analysis of the rhetoric of Jiang, and in particular its invocation of Mao and the other founding fathers of communism, will provoke consideration of those fuller dimensions of the question of "error" that remain relevant to the projects of progressives and revolutionaries in our own troubled times.

I.

Informing Jiang's speech from beginning to end is a nationalist discourse that obfuscates class distinctions and precludes class analysis. The PRC is said to be a "state power of people's democratic dictatorship, with the Chinese people being the masters of their own destiny." It is claimed that "[a]ll socialist laborers, patriots endorsing socialism and patriots supporting national reunification have formed the broadest possible patriotic united front for the reunification and prosperity of the motherland." This populist language-directed here toward the issue of reunification of Taiwan with the Mainland--draws upon the heroic struggles against imperialism that accompanied the birth of "New China"--struggles themselves deploying the rhetoric of the international Popular Front Against Fascism. But this language functions in the current historical juncture to obscure the continuing--indeed, increasingly polarized--existence in China of classes as defined in the traditional Marxist sense--that is, by their relation to the production and appropriation of surplus value. The nationalistically resonant term "the people" dominates Jiang's discussion; class as a structural relation virtually disappears as an analytical category and is supplanted by such bourgeois sociological categories as "strata" and "circles." The working class *qua* working class is mentioned occasionally, but the term routinely used to describe those who engage in productive labor is "the overwhelming majority of the people."⁸

When the working class *is* mentioned, moreover, it is as a productive force rather than as the subject of class struggle or the object of exploitation. "Man is the most decisive factor in productive forces," declares Jiang. "The Chinese working class, including intellectuals, is the basic force that pushes the advanced productive forces forward in China." Nothing is said of the role of the working class in terminating its own alienated relation to production--indeed, of engaging in class struggle in order to abolish itself as a

class, presumably the goal of the movement toward communism. Instead, the working class--continually conflated with "the people"--fulfills its historical mission by engaging in the project of "modernization": "The people are the main body to create advanced productive forces and culture as well as the fundamental force to realize their own interests." There are, in other words, no fundamental class antagonisms; indeed, it is proposed--referencing Deng's famous proposition of 1981--that everyone can "become rich." China's new capitalists are thus not designated as "capitalists" at all, only as people in the "new social strata" who have "move[d] from one ownership sector or place to another, changing their jobs or capacity from time to time." "Becoming rich"--a process that, according to Marx, necessarily derives from the unequal exchange of labor power for wages, with the wealth of the few premised upon the impoverishment of the many--is something apparently possible for all "the people," if they are just willing to be patient and wait their turn. From this proposition, there is very little distance to travel to the conclusion that any and all who can be seen to have "contributed to the development of productive forces"--up to and including "people in the new social strata"--are eligible for membership in the purportedly "communist" party that is guiding this process of modernization.⁹

II.

While Jiang's position on recruiting to the CCP those "people in the new social strata" who are entrepreneurs and capitalists amounts to a fairly blatant apology for capitalist restoration, it is important to examine the reading of the Marxist tradition that rationalizes his argument. To begin with, his analysis is based upon a conflation of the Marxist tradition with productive forces determinism--that is, the doctrine that "[p]roductive forces are the most dynamic and the most revolutionary factor," the "ultimate decisive force of social development." Indeed, "productive forces" is by far the most frequently repeated phrase in the speech, furnishing a nodal point from which all other arguments radiate. Take the following representative sentence:

In order to remain a representative of the requirements of the development of China's advanced productive forces, it is necessary to bring the Party's theory, line, program, principles, policies and all work into line with the law governing the development of productive forces, make them reflect what is required in promoting the release and development of social productive forces, especially in the development of advanced productive forces so that the living standards of the people improve steadily through the development of productive forces.

This relentless--one might say, obsessive--focus upon productive forces (which builds upon Deng's struggle, over the preceding two decades, to characterize science and technology as themselves productive forces) is essential to Jiang's argument. For he proposes that there can be no socialism--let alone communism--unless a society has been fully industrialized (and, in the present era, computerized). It follows that those who take the lead in effecting this process can therefore be seen as objectively blazing the path toward egalitarianism, no matter how un- (or even anti-) egalitarian their policy and practice may be.¹⁰

No Marxist would deny that developments in technology and the organization of human labor fuel historical change, or that fully realized communism will entail abundance. Moreover, if one reads selectively one can find at various points in Marx's writings evidence of a productivist bias, accompanied by the "stagist" view that any given society must experience the full development of one mode of production before another

can supplant it. Thus in 1847 Marx wrote that "[i]f the material conditions that necessarily result in the disappearance of the capitalist mode of production and with it the overthrow of the capitalist ruling class have not yet appeared in the historical process, but should happen despite this before history requires it, then the victory of the proletariat in overturning the rule of the capitalist class can only be temporary." In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) Marx stated that "[n]o social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society." Moreover, Marx's discussion of "bourgeois right" in "The Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875) suggests that bourgeois democracy is--at least in the nineteenth-century European situation under consideration--a precondition to the movement toward socialism and then communism. There is an abiding contradiction in the Marxist legacy between the doctrine of class struggle on the one hand and the notion that technological change drives historical development.^{[11](#)}

Nonetheless, Marx and Engels can be read as productive forces determinists--that is, unequivocal advocates of the view that the fully achieved economic development of one mode of production is the necessary precondition to transition to another mode of production--only if one ignores overwhelming evidence to the contrary. What of their support for agrarian Irish resistance to British colonization? their thesis that the many hundreds-year-old Russian peasant commune might serve as the model for collectivized socialist agriculture? Marx's nuanced perception of the determining role played by politics in contemporaneous class struggles in France? Jiang's argument that "[t]he development of human society is a historical process of advanced productive forces replacing the backward ones" is a mechanical materialist caricature of the much fuller proposition, announced at the beginning of "The Communist Manifesto," that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Marx may have admired the modernizing feats achieved by the bourgeoisie, who removed the barriers and restraints, economic and political, upon the development of industry, technology, trade and law; but he also clearly understood the extent to which they had utilized the power of the state to achieve these feats, and had not waited passively for the capitalist mode of production to "mature" under feudalism in order to assert themselves on the state of history and win state power for themselves. Moreover, Marx unequivocally aligned himself--as both scientist and moralist--with the bourgeoisie's grave-diggers, whom he saw as the only group capable of advancing society to the next stage of history. Jiang's praise of Marxism for "having the theoretical quality of keeping up with the times," and of Marx and Engels for "improv[ing] their views and thinking in light of changing historical conditions," reduces the founders of scientific socialism to technological determinists, pragmatists, and, indeed, advocates of capitalism--at least over the many decades that Jiang and his supporters now estimate it will take even to get past the "primary stage of socialism," and the two to three thousand years it will take to achieve communism.^{[12](#)}

Accompanying Jiang's equation of historical materialism with technological determinism is his theoretical emphasis upon the notion of "fettering"--that is, the process by which outmoded relations of ownership hold back the emergence of new and more efficient modes of production and exchange. Although Marx and Engels indeed employed the metaphor of "fettering" to describe the ways in which feudal property relations had to be abolished in order for capitalism to become the dominant mode of production, and although they viewed capitalist property relations as in turn holding back the emergence of an egalitarian mode of production designed to meet human need, they *never* proposed that the development of productive forces could or would in and of

itself produce world-historical changes in the nature of social ownership. Only class struggle could accomplish that end. Indeed, their preferred metaphor for describing the process by which one mode of production supplants another was not fettering but birthing: the new order develops in the womb of the old, but it requires the labor of the maternal body and the skill of the midwife--that is, purposive work and struggle directed toward revolutionary political transition--for the process to be completed.[13](#)

If it is taken in a one-sided way to describe the *exclusive* force leading to development and change, however, the notion of fettering offers theoretical grounding for Jiang's proposition that *anything* standing in the way of the rapid development of a market economy--including elements of socialism--is historically and politically retrograde. As he puts it somewhat circuitously, the purpose of the recent "reforms and opening up policies" is to "adjust and reform the part of the socialist relations of production that is incompatible with the demand of the development of the productive forces and to adjust and reform the part of socialist superstructure that is incompatible with the economic base." In other words, because they cut into profits and hold back the development of a full-fledged market economy, socialist benefits--such as free medical care and free education--are in fact impediments to the development of socialism. Preoccupied with the need to "adjust and reform," indeed, Jiang sounds more like a power-broker for the IMF than the captain of a socialist ship of state. For Marx and Engels the principal fetter to be broken, in order to allow the productive forces full play, was that of *bourgeois* relations of production. For Jiang, it is residual features of *socialist* relations of production that must now be abolished in order for the productive forces to be emancipated. The irony is complete, and would be farcical indeed, were its consequences not so tragic for the Chinese working class--as well as for the hundreds of millions who at one point looked to China for leadership in their struggles to free themselves from the fetters of capitalist rule.[14](#)

III.

A further consequence of Jiang's embrace of a technological determinist model for social change is his ahistorical and voluntarist formulation of the relation of consciousness, and more broadly culture, to material reality. As Marx and Engels warned, mechanical materialism and idealism are flip sides of the same political--and epistemological--coin. If one were a thoroughgoing dialectical materialist, one would anticipate that a market-based economy would have to give rise to market-based ethics and patterns of human interaction: what else? But, even as he praises the virtues of the "socialist market economy" as the key to modernization, Jiang calls upon his audience to "combat and resist money worship, hedonism, ultra-egoism and other decadent ideas." "Socialist spiritual civilization," he declares, requires that Party members in particular adhere to "ideals and morality" in order to "build a lofty ideological and ethical foundation for maintaining a good public order and practice." Although he has elsewhere argued that "[a]ll relations of production and superstructures . . . develop with the development of productive forces," now Jiang insists, in classic idealist fashion, that such presumably "superstructural" phenomena as "ideals and morality" furnish the "base" for material activity ("good public order and practice"). What would figure as the impetus behind such "spiritual" values, however--that is, what would make Party members "always be clean, honest, and just"--remains unclear. After all, a profit-oriented economy rewards individualism and greed. The term "decadent" accuses, but it explains nothing, since it simply pins a moralistic label upon ideas and behaviors that in fact flow logically--dare one say, naturally?--from the regime of the market.[15](#)

Although Jiang's comments about the relationship between ethics and economy are riddled with non-Marxist inconsistencies, they play a critical role in his overall argument. For it is only by resorting to a conception of morality sealed off from materialist underpinnings that he can then account for the emergence of anti-egalitarian ideas and behaviors among those--entrepreneurs and Party officials alike--who are ostensibly taking the lead in contributing to socialist development by advancing the development of the nation's productive forces. Because he cannot talk about exploitation, in other words, Jiang rails against "formalism and bureaucracy" and, above all, "corruption." This last term is to be sure important, for combating the widespread popular cynicism about government-and Party-corruption is perhaps the key social control task confronting the CCP in the current period. In Jiang's formulation, however, the term obscures the causal nexus of the current system--exploitation--and instead carries the implication that present social arrangements are fundamentally just; anti-egalitarian practices are unfortunate but remediable deviations from the social(ist) norm. By the same token, moreover, Jiang can praise the personal qualities of those who--following Deng's exhortation--have "become rich" without breaking any of the rules or otherwise exhibiting egregiously selfish behavior. "It is not advisable to judge a person's political integrity," he states, "simply by whether one owns property and how much property he or she owns." A working-class-based (that is, Marxist) ethics would target as "immoral" the system that enables a person to amass property through the unequal exchange of labor power for wages; it would demonstrate that the process of "becoming rich" depends neither on luck nor on hard work, but upon the legalized theft that is exploitation. By contrast, Jiang's "spiritualist" ethics reduces morality to the realm of the merely personal. Writing from the heartland of bourgeois ethical obscurantism--where the "morality" of a recent President was held to consist not in his presiding over an empire based upon the most extreme violence and exploitation, but in whether or not he had sex with a White House intern--I hear in Jiang's privatized formulation of the relation of ethics to social role an all too familiar ring.¹⁶

In fact, Jiang's praise of "lofty ideals" as the basis of "socialist spiritual civilization" not only separates morality from the marketplace but also provides an alibi for the substitution of pragmatism for Marxism, market-based "reform" for revolution--and, therefore, the recruitment of capitalists to the ranks of the Party. For, crucially, the term "lofty" also occurs in his stern admonition to those comrades who, embracing a "lofty communist ideal," forget that "China is now in the primary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long time to come." He warns that to "talk big about the lofty ideal without doing any practical work will get one divorced from reality." Echoing Deng Xiaoping's assertion that one of the two cardinal principles of "Mao Zedong Thought" is "seeking truth from facts," Jiang urges his audience to "carry forward and promote the spirit of practicality, truth-seeking and courage in innovation." The market is thus the realm of "fact," and "experience" is the means to "truth." (That both "fact" and "experience" can never exist in unmediated form--an elementary tenet of dialectics--is ignored: in the Deng/Jiang pragmatist apology for capitalism, positivism necessarily supplants dialectical materialism.) Communism, by contrast with this realm of hard and real facticity, is a far-off land of dreams--"lofty," to be sure, but for all practical purposes irrelevant to the process of developing the productive forces, and in fact harmful if taken to signify a course opposing the market--and, therefore, exploitation. The future of "the overwhelming majority of the people" is far more secure in the hands of entrepreneurs, it seems, than in the hands of dreamers who wish to abolish alienated labor.¹⁷

IV.

Much of Jiang's assault upon the Marxist formulation of class is premised upon a distortion of key Marxist categories even as he genuflects in the direction of dialectical

materialism. For as part of his insistence upon a Marxism that "keeps up with the times," Jiang warns that "[i]f we dogmatically cling to some individual theses and specific programs of action formulated for a special situation by authors of Marxist classics in the specific historical conditions in spite of the changes in historical conditions and present realities, then we will have difficulty in forging ahead smoothly and we may even make mistakes because thinking is divorced from reality." Masquerading as a hard-nosed materialist impatient with idle theorizing, Jiang here uses the category of "specificity" to describe--but then dismiss--principles that are in fact not secondary but primary, not ancillary but fundamental, to Marxism. For what is it that he accuses the "dogmatists" of clinging to in the Marxist tradition?

The theory on labor and labor value in a capitalist society advanced by Marxist classical writers brings to light the operational features of the capitalist mode of production and its basic contradictions at that time. At present, we are putting in place a socialist market economy. But the conditions we are faced with are quite different from those the founders of Marxism were faced with and studied.

What Jiang proposes to jettison as "dogma" is the theorization of the relation of labor power to capital that constitutes the core of Marxist economic theory.

The reason for this move is Jiang's need to reformulate the notion of "labor and labor value" embedded in the Marxist definition of the working class in such a way as to efface the notion of exploitation. "With the development of reform, opening up and modernization," he declares, "the working class in China has expanded steadily." It has become "more progressive" as it incorporates "intellectuals" and others who have "changed their jobs" as part of the "strategic readjustments to the economic structure" produced by the "socialist market economy" (that is, presumably, managers and entrepreneurs). To adhere to the definition of the working class as those laborers who produce surplus value is "dogmatic," the nostalgic residue of a "specific" moment of history now long past. By contrast, to redefine the working class as those who develop the productive forces--exploiters and workers alike--is to embrace a flexible, trendy Marxism that keeps itself up to date. It is ironic--but also fitting--that Jiang repudiates the fundamentals of Marxist class analysis at a time when there is a dramatic increase in worker uprisings in China's cities, peasant rebellions against taxation in the countryside, and militant acts of resistance to the privatization of SOEs. Jiang's Marxism that "develops with the times" is on a collision course with the Marxism that describes the emergence of capitalism's grave-diggers from capitalism's contradictions.

Jiang's deployment of the categories of particularity and generality to empty Marxism of its class content warrants special notice, for it signals the methodological sleight of hand central to the notion of "socialism with special Chinese characteristics" that supplies the bedrock premise of the current CCP line (and not simply Jiang's contribution). "Socialism" is asserted to be the general category describing the social order. "With special Chinese characteristics" is merely a modifying phrase, signifying the secondary or ancillary nature of the particular ("special") form socialism takes in the PRC and the non-essence-determining nature of the qualities ("characteristics") accompanying that form. Yet if the phrase "with special Chinese characteristics" means that bosses may now exploit workers under the cover of a class-superseding national project aimed at developing the productive forces, one might question whether the more accurate description might not be "capitalism with special Chinese characteristics"--these "characteristics" being, if you will, the nostalgic residue of a socialist moment now rapidly retreating into the past. Through machinations that can best be termed pseudo-dialectical, the categories of the general and the specific are inverted. The notion of

particularity serves both politically and epistemologically to blur the transmutation of socialism back into capitalism.[18](#)

V.

We now come to the (in)famous theory of the "Three Represents." On one level, this formulation can simply be seen to beg the question: the CCP will "represent" the "most advanced productive forces, the most advanced cultural level, and the interests of the great majority of the Chinese people" if, well, in fact it does so. That is, what matters is *who* is doing the representing, and how this "who" interprets each of these three entities. If the driver's seat is occupied by genuine communists who have at heart the fundamental needs of the producing masses, there is no problem. On another level, however, the formulation is highly suspect, for it clearly it has opened the door of the Party to Chinese capitalists--who are, after all, part of the "Chinese people," and therefore can be construed as a critical element of "the most advanced productive forces." It is worthwhile to tease out various implications of Jiang's famous formulation.[19](#)

We must remember, first, that Jiang is talking about a party that holds state power and, in many senses, *is* the state. (There are a number of small political formations purportedly speaking for various non-Party interests in the PRC, but clearly the CCP holds, and intends to continue to hold, a monopoly upon political power.) Jiang is, moreover, talking about what he insists is "the primary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long time to come." According to classic Marxist theory, however, the state is by definition an instrument that one class--sometimes in alliance with other classes or class sectors--wields to control another class or classes. "Political power," writes Marx in the "Manifesto," is "merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another." The state, writes Lenin in *The State and Revolution* (a presence notably absent from Jiang's speech), "is the product and the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms"; moreover, socialism is the period of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," during which the working class (and its allies) use the power of the state forcibly to suppress any class or classes seeking to reinstitute capitalist relations of production. In classic Marxist-Leninist theory, that is, socialism is a condition in which the classes inherited from the old relations of production still exist. Hence, under socialism the state is still marked by its class character; the communist party that holds state power "represents" the producing masses by its continuing allegiance to them, and struggle on behalf of them, as one class (broadly conceived as the working class and the peasantry) vis a vis another. "Representation" thus remains a partisan act.[20](#)

In Jiang's formulation, however, the notion of "representation" takes on a qualitatively different meaning as it slips from one register to another. Because, as we have seen, Jiang has identified the working class as a "force of production," and has then stipulated that anyone who helps to develop the productive forces counts as a member of the working class, the notion of the "working class" has already been deprived of any connection with either exploitation or class struggle. The next step--to theorize, in the first of the "Three Represents," that the CCP "represents" the "most advanced forces of production"--abandons entirely any notion of *political* representation, or partisanship, and instead implies "representation" as "embodiment," "containment," or "signification," whereby the entity doing the representing is simply rendered *equivalent* to the entity being represented. For forces of production are not political actors; indeed, as Jiang has elsewhere stipulated, "the people are the main body to *create* advanced productive forces" (emphasis added). In the "Three Represents," however, "advanced productive forces" are "represented" not as social groups with interests or needs mediated through political power wielded on their behalf, but only as abstracted material resources, capable of being

"represented" not through advocacy--or struggle--but through identity.[21](#)

The second of Jiang's "Three Represents"--that the CCP stands for "the most advanced cultural level"--is similarly depoliticized. A historical materialist approach to the "culture" of socialism, adhering to the base/superstructure paradigm that Jiang purports to endorse, would proceed from the premise that, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, class struggle would continue to fight itself out in the cultural realm. The "most advanced cultural level" would therefore still be defined as, above all else, those elements of culture enabling the working class to develop the consciousness needed to complete its world-historical mission of defeating the former ruling class, once and for all. As we have seen, however, Jiang has elsewhere severed the connection between such features of consciousness as morality, ambition, and integrity and their material determinants. While he does not state in his speech exactly what he means by "the most advanced cultural level," then, one can readily conclude from the surrounding context that the "most advanced cultural level," corresponding as superstructure to the "most advanced productive forces" constituting the base, would comprise engineering or computer skills, not proletarian literature and art--though it might take in an up-to-date taste for foreign films, so long as these are not too redolent of "spiritual pollution"! After all, Jiang has made it clear that "[s]cience and technology are the primary productive forces and a concentrated expression and a hallmark of advanced productive forces." China's outwardly-gazing and internet-surfing young urban professionals and entrepreneurs, Jiang strongly implies, now bear the banner of "the most advanced cultural level." Indeed, if the updated forms of socialist realism on display in the Museum of Revolutionary Art on Tiananmen Square in celebration of the 80th anniversary of the CCP are any indication of the propagandistic role played by works of art under Jiang's regime, the upwardly mobile university students who fought for more rapid liberalization and Westernization outside the museum's portals in 1989 have, it seems, won the day. The tractor-driving peasants of yesteryear have been definitively replaced by well-dressed young urban professionals--even if these representatives of the most advanced culture somewhat awkwardly embrace sheaves of wheat as they stand in fields in their business suits and high-heeled shoes. (Figure 1)[22](#)

In the last of the "Three Represents," Jiang invokes the more familiar political meaning of "representation" as "advocating for" when he asserts that the CCP "represents" the "interests of the great majority of the people" (who are indeed workers and peasants). But since his nationalist and class-superseding description of "the people" elsewhere in the speech has deprived the term of any capacity to signify those who produce a surplus that is appropriated by others, his usage of the term "representation" here bears a closer resemblance to the usage of the term by bourgeois political theorists of "democracy"--for whom "representation" serves largely to paper over the reality of class struggle--than to the usage of Marx. Moreover, the sense of "representation" as "embodiment" or "signification" accompanying the first and second of the "Three Represents" spills over into the third as well, even though there is--or should be--a qualitative difference between, on the one hand, "advanced productive forces" and the "advanced cultural level" to which they give rise, and, on the other, "the people who are the main body to create advanced productive forces." For the implied categorical parallelism in the "Three Represents" between the three *entities being represented* also implies a parallelism among the three *acts of representation*. That Jiang is inconsistent in his portrayal of the role played by the "advanced productive forces" as well as of their constitution--are they *created by* people, or do they *consist of* people?--only confuses matters further. Jiang's doctrine of the "Three Represents" displays the distance he has traveled from the discussions of state power in the classics of Marxism-Leninism. His formulation betrays the working class not just in its explicit call for admitting capitalists

to the Party, but also in its hollowing out of the logic that would permit class analysis--of either the Party or the state--altogether.

I do not presume to know Jiang's motivations, public or private. He may actually believe that the "socialist market economy" will indeed lead, through many twists and turns, to a non-exploitative society. He may think that encoding the "Three Represents" into the Constitution of the PRC will safeguard the "interests of the great majority of the people." He may be inviting private-sector capitalists into the CCP because he wants to co-opt them, thereby preventing them from organizing in ways that will lead to frontal confrontation with the CCP. Moreover, Jiang may not personally intend to gain in the process (although the fortunes amassed by the offspring of prominent CCP officials, starting with Deng, indicate that Party leaders have managed to feather their own families' nests quite nicely thus far over the past couple of decades). But betrayal is an objective, not a subjective, phenomenon. It is evident that, through the "Three Represents," Jiang has vigorously and purposively cleared the path for private entrepreneurs--who, he knows, are making bonanza profits off the labor of wage-slaves earning \$24 a month or less--to hold state power in an open and unambiguous manner. And these capitalists possess knowledge that power flows from wealth--and, ultimately, as the events of 1989 showed, from the barrel of a gun. While I am aware that some leftist China-watchers believe that the CCP leadership still has the best interests of China's producing masses at heart, and that an egalitarian society may yet emerge from the tortuous process of capitalist development under this leadership's guidance, in my view the "communist" party offering to share power with the class of "entrepreneurs" can no longer be a communist party in anything but name--indeed, cannot have been one for some time. Jiang's speech is not merely "revisionist," then, but an open statement of bourgeois point of view and reflection of bourgeois class interest--that is, it is "ideological," in the most pejorative sense of the word. That the CCP may be trying to co-opt rather than confront China's free-enterprise capitalists only indicates that the differences between the forces "represented" by Jiang and those "represented" by the new echelon of "entrepreneurs" are at most tactical. That the CCP continues to retain within its ranks honest and intelligent cadre--cadre who believe, or want to believe, that the theory and practice of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin will lead eventually to communist egalitarianism--only accents and compounds, for me, the tragedy of the betrayal.

VI.

The codification of "socialism with special Chinese characteristics" as the core of Chinese Marxism dates from the era of Deng Xiaoping. But if we are to understand fully the capitalist apologetics articulated by Deng and Jiang, we need to investigate their historical connection with--and not simply their opportunistic appropriation of--Mao's formulation of the particularities of the task facing Chinese communists as they moved toward, and then consolidated, their hold upon state power. This proposal might seem perverse, at first blush, given the evident antagonism of Deng and Jiang toward much of what occurred--in both theory and practice--during the chairmanship of Mao. Indeed, although he does not mention the name of Mao, Jiang's prime examples of "dogmatism" are clearly the periods of the Great Leap Forward and, especially, the Cultural Revolution:

Our Party made mistakes and even suffered serious setbacks in some historical periods. The most important cause for that was the guiding ideology of the Party was divorced from Chinese reality at the time. It was after our Party restored and upheld the ideological line of emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts

that the Party corrected its mistakes, overcame its setbacks and forged ahead triumphantly by relying on the strengths of itself and the people.

Voicing the critique of the "ultra-left" direction taken by Mao from 1958 until this death in 1976 that was put forth by Deng with steadily increasing intensity from 1978 onward, Jiang presents what has become the CCP's standard analysis of the "whirlpools" through which the "old ship of China" needed to be steered to reach "the strategic pass of the new period." For all his abiding avuncular presence in portraits gazing down in public places and the ritual invocation of "Mao Zedong Thought" by the PRC leadership, most of Mao's writings are all but inaccessible in the PRC these days. At the Foreign Language bookstore in Beijing in the summer of 2001, one could easily find the *Complete Works of Deng Xiaoping*, but the only available texts by Mao were *Mao on Diplomacy*--a recent compilation of speeches implicitly portraying Mao as prophesying China's emergence as a key player in the era of globalization--and his *Poems*.[23](#)

Even as the Mao of the period of socialist construction is alternately castigated and "disappeared," however, the early Mao--especially of the pre-revolutionary years 1936-49--has been cited for at least a decade by CCP theorists seeking historical precedent for the leadership's policies. Who was this Mao of 1936-49? On the one hand, it was the Mao who, after the historic Wayaopao Conference of December 1935, assumed leadership of the Long March; rejecting the Comintern's disastrous strategy of urban concentration, he formulated the plan for rural insurgency that would result in the expulsion of the Japanese army, land reform, the defeat of the KMT, and the founding of the PRC. But it was also the Mao who, in devising the theory and practice that would result in these victories, continually reformulated the categories of "the people" and "the enemy" in ways readily convertible into Jiang's current obfuscating description of the PRC as a "state power of people's dictatorship, with the Chinese people being masters of their own destiny." For example, in late 1936 and early 1937 Mao argued that Chiang-Kai-Shek, previously designated a "traitor," should now be seen as an ally; he continued to argue for this position, even though the KMT periodically attacked the CCP-led armies throughout the anti-Japanese war. At this time, Mao advocated, the CCP's early 1930s call for a workers' and peasants' democratic republic--urged in his own earliest writings about class relations in rural China--had to be suspended. For the principal antagonist of almost all the "Chinese people"--excepting the comprador bourgeoisie and certain sectors of the landlord class--was at this point, Mao argued, Japanese imperialism. Moreover, from 1939 forward Mao courted the national bourgeoisie, writing that "a certain degree of capitalist development" was in fact needed in order to develop the nation's productive forces. In 1942, amidst the struggle over the nature and extent of land reform, Mao warned that the principal danger facing the CCP remained a dogmatism that overrelied on "book learning"--a salvo clearly directed at "left dogmatists" who persisted in talking about irreconcilable class antagonisms. Writing about "coalition government" in 1945, Mao urged that "[i]t is not domestic capitalism but foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism which are superfluous in China today; indeed, we have too little capitalism." With the founding of the PRC in 1949, he wrote of the "people's democratic dictatorship" as a pre-socialist period in which, he reiterated, it was necessary to "regulate capitalism, not to destroy it." Such statements--especially those portraying Mao as pro-capitalist--are continually repeated by the current apologists for capitalist restoration in the PRC.[24](#)

By far the most influential of Mao's early writings in the current period, however, has proven to be "On New Democracy" (January 1940), the *locus classicus* of Mao's theoretical case for a stagist approach to the Chinese revolution. Here Mao proposed that what China needed to adopt was "a new"--if "transitional"--"form of the state" as the "joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes" that were opposed to Japanese

imperialism and committed to securing a "free" and "independent" China. Invoking for the first time what would become, after Deng, his most famous four words, he charged Party members to "seek truth from facts." Those who practiced "'left' phrase-mongering" and embraced the "theory of a single revolution" that would attempt to bypass the phase of New Democracy, he warned, were at best "utopian" and at worst "counter-revolutionaries." It was impossible, moreover, immediately to institute socialist agriculture or go beyond a policy of land to the tiller: underpinning Mao's theorization of the necessity for New Democracy was the view of "the national question as a peasant question" inherited from debates within the Second and fledgling Third Internationals during the early decades of the century. Similarly, Mao maintained, it was impossible to construct a socialist culture so long as the New-Democratic form of the state and the economy prevailed. Introducing a term that would receive quite different formulation twenty-five years hence, he wrote that the "cultural revolution" which was needed to win the populace to follow the socialist path was itself "not yet socialist." Taking a page from the Soviets' view of socialist cultural production as largely "national in form, proletarian in content," Mao declared that "New-Democratic culture is national in form and New-Democratic in content."[25](#)

Containing an explicitly stagist argument for setting up a state apparatus in which opposed class interests can jointly hold power, "On New Democracy" has been widely cited by proponents of the policies of the current CCP leadership. Another early theoretical essay, "On Contradiction" (August 1937)--in which Mao built upon current Soviet developments in dialectics--is also cited, if less frequently. In this seminal essay, Mao posited the equal importance of the "universality" and the "particularity" of contradiction but laid great stress upon the need for studying the latter because, he declared, "it is still not understood by many comrades, and especially by the dogmatists," who failed to grasp its the importance as a guide to "the concrete things confronting us . . . in the course of revolutionary practice." Working from the premise that "there is nothing in the world but matter in motion, and this motion must assume certain forms," Mao argued that "each process of development which is real (and not imaginary) is qualitatively different." As a result,

[q]ualitatively different contradictions can only be resolved by qualitatively different methods. For instance, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is resolved by the method of socialist revolution; the contradiction between the great masses of the people and the feudal system is resolved by the method of democratic revolution; the contradiction between the colonies and imperialism is resolved by the method of national revolutionary war.

Moreover, Mao asserted, "each stage in [the whole process of the movement of opposites in the development of a thing] has its particular features to which we must give attention." The role of the KMT provided a case in point, functioning as a "revolutionary and vigorous . . . alliance of various classes for the democratic revolution" in the period preceding 1927, then "chang[ing] into its opposite and be[coming] a reactionary bloc of the landlords and big bourgeoisie," but, "[a]fter the Sian Incident in December 1936, be[ginning] another change in the direction of ending the civil war and co-operating with the Communist Party for joint opposition to Japanese imperialism." It was attending to such particularities, Mao wrote, that "Lenin meant . . . when he said that 'the most essential thing in Marxism, the living soul of Marxism, is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions.'"[26](#)

Mao also developed at the end of this 1937 essay the correlative--and politically crucial--category of "non-antagonistic contradiction." Noting that contradiction entails

the "struggle of opposites," Mao proposed that "antagonism is one form, but not the only form, of the struggle of opposites." On the one hand, communists must understand that "revolutions and revolutionary wars are inevitable in class society and that without them, it is impossible to accomplish any leap in social development and to overthrow the reactionary ruling classes and therefore impossible for the people to win political power." On the other hand, "we must make a concrete study of the circumstances of each specific struggle of opposites and should not arbitrarily apply [this] formula to everything. . . . Some contradictions are characterized by open antagonism, others are not. In accordance with the concrete development of things, some contradictions which were originally non-antagonistic develop into antagonistic ones, while others which were originally antagonistic develop into non-antagonistic ones." Mao evidently had two historical examples in mind. The first was the relationship between the Communist Party and the other elements in the anti-Japanese alliance; the permutations in the essence of the KMT between 1927 and 1937 were to be understood as instances of the historical mutability of the categories of antagonism and non-antagonism. The other historical example was that of contemporary socialism--both in the U.S.S.R. and in "our revolutionary base areas"--where the "contradiction between town and country," which had been "extremely antagonistic" in the capitalist and feudal/colonial modes of production, was now presumably non-antagonistic. In this context Mao cited Lenin to the effect that "[a]ntagonism and contradiction are not at all one and the same. Under socialism, the first will disappear, the second will remain." Formulated well before the CCP would have the opportunity to engage in its own project of socialist construction, Mao's influential theorization--itself heavily influenced by Soviet dialectical theory--profoundly shaped, I suggest, the notions of alliance and coalition guiding that enterprise.[27](#)

VII.

How are we to come to terms with these evidences of--and rationales for stagism, even class collaboration, in the writings of the early Mao? And how are we to understand the use made of such statements by the current CCP leadership? If it could be determined that Mao's nationalistic formulation of "the people," "the enemy," and "non-antagonistic contradiction" has helped to shape the development of capitalism in China, and is not simply opportunistically invoked to lend legitimacy to the present trends, what then would be the status of the "error" with which Mao can be charged?

On the one hand, we must keep in mind the historical and political context within which Mao was writing and acting, as well as the many provisos he attached to his call for national unity of "the people" against "the enemy." At the moment when Mao assumed leadership in China's revolutionary movement, there was indeed a critical need to understand--and map--the revolutionary process in accordance with the particularities of China's demographics and terrain. At the 1935 Wayaobao conference, implementation of the Third International's recommended policy--based in the Soviet experience--was acknowledged, by the CCP leadership and the Comintern alike, to have resulted in unmitigated disaster, not only in 1927 but subsequently, with the near-obliteration of the Communist-led army and the deaths of millions of peasants from the KMT's destruction of crops and land in areas sympathetic with the Communists. Making a revolution for socialism in China's overwhelmingly peasant-based economy would henceforth have to involve a policy founded upon the particularities of the nation in question. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that, even as Mao urged nationalist collaboration with the KMT during the anti-Japanese war and proclaimed the necessity for postponing the seizure of private property, he never relinquished a class analysis of the relations among the sectors of the population; he simply advocated that these relations be construed as having secondary importance. Nor did he fail to point out that the CCP honored the wartime

alliance while the KMT continually engaged in nighttime raids against the Communist forces which, during the day, were holding off the Japanese. Furthermore, Mao's call for national unity against the "enemy" did not preclude his criticizing what he considered the "narrow nationalism" of the national bourgeoisie or, more importantly, his continually invoking proletarian internationalism. Nor did he cease to state that the long-term goal of the CCP was the abolition of exploitation and the dictatorship of the workers and the peasants. Although he at this time targeted "Left Deviationism" as the main danger in the Party's "style of work," he chided those who "rest content with their own experience" and viewed both "dogmatism" and "empiricism" as sources of "subjectivism." Indeed, he characterized the difference between Left and Right deviationism as primarily a difference in the estimates of time-frame that they entailed: "If the observation you make of the movement of things does not agree with reality, it is a 'Left' deviation if your judgment is premature, and it is a Right deviation if your judgment lags behind." The early Mao's battle with the "dogmatists" should therefore be read as an intra-Party struggle among comrades committed to the common goal of making revolution against an exploitative social order, not as advocacy of an early version of the Deng doctrine that it does not matter what color a cat is, so long as it catches mice.[28](#)

Furthermore, we should realize that Mao soon delivered upon his promise that the period of New Democracy was indeed merely "transitional." On the eve of the seizure of state power, even as he called for the stage of "people's democratic dictatorship" as prefatory to socialism, he wrote that the state was an instrument of oppression and needed to be abolished. By mid-1952 he was writing that the contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie had emerged as the principal contradiction in the PRC; significantly, by mid-1953 he proclaimed that this contradiction was "antagonistic." Moreover, Mao now chastised those Party members who embraced "Right Deviationist Views" and went to "pushing their 'New Democracy' instead of socialist transformation"; the main manifestation of "bourgeois ideas" in the Party was not corruption, he charged, but pro-capitalism, and its characteristic theoretical stance was empiricist.[29](#)

Starting in the mid-1950s, moreover, Mao revised his timeframe for socialist construction. Although China was still "state capitalist" at this point, he argued, it was on the road to socialism, which he estimated it would take some fifteen years--three Five-Year Plans--to travel. Where earlier he had estimated that the stage of New Democracy would last between ten and twenty years, before even the first steps toward socialist construction could be taken, now he dated the era of socialist revolution back to the founding of the PRC in 1949; New Democracy was in effect collapsed into the first stages of socialism through the notion of "transition." Opting not to wait for fuller industrialization to begin the formation of rural co-operatives, he unabashedly proclaimed that the goal of "agricultural co-operation" was

to consolidate our alliance with the peasants on the basis of proletarian socialism and not of bourgeois democracy. That will isolate the bourgeoisie once and for all and facilitate the final elimination of capitalism. On this matter we are quite heartless! On this matter indeed Marxism is indeed cruel and has little mercy, for it is determined to exterminate the bourgeoisie and capitalism in China, a country with a population of 600 million. Our aim is to exterminate capitalism, obliterate it from the face of the earth and make it a thing of the past. What emerges in history is bound to die out. Everything in the world is a historical phenomenon; as there is life, so there must be death. As a historical phenomenon, capitalism must also die out, and it has a very nice place to go, that is, underground, there to 'sleep.'

Although the Mao of the early to mid-fifties is still given perfunctory credit for having initiated socialist construction in the PRC and has not been entirely excised from historical memory, it bears noting that such statements are never cited in current accounts of his contribution.[30](#)

I have cited the Mao of this period at some length in order to emphasize that his earlier espousal of New Democracy was--as he himself insisted at the time--a pragmatic move, a tactic akin to Lenin's espousal of the New Economic Policy in the U.S.S.R. of the 1920s. New Democracy was, for Mao, "transitional," and by "transitional" he signified an interim period that was to be over and done with as soon as possible: the verve with which he would soon write about of the need for burying capitalism was not an impulse newfound in the 1950s, but an abiding feature of his revolutionary outlook. Those contemporary CCP theorists who selectively read the Mao of New Democracy as a harbinger of Jiang's managerial policies of structural adjustment thus profoundly distort the intentions of the founder of "Mao Zedong Thought." When Mao battled with the "dogmatists" of his time, what was primarily at issue was not whether China needed fully to develop capitalism before it could move to socialism, but how soon the Communists could initiate socialist construction in their "backward" country after seizing state power; the span of years under debate was measured not in millennia but in five-year plans. By contrast, the current defenders of the "Three Represents" treat as "dogmatic" the proposition that CCP should engage in anything other than the development of China's productive forces for scores of future generations. Moreover, Mao clearly stipulated in 1949 that the form of the state accompanying the "people's democratic dictatorship" was not socialist, but a pre-socialist formation. Jiang, by contrast, states that the PRC has "creatively materialized the transformation from new democracy to socialism and established the basic system of socialism in an all-round way" yet a moment later blithely refers to the China of 2001 as a "state power of people's democratic dictatorship"--thereby conflating Mao's description of a transitional political formation, comprising classes that he would soon see once again as antagonistically counterposed, with a form of the state that will presumably last for thousands of years. Furthermore, when Mao cited Lenin on the need for concreteness, proclaimed the need for "seeking truth from facts," and chided certain comrades for their "bookishness," he was contesting what he saw as certain forms of rigidity in applying Marxism to particular circumstances, not the relevance of Marxist theory--including the theory of class struggle--to an understanding of the past, present, and future. When Jiang and his allies decry "bookishness," by contrast, what they are targeting is the attempt to bring to bear upon Chinese reality any feature of Marxism that does not feature the centrality of developing productive forces; any feature of Leninism that does not highlight the pragmatism of the New Economic Policy era; any feature of Maoism that cannot be boiled down to "seeking truth from facts" and tailoring Marxism to the "particularities" of the Chinese situation.[31](#)

On the other hand, even if we grant that the capitalist-roads currently setting policy in the PRC have manipulated the revolutionary legacy to their own ends, we still need to acknowledge the extent to which this legacy contains revisionist elements that may have given rise to their own misappropriation. Demonizing Deng and Jiang, or viewing them simply as, respectively, the perpetrator and the consolidator of a coup d'etat by a "red" bourgeoisie seeking from the outset its own gain, offers little by way of dialectical analysis. Nor does construing the bourgeois seizure of power in China as a hijacking of the convoy on the road to communism help us to guard against the resurgence of class divisions and exploitation in whatever site the unpropertied masses next succeed in making revolution. We may now address the matter of "error."

To begin with, even if he intended New Democracy and the "People's Democratic Dictatorship" to be nothing more than transitional, Mao still asserted that different classes--some of them consisting of exploiters, others of exploited--could and should share power in the state. This formulation fundamentally runs counter to the Marxist-Leninist view of the state as the executive of the ruling class. Mao may have intended his articulation of the category of "non-antagonistic contradiction" to provide a rationale for this sharing of power that would still allow for an acknowledgement of abiding class contradictions. In retrospect, however, we can postulate that it functioned in the opposite way, violating Marx's fundamental dialectical principle that "contradictions can be mediated only in the limited situation where the two sides are essentially unified in the first place, but have come into contradiction with each other. 'Real extremes,' however, 'cannot be mediated precisely because they are real extremes . . . They are opposed in essence.'" Much of Marx's oeuvre was devoted to explicating how the most critical of these "real extremes" was the contradiction between labor and capital; Mao's proposal that war against an external enemy--the Japanese, the comprador bourgeoisie--might mediate this contradiction was, fundamentally, an opportunistic move. This move, moreover, flew in the face of the further dialectical principle--ably articulated by Mao himself in "On Contradiction"--that the main contradiction shaping any process is internal to it, with external contradictions providing only the conditions of possibility whereby internal contradictions work themselves out. Even when Mao backed off from the Right in the CCP in the early 1950s, chastising them for empiricism and timidity in their fixation upon New Democracy, he did not rebuke them for aligning with the wrong class (the core internal contradiction making them pro-capitalist) but for simply lagging behind the pace of socialist construction--a criticism that displaced the class question onto their erroneous assessment of the external conditions facilitating or impeding socialist construction.[32](#)

In addition, while Mao quoted Lenin to the effect that contradiction and antagonism are not the same thing, he neglected Lenin's other insight that "[t]he unity (coincidence, identity, equal actions) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute." Historical developments in the PRC suggest that, during the period of socialist construction, the relationship between the national bourgeoisie and the masses of peasants and workers remained an antagonistic one, with capitalists acceding to the demands of the state-run economy only under duress--to the point, indeed, where that national bourgeoisie, after the open class struggle that was the Cultural Revolution, seized back control of the state. At least as it is applied to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, then, the class contradiction is, and always has been, a fundamentally antagonistic one--as Mao himself recognized in his earliest writings on the peasant question in Hunan in 1927. While Mao attempted to reframe this relationship and sharpen the class contradiction in the 1950s and beyond, his theoretical legacy from the years 1936-49 codified an alternative view of the class contradiction, and therefore may in fact supply Jiang with some precedent for his proposed 2001 Constitutional amendment.[33](#)

Furthermore, Mao's New Democratic-era use of a highly nationalistic rhetoric proclaiming the common desire of the national bourgeoisie and the oppressed masses for the "freedom" and "liberty" of the nation blurred class distinctions in the name of "the people," a term to which he applied whatever referent was appropriate for whatever type of coalition he sought at the moment to build. Even Mao's branding Chiang a "traitor" implied a prior assumption of class-transcending national unity; while his critical attitude toward the "narrow nationalism" of the national bourgeoisie still posited a "lesser-evil" nationalism that sutured class contradictions. Jiang's call for "the broadest possible

patriotic united front for the reunification and prosperity of the motherland," as well as his non-Marxist reformulation of the working class as "the great majority of the people," echo, albeit farcically, the Maoist call for patriotism and expanded definition of "the people" during the periods of the anti-Japanese war, New Democracy, and beyond. Chinese exceptionalism--enshrined as "socialism with special Chinese characteristics" by Deng and his pseudo-dialectical descendants--can thus perhaps claim theoretical grounding in the category of non-antagonistic contradictions central to Maoist situational dialectics. For, as developed by Mao, this dialectical category--along with the related epistemological categories of the "particular," the "concrete," and the "specific"--can then be harnessed to a pragmatism that, under the cover of nationalism, provides an ideological alibi for capitalist restoration. It is perhaps no accident that the phrase "seek truth from facts" first occurred in Mao's call for papering over class antagonism in "On New Democracy."

Mao, who in the mid-1950s and well beyond wished to send capitalism to its grave, would doubtless roll over in his own were he to witness the current policies of the CCP. Nonetheless, it is worth contemplating whether Mao's theorization of stagist doctrine, even if intended as a temporary expedient, may have served to some degree to rationalize those policies. We may ask, does a revolutionary party's confrontation of a concrete and immediate crisis--arguably, the case facing the CCP in China during the anti-Japanese war and its aftermath--necessitate that situationality as such be encoded, dialectically, as the particularity of contradiction? Does the particularity of a given national situation--which is, in other contexts, dubbed "exceptionalism"--justify embracing class-collaborationist nationalism as a necessary stage in the construction of egalitarian societies? Above all, does the category "the people," supplemented by the theoretical notion of "non-antagonistic contradiction," facilitate or hinder the building of the mass, class-conscious movement needed to fight for, and retain, the dictatorship of the proletariat?

VIII.

Although we have been considering the transit from Mao to Jiang largely in terms of the "particularities" of Chinese experience, we should avoid the nationalist "error" ourselves by remarking that the contradictions within the early Mao cannot be understood apart from the contradictions informing the theory and practice of the contemporaneous Third International. We should not minimize the many differences between the CCP and the rest of the Comintern during the 1930s and 1940s or treat Maoist New Democracy as simply a clone of the Popular Front Against Fascism. Nonetheless, in seeking answers to the questions just posed, we cannot overlook the tangency between the two. For Mao's theorization of the Japanese imperialists and their allies among the comprador bourgeoisie as a greater enemy, necessitating the New Democratic alliance of communists, peasants and workers with other classes and class sectors, in key ways paralleled the analysis of fascism proposed by Georgi Dimitrov and endorsed by the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935. Describing fascism as "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital," Dimitrov stipulated that there were other "elements of finance capital" that could be potential allies of the workers of the world, and with whom communists accordingly should try to form "governments of struggle against fascism and reaction." Polemicizing against the "self-satisfied sectarianism" and "national nihilism" of those who were leery of such an alliance, Dimitrov concluded, "Proletarian internationalism must, so to speak, acclimatize itself in each country in order to strike deep roots in its native land." In the era of the Popular Front, inter-nationalism was thus premised upon nationalism--indeed, upon sharing state power with the "lesser-evil"

wings of various national bourgeoisies.[34](#)

Although it emerged from the particular historical conjuncture faced by the CCP from the mid-1930s onward, then, there is an important resemblance between Mao's theorization of "non-antagonistic contradiction" and New Democracy on the one hand, and, on the other, Dimitrov's analysis of the fissures within finance capital and his call for shared state power in "governments of struggle against war and fascism." Indeed, all the parties of the Third International subscribed to the "lesser-evil" doctrine implicit in Dimitrov's call for the Popular Front Against Fascism. In the United States--the situation with which I am most familiar--this strategy gave rise to the nationalist slogan, "Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism," which entailed an American Exceptionalist whitewashing of the Founding Fathers and resulted in the CPUSA's support for Roosevelt in 1936--moves not unconnected to Mao's reformulation of the KMT as a "revolutionary" force from late 1936 onward. During World War II (that is, after mid-1941), the CPUSA's embrace of the Comintern line led it to enter into a no-strike pledge and to "soft-pedal" (as it would later self-critically admit) the fight against Jim Crow racism. In other words, the Popular Front--which shifted the main contradiction in the world from capitalism versus socialism to fascism versus antifascism--effectively tamped down class struggle by codifying nationalist class collaboration as the particularity of contradiction. While the antagonism between capitalists and workers might embody a general truth--that is, the universality of contradiction--any action upon this truth (this "lofty ideal"?) must be deferred for a later stage. Somewhat paradoxically, the particularity of contradiction (that is, the "special characteristics" accompanying the all-class unity purportedly needed in the fight against fascism in different nations) would everywhere (that is, "universally") guide Communist theory and practice. If Mao committed an "error" in codifying national unity with the lesser-evil bourgeoisie as a necessary stage in the movement toward socialism, he was hardly alone among communists of his day.[35](#)

The point here is not that the theory and practice of "socialism with special Chinese characteristics," as it exists at the turn into the twenty-first century, can be unilinearly traced to, much less equated with, what can retrospectively be seen as the shortcomings, theoretical and practical, of the Popular Front-era left. The sharp class struggles of the Cultural Revolution, themselves a product of intensifying class contradictions in the early 1960s, had far more to do with the rise of Deng and Jiang than did any opportunistic moves on the part of the CCP in the 1940s. Moreover, even those moves need to be seen in context--that is, as shaped by external contradictions. Faced as they were with a desperate situation, the Communists of the Third International quite understandably saw nationalist collaboration with a less openly vicious wing of the ruling class as an expedient, a necessary stage, a temporary diversion on the road to ultimate proletarian dictatorship. It is only in retrospect that we can appreciate the extent to which the fighting of World War II on the basis of aligning "progressive" nationalisms ended up sabotaging the struggle for workers' power in many parts of Europe in the postwar capitalist period, hastening the development of state capitalism in the U.S.S.R., and encouraging bourgeois-led movements for national liberation in many parts of the formerly colonial world--as well as rationalizing class collaboration as necessary to the founding of "New China." Our predecessors in the 1930s left did not view the strategic alliance that was the Popular Front as a means to consolidating bourgeois power--quite the opposite. We should keep in mind the estimate, widespread among Marxists living in the era of Depression, war and fascism, that victory over fascism would usher in the era of socialism. In "On New Democracy," for example, Mao repeatedly referred to the current moment as the "era of proletarian world revolution"; his conviction that New Democracy was both new and transitional was based in the belief that

[al]though . . . a revolution in a colonial and semi-colonial country is still fundamentally bourgeois-democratic in its social character during its first stage or first step, and although its objective mission is to clear the path for the development of capitalism, it is no longer a revolution of the old type led by the bourgeoisie with the aim of establishing a capitalist society and a state under bourgeois dictatorship. It belongs to a new type of revolution led by the proletariat with the aim, in the first stage, of establishing a new-democratic society and a state under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes. . . .[S]uch a revolution inevitably becomes part of the proletarian-socialist world revolution.

If one believes that the bourgeoisie is doomed in the not-so-distant future, the notion of hitching one's wagon to their political star for a few more years may not appear all that distasteful--or dangerous. There is no way by which to judge that, given what they knew then, the communists of the Third International, in China or elsewhere, could have known where class-collaborationist nationalism would lead. Their "error" was thus inevitable and, in a sense--I intend no patronization--innocent.[36](#)

And yet the strategy of the Popular Front and New Democracy was, in my view, an error all the same. For the proclamation that exploiters and exploited can share state power in non-antagonistic unity codified as a theoretically correct strategy what was at most a pragmatically convenient tactic, a retreat under duress rather than a necessary stage in forward movement. Constrained by objective circumstances, communists in China and elsewhere construed the external as the internal, thereby codifying opportunism as dialectics. This is, inescapably, part of their legacy to the future which is our present. To put a spin on *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, however, we might note that what is the first time an innocent error is, the second time, a criminal one. The CCP in 1964 formulated a thoroughgoing critique of Soviet revisionism, focused particularly on the Khrushchevite doctrine of the "state of the people," which was, in many ways, a retrospective critique (though they did not say so) of New Democracy. When Jiang currently revives this slogan in his call to recruit capitalists to the CCP, the repudiation of the communist movement's hard-won wisdom is not naïve and understandable, but purposive and cynical. It is at our own peril that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, leftists in all parts of the world ignore the echoes--however farcical--of Popular Front rhetoric in Jiang's spurious calls for national unity behind the CCP's spearheading rapacious exploitation in the PRC. Nor can we detach the current perversion of Marxism in China--where communists at least won state power in the course of the last century--from a critique of the ways in which the left's pragmatic embrace of a "lesser-evil" or "progressive" capitalism, routinely coupled with a nationalist and stagist argument based in productive forces determinism and an embrace of the notion of non-antagonistic contradiction among various sectors of "the people," have been implicated in the difficulties revolutionary parties have encountered in building effective movements toward egalitarian societies run by the currently unpropertied producers. China's present crisis is not, finally, "particular" to China; it is ours as well. We will move beyond it only--again to reference Marx--by engaging in a ruthless criticism of all things that exist and have existed, not least in our own theory and practice.[37](#)

Notes

[1](#) Thomas Friedman crowed, "[A] Communist Party with capitalists in it is like a vegetarian restaurant that also serves steak or a nudist colony with bikinis: it's a contradiction so fundamental that it strips the original thing of all meaning. . . . Sorry,

workers of the world" ("Introducing the China Ruling Party," *New York Times* 11 August 2001). Craig S. Smith saw Jiang's proposal as a "revisionist" measure in the tradition of the "backpedaling" begun under Deng and observed that "[t]he United States is arguably farther along to road to Marx's utopia" than the PRC ("Workers of the World, Invest!" *NYT* 24 August 2001). Antoaneta Beziova sardonically featured Beijing's Red Capital Club as "fast becoming one of the hip places to be in this season" and dubbed its large Mao portrait as "nothing more than a shrine to a lost world" ("Red Capitalists Toast Their Future," *Asia Times* 24 August 2001. See also Charles Wolf, Jr., "China's Capitalists Join the Party," *NYT* 13 August 2001. While the policy on recruitment up to now has been, technically, that "entrepreneurs" could not join the CCP, many businesspeople have bypassed this regulation by placing their holdings in the names of their spouses. Between 1993 and 1998, moreover, Rong Yiren, who accordingly to *Forbes* magazine is the richest man in China, held the largely ceremonial post of vice president. See Anthony Kuhn, "Jiang's Bid to Bring Capitalists into Communist Fold Roils Cadres," *NYT* 15 August 2001. The Labor Day Honors accorded to capitalists are described in Anonymous, "Beijing Honours Private Sector Bosses," *Straits Times International* 22 April 2002. For the announcement that the PRC Constitution will be amended to incorporate the "Three Represents" in October 2002, see Tseng Shu-wan, "Party Constitution to Be Amended at the 16th CPC National Congress," *Wen Wei Po* 14 June 2002. For the great majority of my citations from the international press throughout this essay, as well as many insights into Chinese politics and history, I am indebted to my friend and summer 2001 fellow traveler in Yunnan Province, Albert Sargis of Boston University. Special thanks go to my nephew Peter Foley for help with historical background and Martin Davis for rigorous political discussion. In addition, I would like to thank Eric Canepa, Teresa Ebert, Grover Furr, Rich Gibson, Marcial Gonzalez, Wolf Haug, Roger Lancaster, Liu Qiyun, Liu Yuanqi, Derek Lovejoy, Lu Weizhou, Ma Tongchun, Randy Martin, Gregory Meyerson, Bill Mullen, Bertell Ollman, Margaret Powell-Dobbins, Bill Sacks, George Snedeker, Victor Wallis, and Philip Woodruff.

² Letter of the Fourteen," *Monthly Review* (May 2002), <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0502cpc2.htm>. Jasper Becker, "Kicking Marx Out of the Party," *South China Morning Post* 26 January 2002. For initial statements approving Jiang's speech, see Feng Qihua, "Broadened Membership Bolsters Party," *China Daily*, 25 July 2001; Jiang Defu, "On Strengthening the Party's Basis and Expanding Its Mass Foundation," *Beijing Jiefangjun Bao* 11 August 2001. For more on the struggle between Jiang and his opponents, as well as the closing down of the left journals opposing the July 1 speech, see Ching Cheon, "Jiang Is Up Against Party Left Wing," *STI News* 13 August 2001; Erik Eckholm, "Chinese Censors Shut Down Marxist Journal Critical of Jiang," *NYT* 16 August 2001; Anonymous, "Slow Progress in Opening up Party to Entrepreneurs," *China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) 17 August 2001; and Eva Cheng, "'Red Capitalist' Speech Divides Party," *Green Left Weekly* (Australia) 12 September 2001. For an example of the kinds of critiques of market socialism posed by the left tendency Chinese Marxists, see Duan Ruofei, "China's Ten Problems Urgently Needing Solution in the 21st Century," *Dangdai Sichao* [Contemporary Thought] 1 (2000). For more on the different forces aligned within the CCP leadership, see Willy Lo-Lap Lam, "Every Picture Tells a Story," *CNN.Com/World* 8 May 2002; Anonymous, "China's Fifth Generation," *Asia Times Online* 10 May 2002; and, especially, Albert Sargis, "Ideological Tendencies in Chinese Marxism in the 'Primary Stage of Socialism,'" *NST* (2001). For early defenses of Jiang, see Li Junru, "Real Marxists Have to Keep up with the Times," *Beijing Jiefangjun Bao* 24 December 2002; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Jiang's Staying Power," *CNN.com/WORLD* 26 December 2002; Gong Wen, "The Foundation for Building the Country, the Road for Making the Country Strong--Third Commentary on Triumphant Marching Toward the New Century," *Beijing Renmin Ribao* 29 December 2001;

Francesco Sisci, "The Reformist Road, Trod with Care," *Taiwan Economic News* 3 January 2002; Anonymous, "PRC's Ding Guangen Addresses National Congress of Propaganda Chiefs," *Beijing Xinhua*, 13 January 2002.

³ Li Yan, "China Is among Countires with Wide Income Gap," *People's Daily China* 10 May 2002; Jiang Xueqin, "Letter from China," *Nation* 4 March 2002: 23-25; Craig S. Smith, "For China's Wealthy, All But Fruited Plain," *NYT* 15 May 2002; Anonymous, "China Loses Grip on SOE's," *People's Daily Online* 4 June 2002; Craig S. Smith, "China Faces Problems Creating Jobs, Officials Say," *NYT* 30 April 2002; Antoaneta Bezlova, "More Chinese Jobless Than Statistics Reveal," *Asia Times* 15 June 2002; Aonymous, "China Vows to Grant Allowances to All Urban Poor," *Xinhua in English* 18 June 2002; Dong Xulin, oral presentation in session on "Whither China?" at the Socialist Scholars Conference, New York City, April 2002. For an instance of the reshuffling of class categories entailed in arguing that "[the] market is a battlefield where the working class can fully display its prowess, and competition is a propeller for the working class' progress," see National Defense University's Deng Xiaoping Research Center, "Correctly Understand the Party's Class Base and Mass Foundation," *Beijing Renmin Ribao* 17 October 2001. See also Xiao Zhuoji, "Deepen in Practice Understanding of Labor and Labor Value Theory" (*Beijing Renmin Ribao* 31 July 2001), in which it is asserted that "[w]e must not confuse widening the income gap with unfair distribution."

⁴ Anonymous, "Majority of CPC Officials Well Educated," *People's Daily* 12 June 2002; Anonymous, "Changing Face of China's Ruling Party," *Straits Times* (Singapore) 15 May 2002; Jiang Xueqin (see note 3); Jasper Becker, "Princes of Privatisation Reign," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 10 January 2002. See also Zheng Yongnian, "Ideological Decline, the Rise of an Interest-based Social Order, and the Demise of Communism in China," in John Wong and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *The Nanxun Legacy and China's Development in the Post-Deng Era* (World Scientific: Singapore University P, 2001), pp. 173-96. In the CASS study, private entrepreneurs ranked third and shopkeepers sixth; proletarians and agricultural workers "[brought] up the rear" (James Kyngé, "China Erodes the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *The Financial Times* [England] 14 December 2001).

⁵ Anonymous, "China's Factory Employees Have Few Rights," *BBC* 28 June 2002; Chirstopher Bodeen, "Police, Fired Workers Clash," AP 8 April 202; Ho-Jun-bo, "Redundant Dajing Oil Workers and Laiyong City Steel and Textile Workers Battle Paramilitaries," *Asian Marxist Journal* 19 March 2002; Philip P. Pan, "POil Protest Shows Spread of Unrest in China," *Washington Post* 24 April 2002.

⁶ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Selected Works of Marl Marx and Frederick Engels*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress P, 1969), v. 1, pp. 398-400. While I am aware the term "capitalist restoration" is problematic for many, since it may imply that capitalism existed in China prior to the establishment of socialism, I shall use it occasionally; the problematic that it contains is explored in the course of this essay. For the argument that the PRC was essentially capitalist at least a decade ago, see Robert Weil, *Red Cat, White Cat: China and the Contradictions of "Market Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review P, 1996), William Hinton, *The Great Reversal: The Privatization of China 1978-1989*. The Progressive Labor Party as early as 1971 charged that the PRC had become "revisionist" and entered upon the capitalist road. See *Road to Revolution III* (<http://www.plp.org>).

⁷ For more on class struggles during the Cultural Revolution, see James Petras and Xing Li.

⁸ Because the version of Jiang's speech from which I am working was obtained informally over the Internet, I cannot supply page references.

⁹ Deng Xiaoping, "Adhere to the Principle of Each According to His Work" (March 28, 1978), *Selected Works*, 5 vols. (Beijing: Foreign Languages P, 1994), v. 2, pp. 112-13; "We Can Develop a Market Economy Under Socialism" (November 26, 1979), *SW* v. 2, pp. 235-39; and "To Build Socialism We Must Develop the Productive Forces" (April-May 1980), *SW* v. 2, pp. 310-13.

¹⁰ See, for example, Deng, "Speech at the Opening of the National Conference on Science" (March 28, 1978), *SW* v. 2, pp. 98-111. Deng was a vigorous proponent of the position that socialism entailed abundance and castigated Lin Biao and the Gang of Four--whom he dubbed "feudal fascists"--for their contention that socialism could be built in a situation of poverty ("Uphold Four Cardinal Principles" [March 1979], *SW* v. 2, pp. 168-91). In this seminal essay, Deng also cited Lenin approvingly--and we might add, quite selectively!--to the effect that "Lenin called for more talk about economics and less about politics" (189). See also "To Uphold Socialism We Must Eliminate Poverty" (April 26, 1987), *SW* v. 3, pp. 221-23.

¹¹ Marx cited in Craig Smith (see note #1); Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy; Marx, "The Critique of the Gotha Program," *CW* v. 3, pp. 13-30.

¹² Marx, 1882 Preface to "The Communist Manifesto," *CW* v. 1, pp. 100-01, 108; Marx *The Class Struggles in France*, *CW* v. 1, pp. 186-299. Jiang's comment about Marx and Engels was cited by Thomas Friedman (see note #1). Yan Shuhan, Director of the Institute for Social Development at the Central Party School in Beijing, remarks that the "early period of socialism" experience by present-day China will "last at least 100 years. Socialism and the entire process of maturity towards communism will take another 10-20 generations. It's only then that China can enter the early stages of communism, and it will take another 10-20 generations before true communism can be attained. Communism is still our ultimate objective as a Party, but it may take several thousand years" (Anonymous, "A New Chinese Ideologist Reveals Conflicts within the Party," *Asiaweek* 9 August 2001). For more on the current CCP's emphasis upon the structural versus the activist Marx, see Robert Weil's "Reply" to Kang Ouyang, "Contemporary Development of Marxist Philosophy in China," *Socialism and Democracy*---- 15 (Fall 2001): 97-104, especially 101. See also Bertell Ollman's Reply to Kang (105-12) as well as his *The Debate Over Market Socialism*, which has been translated into Chinese. It is noteworthy that the CCP leadership's current estimate that it will take thousands of years to build socialism is of fairly recent vintage. In 1984 Deng was suggesting that twenty to thirty years were all that was needed ("Building Socialism with a Specifically Chinese Character" [June 30, 1984], *SW* v. 3, pp. 72-75). CCP theorists who support Jiang's proposal have cited Marx highly selectively. The editors of *Beijing Liaowang*, for example, convert the founder of proletarian internationalism into a proponent of national exceptionalism by taking out of context Marx's statement, in the Preface to his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843-44), that "[t]he degree of realizing a theory in a country is determined by the degree [to] which this theory can meet the needs of this country" ("Reviewing the 'Three Points' of Deng Xiaoping," *Beijing Liaowang* 12 November 2001). The National Defense University's Deng Xiaoping Theory Research Center, in arguing that the primary revolutionary role of

the working class should be supplanted by the thesis that there are "two vanguards"--the working class and the "people as a whole"--cites the Marx of *The Holy Family* (1845) in presumed support: "Historical activities are the cause of the masses. With the in-depth development of historical activities, the expansion of the mass foundation is an inevitable trend" ("Correctly Understand the Party's Class Base and Mass Foundation," *Beijing Renmin Ribao* 17 October 2001). A recent reading of the different prefaces to the *Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels wrote that certain portions the 1849 text were "outdated," proclaims that these "outdated" portions were those in which they proclaimed the universality of class struggle, not--as the authors clearly intended--those portions in which they advocated an immediate 10-point reform program (Xin Ping, "Xinhua 'Commentary' on Need to Study Some History of Marxist Development," Xinhua Domestic Service 15 April 2002).

[13](#) For an instance of how un-Marxist the notion of "fettering" has become of current CCP discourse, consider this 2001 statement by the Liaowang Editorial Board, which effectively reverses the base-superstructure paradigm: "The history of advancement in human society is a history of unceasing emancipation of the mind. . . . Without our daring to raise questions and solve problems by emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts, it would have been impossible to have the 1911 Revolution, the October Revolution, the people's great revolution. . . . Without the emancipation of the mind, we would not have airplanes and submarines, Newton, Nicolaus Copernicus, Charles Robert Darwin, and Albert Einstein" (see note #9). For a further elaboration of the idealist implications of such statements, see Kang Ouyang, "Contemporary Development of Marxist Philosophy in China," *Socialism and Democracy* 15 (Fall 2001): 85-96. Deng's influential statement about "emancipating the human mind" was first articulated in "Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts and Unite as One Looking into the Future" (December 13, 1978), *SW* v. 2, pp. 150-63.

[14](#) The rhetoric of neoliberalism suffuses much current Chinese advocacy of the market. See, for example, Gong Wen's statement that "[s]tructural readjustment and economic development have to rely on reform in the end. According to the plan made at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th CPC Central Committee, during the next five years and even for a longer period, we must continue to deepen reform of state-owned enterprises, establish the modern enterprise system, really realize separation of government functions from enterprise management, and let enterprises play a main role in market competitions" (see note #2).

[15](#) Jiang's comments follow closely the critique of "spiritual pollution" by Deng, whose oeuvre is marked by a cynical conjunction of productive forces determinism regarding the economy and idealism regarding matters of culture and consciousness. See, for example, Deng's comments on "mental pollution" in "The Party's Urgent Tasks on the Organizational and Ideological Fronts" (October 12, 1983), *SW* v. 3, pp. 47-58. For an instance of the continuing influence of Deng's thesis about "emancipating the human mind," see Editorial, "Reviewing the 'Three Points' of Deng Xiaoping," *Beijing Liaowang*, 12 November 2001.

[16](#) For more on the felt need to battle corruption, see Anonymous, "Central Party School Survey Shows Political Reform More Difficult Than Any Other Reforms," *Hong Kong Wen Wei Po*, 5 January 2002; and Anonymous, "Hu Angang Urges PRC to Crack Down Harder on Corruption," *Beijing Zhongguo Xinwen She*, 7 January 2002. Interestingly, even some of those daring to criticize Jiang's pro-capitalist policies reproduce the same idealist polarization of ethics and the economy. Ma Ling, for example, alludes to a recent book by He Xin which argues that "the true crisis China has been facing is neither the

economic crisis nor the political crisis caused by corruption, but is the spiritual crisis and the value crisis caused by the separation of ideology and reality. . . . A new spiritual value that can strengthen the coherence, dignity, and self-confidence of the state and the people must be created. This value can be called a new ideology as well." Ma seems to find He's argument of limited value--"this book does not mention what the new ideology is and how to create it"--but then goes on to reproduce the same gap: "Although the economic situation in today's China is excellent, it cannot be denied that there is a crisis in the ideological field, and this crisis cannot be belittled" ("Ideological Crisis Is Most Horrible," *Hong Kong Ta Kung Pao* 22 August 2001). A proposal by Jiang to "rul[e] the country with ethics" (by which he primarily means "upholding the party leadership") is outlined in Anonymous, "Jiang Zemin To Offer New Theories on Ruling China," *Hong Kong Sing Tao Jih Pao*, 2 January 2002. Defining the category of "outstanding elements" among the "private entrepreneurs" has been one of the key elements in the defense of Jiang's proposal. The routine argument has been that Jiang is advocating the admission not of all capitalists to the CCP, but only of the "outstanding elements" among them currently working to advance present CCP policy. See Wang Changjiang, "Admitting Outstanding Elements of the Whole Society to the Party," *Beijing Laiowang*, 13 August 2001.

[17](#) The phrase "seeking truth from facts" was first used by Mao in "On New Democracy" (see below). In 1978, Deng, codifying what would become the canonical view of Mao as pragmatist and nationalist, designated "seeking truth from facts" and "integrating the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution" as the key contributions of "Mao Zedong Thought" to Marxist-Leninist theory. See "Hold High the Banner of Mao Zedong Thought and Adhere to the Principle of Seeking Truth from Facts" (September 16, 1978), *SW* v. 2, pp. 137-39. It is noteworthy that Deng's first iteration of Mao's famous four words occurred in the context of a critique of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. See "Mao Zedong Thought Must Be Correctly Understood as an Integral Whole" (July 21, 1977), *SW* v. 2, pp. 55-60, quoted p. 58.

[18](#) The term "socialism with special Chinese characteristics" originated with Deng ("Building a Socialism with a Specifically Chinese Character" [June 30, 1984], *SW* v. 3, pp. 72-75). The term "Sinicization of Marxism" alternately signifies the same concept. See Luo Shugang, "A Special Comment on Studying and Implementing the Spirit of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 15th CPCCC," *Beijing Renmin Ribao*, 8 November 2001.

[19](#) For early laudatory commentaries on the "Three Represents," see Wang Chi, "PRC: Central Party Literature Expert Views 'Three Represents,'" *Beijing Xinhua*, 22 August 2001; and Anonymous, "Beidaihe Conference Affirms Jiang Zemin's 'Innovations,'" *Hong Kong Ming Pao* 22 August 2001. Further indications that Jiang's doctrine of the "Three Represents" was soon being enshrined as his key contribution to Chinese Marxism are contained in the effusive review of Jiang's *Talking about Party Building*, a collection of Jiang's writings from 1989-2001, published in late November 2001. See Chen Qun, Miao Changfa, and Sun Yieli, review in *Beijing Renmin Ribao*, 29 November 2001.

Further indications that the "Three Represents" were being codified as Party doctrine in advance of the October 2002 Plenum were contained in a post-May Day report by Tseng Shu-Wan, "The Political Report of the 16th CCP National Congress Will Be Based on Jiang's '1 July' Speech," *Hong Kong Wen Wie Po*, 9 May 2002. According to Xu Yufang, the doctrine of the "Three Represents" was originally formulated by Jiang in February 2000 as "an attempt to tackle [the] growing chaos" resulting from the

boomeranging of Jiang's earlier "Three Talks" campaign, which had called upon the populace to engage in "studying, politics, and righteousness." When peasants angry at being shut out from--indeed victimized by--the "reforms" took Jiang at his word, and called for widespread purges of cadre, the CCP leadership feared a "return to the Cultural Revolution." Ironically, the "Three Represents" thus emerge from the continuing, in fact sharpening, class struggle in the PRC. See "Party Slams Its Door on Jiang's Plan," *AsiaTimes* 23 October 2001.

[20](#) Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*; Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Peking [Beijing]: Foreign Languages p, 1965), pp. 5-25, quoted p. 7.

[21](#) Marx plays upon the distinction between representation as portrait and as proxy in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. See Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Wolf Haug, editor of the *Historico-Critical Dictionary of Marxism*, writes that Marx drew upon a range of German terms to signify "represent" or "representation." These include "vorstellen," "which is close to imagine, forming an idea of;" "vorstellungsvermoegen," which "is almost synonymous for phantasy"; and "vorstellung," which "is also a term for a theatre representation." In addition, Marx used the term "repraesentation," which means "to act for someone, being his representative, and is mostly used in the same political meaning ('representative democracy') which [it has] in English." There is still another term, "vertretung," (f.i. "volksvertretung," which means "political representation of the people" (private communication, September 6, 2001).

[22](#) Li Junru, Vice-President of the Central Party School, is explicit about the relationship of the "Three Represents" to the "young people (among whom many are young intellectuals), who represent the future of our motherland and our nation. . . . [S]hould we try to draw them to the party, or should be push them to the opposite side?" (see note #2). For the debate internal to the CCP about whether the Tiananmen Square protestors of 1989 represented the forces of "bourgeois liberalization and spiritual pollution" or "patriots," see "The Tiananmen Papers," intro. Andrew J. Nathan, *Foreign Affairs* 80 (January-February 2001): 2-48. For Jiang's recent call for art and literature that "rais[e] the people's ideological and moral standards" by combating the "crumbling state of Confucianism," which he considers China's "conventional moral system," see Antoaneta Bezlov, "The Politics of Culture in China," *Taiwan News*, 9 January 2002.

[23](#) Gong Wen (see note #2). For the CCP's first definitive description of the "left errors" committed during the GPCR, see "Resolution on CPC History 1949-81" (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981). Notably, 1981 was the year when CCP documents ceased to be prefaced with the words, "Workers of the World Unite!" and when the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were removed from most Party buildings and assemblies.

[24](#) Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (May 1927), *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung* (Zedong), 5 vols. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), vol. 1; "Statement on Chiang Kai-Shek's Statement (December 1936), *SW*, v. 1, pp. 255-62; "The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party in the Period of Resistance to Japan" (May 1937), *SW* v. 1, pp. 263-84, quoted 271-72; "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" (December 1939), *SW* v. 2, pp. 305-36, quoted 329; "Rectify the Party's Style of Work" (February 1, 1942), *SW* v. 3, pp. 35-51, quoted 41; "On Coalition Government; "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" (June 30, 1949), *SW* v. 4, pp. 411-24, quoted 421. For more on the revival of interest in the early Mao among CCP theorists, see Craig Smith (note #1) and Francisco Sirsi (note #2), as well as

Wang Changjiang (note #2), Luo Shugang (note # 15), and Hu Sheng, "A Reconsideration of Mao Zedong's Theory of New Democracy," trans. Jiang Yajuan, rev. Su Xuetao, *Guangming Ribao* 11 June 1999, 5-13. For the historical context of Mao's early writings, see Han Suyun, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).

[25](#) Mao, "On New Democracy" (January 1940), *SW* v. 2, pp. 339-84, quoted 339, 350, 358, 366, 371, 378, 380.

[26](#) Mao, "On Contradiction" (August 1937), *SW*, v. 1, pp. 311-47, quoted 316, 321-22, 325-7, 323. The Sian Incident occurred when Chiang Kai-Shek was captured by the PLA and subsequently agreed to enter into an anti-Japanese alliance with the CCP.

[27](#) Mao, "On Contradiction," pp. 343-45. Thomas Weston argues that the category of non-antagonistic contradiction was developed by the Soviets in the early 1930s ("Antagonism and Non-Antagonism in Contradiction," Unpublished essay, 2002). The concept of non-antagonistic contradiction figured still more prominently in Mao's 1957 essay addressing the continuation of class struggle into socialist construction, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" (*SW* v. 5, pp. 384-421). In his estimate of the situation in the U.S.S.R., Mao was probably influenced by Stalin's recent (1936) proclamation that class struggle there had ceased, and communism had been achieved. In "On New Democracy" he stated this view explicitly (p.347).

[28](#) Mao, "Rectify the Party's Style of Work" (February 1, 1942), *SW* v. 3, pp. 35-51, quoted 41. Throughout the period of the Japanese war Mao adhered to exploitation as the defining feature of China's various rural classes as he had first outlined them in 1933. See "How To Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas" (October 1933), *SW* v. 1, pp. 137-3. For his continuing call for proletarian internationalism, see "In Memory of Norman Bethune" (December 21, 1939), *SW* v. 2, pp. 337-39. For Mao on the KMT during the war, see "Problems of War and Strategy" (November 1938), *SW* v. 2, pp. 219-36; "Ten Demands on the Kuomintang" (February 1, 1940), *SW* v. 2, pp. 395-402; and "Freely Expand the Anti-Japanese Forces and Resist the Onslaughts of the Anti-Communist Die-Hards" (May 4, 1940), *SW* v. 2, pp. 431-36. It bears noting that Deng's famous pragmatic dictum about the cats dates as far back as July 1962, when he urged the dismantling of the agricultural communes and advocated restoring "illegal practices" (that is, private ownership of land). See Deng, "Restore Agricultural Production," *SW* v. 1, pp. 317-21.

[29](#) Mao, "The Contradiction between the Working Class and the Bourgeoisie Is the Principal Contradiction in China" (June 6, 1952), *SW* v. 5, p. 77; "Refute Right Deviationist Views That Depart from the General Line" (June 15, 1953), *SW* v. 5, pp. 93-94; "Combat Bourgeois Ideas in the Party" (August 12, 1953), *SW* v. 5, pp. 103-11.

[30](#) Mao, "Debate on the Co-Operative Transformation of Agriculture and the Current Class Struggle" (October 11, 1955), *SW* v. 5, pp. 211-34, quoted 230. For a critical examination of the movement from New Democracy to socialist construction written from the standpoint of the current CCP leadership, see Yan Ling, "The Transformation from New Democracy to Socialism," *Social Sciences in China* 12 (1991): 34-67.

[31](#) For more on the CCP's present estimate that it will take two to three thousand years to get past even the first stage of socialism, see Wang Changcun, "Why Say That 'Realizing Communism Is Extremely Long Historical Process?'" *Beijing Jiefangjun Bao* 15 November 2001.

[32](#) Marx, *Contribution to Hegel's Philosophy of Law, Collected Works*, 3:88, cited in Weston. For more on class struggles in China during the period of socialist construction. See Yan Ling.

[33](#) Lenin, "On the Question of Dialectics," *CW* (Moscow, 1961), v. 38, p. 360. The quotation about socialism as constituted by non-antagonistic contradiction, cited by Mao in "On Contradiction," is, according to Weston, "a comment that Lenin wrote in the margin of his copy of N. Bukharin's . . . *Economics of the Transition Period* (1920). Bukharin had written, 'Capitalism is an antagonistic, contradictory system'. . . This marginal note was often cited in Soviet philosophical discussions of contradiction in the 1930s."

[34](#) Georgi Dimitrov, *United Front* (<http://www.ex.ac.uk/Projects/meia/dimtrov/1935-rep.htm>). The more rigorously Marxist analysis of fascism proposed by R. Palme Dutt in *Fascism and Social Revolution* (New York: International P, 1936) was considered but rejected by the Seventh World Congress. It is perhaps noteworthy that, in his call for the Popular Front, Dimitrov chose to cite the somewhat anomalous Lenin of "On the National Pride of the Great Russians" (1914).

[35](#) Earl Browder, *The People's Front* (New York: International P, 1937).

[36](#) Mao, "On New Democracy," p. 344.

[37](#) Editorial, "'Khrushchev's Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World,'" *Renmin Ribao*, 1964; Marx, "A Ruthless Criticism of All Things Existing."
