

Preface

By 1958, as described in the essay "China's History in Marxian Dress" (Chapter 2 of this volume), historiography in the People's Republic of China, like so many other aspects of that society, had come to an important juncture. In spite of obvious accomplishments, ten years of rewriting history had still left the political rulers of China unsatisfied with the historians' treatment of the past inherited by the Communist regime. The Great Leap Forward in the realm of historiography included a renewed emphasis on "directing historical research with theory", i.e., the thought of Mao Tse-tung; a call to "emphasize the present and de-emphasize the past", i.e., to use the study of the past to serve present-day political needs; a demand that the history of emperors, generals, and ministers be replaced by attention to the historical struggles of the labouring masses; and a call for the "broad masses of history workers" to join with workers and peasants and write histories of families, villages, communes, and factories.¹

While the leading historians could not but offer support to the Great Leap, it is apparent that some at least were as dismayed by what the political mobilization of 1958–1959 did to the teaching and study of history² as many economists were by its disastrous economic aftermath. The quality and content of academic discussion following the Great Leap period—first centering on the problem of evaluating historical personages, then broadening to encompass the question of the "critical inheritance" of China's entire "cultural legacy", and finally taking the shape of a debate between the proponents of "historicism" (*li-shih chu-i*) and those who called only for a "class viewpoint" (*chieh-chi kuan-tien*)—seemed to me, when I wrote in 1960 and even in 1964 (but much less positively in the latter year), to offer the possibility that the writing of history in China, while it would never again be "bourgeois" history, might yet succeed in the successful construction of a new domestic tradition combining Marxism-Maoism and Chinese nationalism. Articles critical of the shabby quality of much current historical work were

¹ See Ch'i Pen-yü, Lin Chieh, and Yen Ch'ang-kuei, "Fan-kung chih-shih fen-tzu Chien Po-tsan ti chen mien-mu" (The True Face of Chien Po-tsan—An Anti-Communist Intellectual), *Hung-ch'i (Red Flag)*, No. 15, 1966, pp. 25–35.

² See Albert Feuerwerker and S. Cheng, *Chinese Communist Studies of Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. xiii–xv.

published in professional journals,³ but also in *Hung-ch'i*,⁴ the official voice of the Communist Party. A strong case was made in historical circles for what in effect was a nationalistic evaluation of the two millenia of "feudal" China that preceded the beginning of the modern revolutionary movement.⁵ The discussion of "historicism" and the "class viewpoint", which became very intense from early 1963, appeared to leave some room for treatment of the past in its own terms once the proper obeisance had been made to Marxism-Maoism.⁶

Some writers to be sure, such as Professor Liu Chieh of the Department of History at Chungshan University, went beyond acceptable limits in emphasizing what was assertedly Chinese at the expense of what was assuredly Communist, and in consequence were attacked by their more politicalized colleagues. Riding on the wave of historicist criticism of the crude application of the class viewpoint, Liu in several articles written in 1962 and 1963 questioned whether the class struggle was really applicable to ancient Chinese history. "In brief, the theory of class struggle is practical and effective when applied in current politics," he wrote, "but when applied in the interpretation of ancient historical events, is it necessary to use the theory in such a dogmatic manner and so mechanically?"⁷ Liu's doubts had been expressed in his contributions to discussions in philosophical circles devoted to the re-evaluation of Confucius and Confucian thought. Like a few others, notably Fung Yu-lan, who was also to be attacked, Liu had argued that Confucian *jen*, for example, was devoid of class content. He described it as an "abstract ethical concept" which "has been induced from all kinds of concrete happenings in human society from ancient times till the present." The nature of man, regardless of his times and his class, always required him to pursue *jen*.

On the one hand, Liu's position might be likened to that of some earlier predecessors who had sought to identify values in the Chinese tradition that might too, like those of the politically dominant West, be

³ For example, Teng T'o, "Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang k'ai-p'i-le Chung-kuo li-shih k'o-hsüeh fa-chan ti tao-lu" (The Thought of Mao Tse-tung Opens the Way for the Development of Historical Science in China) *Li-shih yen-chiu* (*Historical Studies*), No. 1, 1961, pp. 1-12; Fan Wen-lan, "Fan-tui fang k'ung-p'ao" (Oppose Empty Theory), *ibid.*, No. 3, 1961, pp. 1-4.

⁴ Pai Shou-yi, "Li-shih k'o-hsüeh chi-pen hsün-lien yu-kuan-ti chi-ko wen-t'i" (Some Problems Concerning Fundamental Training in the Historical Sciences), *Red Flag*, No. 18, 1961, pp. 21-31.

⁵ See Chapter 2 of this volume.

⁶ For brief reviews of these discussions, see *Jen-min jih-pao* (*People's Daily*), February 25, 1964, and *Kuang-ming jih-pao* (*Kuang-ming Daily*), January 18, 1964.

⁷ Quoted in *People's Daily*, June 18, 1963. I have not seen the original articles by Liu, some of which appeared in the Canton bi-monthly *Hsüeh-shu yen-chiu* (*Academic Studies*), No. 1, 1962; Nos. 2, 3, 1963.

nominated as candidates for universal acceptance. That is, in re-evaluating China's philosophical heritage, Liu was to some degree expressing a nationalist attitude. This was not, however, the way in which his eccentricity was interpreted by Liu's more politically sophisticated colleagues. In numerous articles and at meetings such as that of the Kwangtung Historical Association held on October 5, 1963, he was attacked for "opposing the materialist historical viewpoint of Marxism", for espousing a theory of human nature "basically opposed to the class theory of Marxism", and for taking a "supra-class viewpoint" which was in fact the viewpoint of the capitalist class.⁸ It was Liu's misfortune that in his interpretation and espousal of Confucian *jen* (which one might read as the equivalent of "humanism" or "humanitarianism") he was, intentionally or not, coming close to the very ideological sin of which the Chinese Communist Party was accusing the Soviet "modern revisionists". As Chou Yang, then Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, put it in a speech to a conference of the Department of Philosophy and Social Science of the Academy of Sciences on October 26, 1963:

Completely discarding historical materialism, the modern revisionists substitute the bourgeois theory of human nature for the Marxist-Leninist teachings on class struggle and proletarian dictatorship. . . . They have equated the concept of humanism, so-called, with that of scientific communism. . . . They say "communist ideology is the most humane ideology," they talk of humanism as "the highest embodiment of communism," and they assert that "humanism in the broad sense of the word merges with communism," and that "the communist system means the triumph of humaneness". . . . We are firmly opposed to substituting the theory of human nature in the abstract and the preaching of fraternity for the standpoint of class analysis and class struggle; we are against describing communism as humanism and against placing humanism above communism.⁹

But few went so far as Liu Chieh publicly, and while the channel between the Scylla of "historicism" and the Charybdis of "class viewpoint" was a narrow one, most historians seemed to be capable of negotiating it successfully.

There is irony perhaps in the fact that just when Chou Yang and others—including Liu Shao-ch'i, Chairman of the People's Republic of China, who was present at the philosophy and social science conference and reportedly delivered an "important speech"¹⁰—were castigat-

⁸ *Kuang-ming Daily*, November 10, 1963.

⁹ Chou Yang, "The Fighting Task Confronting Workers in Philosophy and the Social Sciences," *Peking Review*, January 3, 1964.

¹⁰ New China News Agency, Peking, November 24, 1963.

ing those guilty of "modernizing the ideologies of the ancients" and asserting that "they are something which transcends classes and time",¹¹ the "modern revisionist" adversary himself was accusing Chinese historians of "bourgeois nationalism" for their favourable reappraisal of the thirteenth-century Mongol conquests (seen as calamitous of course by the Russians and other Europeans), for their claim that Chinese "feudalism", not European, is the classical model of this historical phenomenon, and because of their allegedly exaggerated estimate of the role of Confucian ideas and their influence on Western philosophy.¹² And even greater irony is manifest in the circumstance that Liu Shao-ch'i and Chou Yang, who in late 1963 were criticizing excessive "historicism", were in the next act of the drama to be accused as the evil powers behind the historians Wu Han, Teng T'o, Chien Po-tsan, Hou Wai-lu, Li Shu, Liu Ta-nien, Sun Tso-min, Shen Yüan, Ts'ai Mei-piao, and others who were denounced for opposing the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of Mao Tse-tung.

The attack, which began in November 1965, on Wu Han, specialist in Ming history, chairman of the Peking Historical Society, and deputy mayor of Peking, was perhaps the first public signal of the imminent upheaval in Chinese intellectual and political circles.¹³ When all the academic verbiage is stripped aside, Wu stood accused for writing a play, *The Dismissal of Hai Jui*, produced in 1961 at the height of China's post-Great Leap economic crisis. In this play he covertly attacked the economic policies of Chairman Mao and implicitly identified the dramatic protagonist, a mid-sixteenth century official of almost legendary popularity, with the dismissed Marshall P'eng Te-huai, ousted by Mao in 1959 for opposing the Great Leap and for advocating a mending of fences with the Soviet Union. This is not the place to recount the dramatic sequence by which the campaign, launched first against Wu Han, next engulfed Ten T'o, fellow historian and writer, official of the Peking Municipal Committee of the Communist Party and editor of *Ch'ien-hsien*, theoretical organ of that Committee, and former editor of *Jen-min jih-pao*.¹⁴ Nor how, as the Cultural Revolution gathered steam, P'eng Chen, Politburo member and mayor of Peking, Chou Yang, and many others fell from power amid assertions that their

¹¹ *Kuang-ming Daily*, January 23, 1963; *Hsin chien-she (Reconstruction)*, No. 1, 1962, pp. 1-4.

¹² See Chapter 16 of this volume.

¹³ See Stephen Uhalley, Jr., "The Wu Han Discussion: Act One in a New Rectification Campaign," *The China Mainland Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, March, 1966, pp. 24-38.

¹⁴ See "The Press Campaign against Wu Han," *Current Background* (Hong Kong, U.S. Consulate), No. 783, March 21, 1966, and "Teng T'o, his 'Evening Talks at Yenshan' and the 'Three-Family Village' Group," *ibid.*, No. 792, June 29, 1966.

“anti-Party, anti-socialist” activities were directed, supported, and shielded by a person of even higher authority within the Party “who has taken the capitalist road”, which of course we know referred to Liu Shao-ch’i.

The past year of confused struggle between supporters of Mao and their opponents (if one dare put it that simply), with its Red Guards, *ta-tzu-pao*, armed clashes, shadowy advances and obscure retreats, it need hardly be said, has not been conducive to academic scholarship. China’s institutions of higher education were closed in June 1966 and at the time of this writing are just beginning to reopen. Efforts to reopen lower schools this past spring met with many obstacles, as teachers were barely able to manage their Red Guard charges, who were in turn reluctant to exchange the license of demonstrations, marches, and mass meetings for classroom discipline. When and how the teaching and writing of history will return to something like its pre-1966 format remains a hazardous guess.

In addition to the general distrust of “bourgeois” intellectuals characteristic of China today, the fact that Wu Han, Teng T’o, and others in their “criminal” group were historians has probably added an extra measure of resentment on the part of China’s political leaders against established professional historians as a group. *Li-shih yen-chiu* (*Historical Studies*), the leading historical journal in China, ceased publication after its April 1966 number. In a front-page editorial on June 3, 1966, *Jen-men jih-pao* vituperatively attacked “bourgeois ‘authorities’ in the field of historical studies” for opposing the “scientific theses” of Mao Tse-tung, for denying the class struggle, and for suppressing truly revolutionary historians through their control of the leading academic positions. Individual prominent historians, among them Li Shu, editor-in-chief of *Historical Studies*, as well as the magazine itself, were similarly attacked in the same newspaper on October 23, 1966. It was charged that in 1961 Chou Yang had covertly gained control of *Historical Studies* by arranging the appointment of Li Shu as editor, and had thereafter utilized that journal to support his “counter-revolutionary” activities. Numerous “reactionary” articles by Wu Han, Teng T’o, Chien Po-tsan, and others of their ilk were allegedly solicited and printed by Li Shu in pursuance of this plot: the Taiping “renegade”, Li Hsiu-ch’eng, was defended, peasant class struggles were deliberately misinterpreted, Mao’s thought was basely distorted, the feudal landlord class and its emperors were extolled. Now, the article concluded, the proletarian revolutionaries have torn away the “black curtain enveloping *Historical Studies*. . . . However, we must continue to expose and

criticize thoroughly the large amount of poison it has spread. We must sweep away all rubbish and wash away all dirt, and plant on the positions of historical science the proletarian, dazzling red banner of the thought of Mao Tse-tung."¹⁵

The future of historiography in China is, of course, unknown. Its present configuration, like so much else under the reign of Chairman Mao, is difficult to apprehend with confidence. The essays in this volume are collectively a preliminary reconnaissance of the work done by Chinese historians in the first fifteen years of the People's Republic of China. In their original drafts most of them were prepared for delivery at a conference on "Chinese Communist Historiography" sponsored by *The China Quarterly* and held at Ditchley Manor, Oxfordshire, September 6-12, 1964. Others were made available as background papers for that conference. Chapter 13, although it was not written in connection with the historiography conference, is included because of its value as a case study of how modern history is treated in Communist China. Chapter 17, also not available at the conference, touches on one important aspect of contemporary Chinese historiography not otherwise separately discussed in this volume: Chinese Communist treatment of the history of Asian countries as a whole. It displays, for those who are not already acquainted with it, the customary polemical style of many historical writings published in China today.

Chapter 1 is a summary of the discussions at Ditchley, while Chapter 2 surveys the main developments in the field of history in Communist China through the year 1959. These two contributions may serve as an introduction to the topical essays that follow.

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¹⁵ Translated in *Survey of the China Mainland Press* (Hong Kong, U.S. Consulate), No. 3813, November 2, 1966.