

*For Mao Tse-tung,
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like a series of
contradictions*

From the Dullesian days of Cold War caricatures painted from afar in almost solid blacks, Western observers — often the same ones — have switched to pure whites. A former Canadian political leader called his trip a visit to Utopia. A leading Australian banker and lay preacher returned with public exclamations that Mao had surely been appointed by God! The truth is that China, like all societies, covers the whole colour spectrum, in which for the most objective, and indeed the Chinese themselves, the predominant tones are various shades of grey.

To Mao, Chinese society, like history generally, is a series of contradictions, the resolution of which creates change. For the objective foreign observer, China is a host of contradictions the current meaning of which often eludes all but the most superficial or polemical comprehension, and whose ultimate resolution defies prediction.

Take, for example, the nature of Chinese politics, particularly since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). China is often defined as a "mass society" in which power and policy moves "from the masses, to the masses". There is much about the definition that is true. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the network of auxiliary organizations at the "grass-roots" level, the organizational structure of communes and factories and the decentralization of the economy generally, do provide a political structure through which the masses can influence policy implementation and thereby indirectly policy itself. The conception of *hsia-fang* — sending urban *élites* down to the countryside to work with the peasantry — is a revolutionary device for bridging the inevitable gap between the masses and their leaders.

Controlled society

Criticism and self-criticism, long enshrined as hallmarks of the Maoist political strategy, and mass campaigns do allow a unique kind of mechanism for reflecting the mood of the people, shaking up the bureaucracy and injecting a genuine element of mass "input" into the political equation. And yet each of these and other political techniques have their other side — have their risks and potential resentments. For at the base remains the fundamental contradiction — China is also a highly-controlled society.

The Shanghai student hopeful of attaining a higher education and capable of succeeding may well be sent instead to the distant frontiers of China as a peasant or worker. The Canton driver may be

directed to leave his family to work indefinitely in Sian or Peking. When the state directs, the masses obey. When the hero of yesterday suddenly becomes the villain of today, history is rewritten — the revision accepted. Could it be otherwise? Are the contradictions more apparent than reality do they in turn create tensions as volatile as the achievements they create are visible.

Undoubtedly, the greatest contradiction of all is the basic quest for rapid modernization and industrialization without an erosion of revolutionary commitment — the tension between "Red" and "expert". Can ideological purity survive the complexities of modern society? Can the political perspectives of the ideologue co-exist with the administrative concerns of the bureaucrat and the economic and technical priorities of the manager? Is the human mind so malleable that the "New Socialist Man" can be created — at once patriot and producer, motivated only by the selfless pursuit of the collective good? Or is he inherently acquisitive and seeking? Does modernization lead to the fuller liberation of man, or does it inevitably leave in its wake social injustice and waste? When revolutionary fervour fades can it be rekindled, or do revolutions, by definition, ultimately die?

These and other fundamental political, and indeed philosophical, questions remain basic concerns of Mao Tse-tung. Conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit, they, along with the power struggles of those who answered them in different ways, were at the root of the Cultural Revolution. With education halted, production disrupted and the Chinese Communist Party decimated, China emerged from the Cultural Revolution perhaps having come dangerously close to national disintegration. China entered the Seventies with a host of veteran leaders dismissed or disgraced, a heavy military presence in the new power structure, and a constitutionally-designated heir-apparent (Li Piao) bent on a Napoleonic venture that, if attempted, we are told, the assassination of Mao but was destined to failure, the plotter's own death.

Scars were left

If the Cultural Revolution succeeded in throwing out of power those who were taking the "capitalist road" and led more revolutionary policies, particularly in areas like medicine and education, it left its scars as well. Far from eliminating "bureaucratism", one of the leading evils it attacked, the Cultural Revolution may have created the danger of a critically indecisive bureaucracy. Policies and pow-