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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Problem of Class in Socialist China

In 1965 in Beijing, Mao Zedong discussed the fate of revolutions with the visiting French Minister of Culture, Andre Malraux. According to Malraux, his host remarked that "Humanity left to its own devices does not necessarily reestablish capitalism . . . but it does reestablish inequality. The forces tending toward the creation of new classes are powerful."¹ Mao might have made his point still more forcefully: even when humanity has not been left to its own devices—and it has not been in China—inequality persists.

Although Chinese socialism has not eradicated inequality, it has altered the forms which it assumes. The most fundamental such alteration has been the restriction of private property, a success of the revolution which gives rise to an apparent paradox in contemporary Chinese society. Leaders of the Chinese Communist Party have frequently characterized their society as one rent by large-scale struggle among classes; yet the property relationships that underlie a conventional Marxist conception of class were essentially destroyed nearly three decades ago, as China socialized its economy. How, then, is one to make sense of the continued use of such terms as "bourgeois" and "landlord" in a society where such classes certainly cannot exist as we know them from capitalist experience?

One approach is to presume, as many students of China tacitly do, that the language of class in fact does not make much sense, that it serves primarily as a cloak for self-interest, or that its meaning is so abstruse that it can only arouse pedantic curiosity.² Such a view is encouraged by the vagueness of much discussion of class

in the Chinese press, where concrete references to social structure are often lacking.

It is dubious, however, that a vocabulary employed so extensively as has been the language of class in China can be merely rhetorical in nature. This language, derived from the Marxist tradition but modified in its new context, became the principal medium for political discourse in the People's Republic. Political discussion is often far removed from social analysis, a phenomenon no doubt as true in China as in any other country. But where alternative terminologies are so often considered illegitimate, the language of class must serve as the vehicle for discussions of more serious significance.

Much of the difficulty in grasping the Chinese concept of class stems from the tumult within the society it is intended to analyze. Revolution, then rapid industrialization have compressed a broad range of radical social changes within a single generation. The problem is not that class is without meaning, but that it has come to bear multiple connotations, as competing forces in a rapidly changing society have endeavored to utilize the concept to buttress their own interests. The search for the meaning of class, then, must be made alongside an examination of the changes which have been made in China's social structure. Changing Chinese approaches to the class system of the People's Republic are themselves elements in the social conflict which they prescribe, illuminate, and obscure. Little progress in extending our comprehension either of Chinese social tensions or of systematic self-representations by the Chinese of their society is possible without appreciating the complex interaction of theories of class with the practice of social inequality in which these theories are embedded.

Thus our search must have three foci. It must perforce deal with the character of class relationships in socialist society, and with the adaptation of Marxist social theory to Chinese conditions. The combination of these two themes gives rise to a third: Mao Zedong's role as critic of inequality since liberation. In this introductory chapter, I will sketch the issues which these themes entail.

Class Conflict in a Socialist Society

Underlying this study is the assumption that the class analyses made by the Chinese of their own society warrant respectful at-

tention. Since the founding of the People's Republic, outsiders have considered its society and politics through various classificatory schemes. The Chinese people have been broken down into elites and masses, divided into mobilizers and mobilized, and assigned to occupational groups and factions. They have been examined as modernizers, revolutionaries, totalitarians, bureaucrats, and as inheritors of ancient dynastic tradition. Although many of these approaches have enabled observers to organize information about contemporary China in an illuminating manner, there has been surprisingly little interest in understanding China in terms employed by the Chinese themselves. I do not claim that the Party's class theories offer a magic key which can unlock all the mysteries of social conflict in the People's Republic. I do argue that it seems prudent to add to our present arsenal of conceptual tools some of those which have been widely used by the subjects of our investigations.

It is easy to understand why this is not common practice. Liberal scholars, unaccustomed (and disinclined) to analyze their own societies in class terms, have turned to other concepts when they approach China. Marxists, who might be expected to be more comfortable with class-based interpretations, face other problems. Some have uncritically accepted official Chinese perspectives, forgetting that these are colored by the social conflicts which they describe. A more serious obstacle is the Marxist fixation upon private property, the absence of which poses serious difficulties for analysts used to asking *who owns* the means of production. Thus there is a need to recognize both that socialist classes must involve social relationships more complex than simple property ownership, and that Chinese interpretations may provide important clues, if not final answers, to the issue of class in the People's Republic.

It is easier to describe broadly the changes in China's class structure since liberation than to offer a simple formula for understanding class conflict in socialist society. The classes which were dominant before the revolution had based their power upon private property, which was severely restricted in what the Chinese call the "socialist transformation" of 1955-1956. In the countryside, land reform had earlier destroyed the foundation of the old landlord class; the subsequent collectivization of agriculture removed the possibility of the rise of a new group of landlords. Similarly, the socialization of private industry and commerce drastically constituted the economic basis of China's urban

bourgeoisie. These reforms were reinforced by the sudden termination of Western imperialist influence, which had been supportive of the former ruling classes.

But as the old propertied classes were weakened, socialization and aggressive economic expansion contributed to the rise of other social groups. Socialist China's still embryonic social structure is characterized by a proud new status for a growing industrial proletariat, an obvious beneficiary of policies intended to raise China from poverty. However, 80 percent of the population is still peasant. Agricultural collectivization has altered the context in which peasants live and work, and while their economic position is still not high, both the rural emphasis in Chinese developmental strategy and the peasant contribution to the Communist victory have increased the peasantry's prominence in national affairs.

Much more controversial is the position of bureaucrats in the new social structure. The displacement of the old ruling classes has raised the autonomy and influence of bureaucrats, but their character as a social group remains ill-defined. From an organization of militant activists, leading revolution at the mass level, the Chinese Communist Party after liberation became a body of full-time salaried administrators, working within formal bureaucratic structures. This trend was intensified by the civil service scheme which was introduced to accompany the economic reforms of socialist transformation.³ While tendencies toward the development of a clearly defined consciousness as a social group have no doubt been impeded by the lowly origin of many of China's new bureaucrats, the great fear of Maoists has been that these cadres will become a new elite group, pursuing its own narrow interests at the expense of workers and peasants, and amassing privileges to bequeath to its children.

Anxiety about the possible emergence of a powerful bureaucratic class is perhaps easily understandable in China, where the landed upper class of former dynasties organized its domination over the rest of society through an elaborately graded state bureaucracy. Entrance to this civil service was secured by successful participation in a national examination system which was only abolished in 1905—within the lifetimes of the leaders of the Communist revolution. Centuries of familiarity with bureaucratic hierarchy so colored Chinese cultural orientations toward social interaction that even popular conceptions of hell are filled with

ranked officials and their red tape. Little wonder that contemporary revolutionaries entertain profound suspicions toward developments within the bureaucracy.

China's social structure is thus still a fluid one—both because the dust of revolution has not yet settled and because of the grand scale of economic construction which has been undertaken since liberation. Yet within this turbulence, the bureaucrats possess significant advantages which may well facilitate their consolidation as a new dominant class. Most obvious is the prior destruction of landed and business classes, which removed the two groups most typically at odds with bureaucratic power. Equally important, however, is the central role of the political apparatus in China's drive for industrialization, which adds collective control over the means of production to the powers of a group that has already destroyed its chief rivals.

To be sure, there have been vigorous efforts in China to prevent the rise of a new and privileged bureaucratic class. One approach has stressed ideological appeals, such as the cultivation of a "serve the people" mentality, consciously drawing upon egalitarian aspects of China's revolutionary heritage. Structural innovations have also been introduced, including both institutions which force bureaucrats to share the life-styles and work experiences of ordinary citizens and repeated campaigns to open the bureaucracy to people of humble birth. However, the persistence of these efforts suggests less that a potential bureaucratic class has been dispersed than that its formation is viewed by many as a continuing threat. Although a single generation is too brief a period for the consolidation of a new class structure, in the years since 1949, China's bureaucrats have hesitantly emerged as a distinctive social group, gradually discovering their common interests and identity.

The rude statistics available in the West sustain such an impressionistic account of China's changing social structure. The number of industrial proprietors declined from 222,800 in 1952 to 132,000 in 1955, the eve of socialization.⁴ The industrial work force increased from 3,004,000 in 1949 to 9,008,000 in 1957.⁵ But the rate of growth for bureaucrats was more rapid still. The Guomindang government employed about 2,000,000 state functionaries in 1948; by 1958 there were almost 8,000,000 state cadres in China.⁶ For the city of Shanghai, where total employment between 1949 and 1957 increased by 1.2 percent per year, workers

and staff in factories grew by 5.8 percent annually, while health and government workers increased at an annual rate of 16 percent.⁷

From another perspective, bureaucrats controlled less than 10 percent of China's gross national product before 1949; by 1972 this figure had risen to 30 percent.⁸ This change reflects the intensity of the Communist's attack upon private property, which today has a very limited role in the economy. Three levels of ownership are distinguished in China: state ownership (by the whole people), collective ownership (by units of producers, such as production brigades or handicraft cooperatives), and individual private ownership. The relative importance of each of these in 1973 was as follows:⁹

	State	Collective	Private
Industry (value of industrial output)	86%	14%	0%
Agriculture (share of production)	1-9%	over 90%	1-9%
Commerce (share of retail sales)	92.5%	7.3%	0.2%

Private ownership had disappeared in industry, formed a minute share of commercial activity, and was significant only in the private plots of peasants (which were in fact owned by the collective and assigned temporarily to peasant families).

None of these data, however, will support the bald assertion that the People's Republic is clearly dominated today by a new class of bureaucrats. A more ambiguous assessment may be of greater heuristic value: the bureaucrats are a class in formation, one historical possibility embedded in China's present which may be realized in succeeding generations.

I do not intend to suggest that the Chinese revolution overthrew one set of ruling classes merely to supplant them with a new one, that the revolution was not worth its enormous costs of violence and suffering. To the contrary, the broad range of social reforms introduced in the People's Republic have made possible better lives for the mass of the Chinese population and a new respect for China as a nation. The achievements of the Chinese revolution certainly have not been those of the bureaucrats alone, but their central place in organizing social change evokes admiration for their administrative skill and sense of public service. Although China's officials will be described in sometimes negative

language in the pages below, I have no desire to portray them as the simple villains of a drama in which their collective role has often revealed a heroic aspect.¹⁰

Nonetheless, the structure of conflict in China has been altered, with the former dominance of propertied classes replaced by competition among groups within a bureaucratized society. In such a context it is not surprising that bureaucrats, who collectively control the use of China's productive assets, often prevail. What is worthy of greater attention is the fact that the emergence of a bureaucratic class has been resisted most strenuously by some of its own members.

The situation is one of great ambiguity: do socialist bureaucrats form a class, and if so, on what basis?¹¹ These are not simply the questions of external analysis, but are issues of intense political debate within China as well. There, the Party has endeavored to apply its own Marxist tradition of class analysis to the problem. But the fit has not been a neat one; many of the Party's intellectual assumptions were undermined by socialist transformation—most notably the practice of distinguishing class membership according to individual property ownership. The effort to fashion new answers to the problem of class has itself been caught up in the conflicts under analysis. The stakes have been high, as the power to define classes carries vital implications for the allocation of scarce resources among competing groups in the society.

Central to the argument which follows is the proposition that there have been two broad types of class conflict in China since liberation. The first has been a struggle among economic groups identifiable by the classically Marxist test of the ownership of the means of production. Class conflict organized around the axis of private property was particularly fierce in the early years of the People's Republic; since the socialist reforms of 1956, this conflict has become one between *former* owners and nonowners, and has been transferred largely (but not exclusively) from the economic realm to the level of ideological and institutional influence.

The second type of class conflict reflects the new social organization introduced by the reforms of the Communist Party, with a diminished place for market mechanisms and a vastly increased significance for bureaucratized social relationships. Here, conflicts of material interest have divided people in ways not directly tied to individual ownership of private property. Although inequalities grounded in the new class tensions of socialist society have in-

creasingly superseded those arising from the former private property system, the persistence of vestiges of the latter has obscured recognition of the former.

The Sinification of Marxism

Since the Chinese Communist Party has consciously applied to Chinese society an analysis drawn from the Marxist tradition, a study of the changing significance of class must also be a detailed examination of the sinification of Marxism. Beyond the pioneering works of Meisner, Schram, and Schwartz,¹² this process is perhaps more talked about than studied. It is perhaps time to move beyond the correct but no longer exciting proposition that the Chinese Communists are nationalists as well as Marxists, and look closely at what happens to a central concept of Marx when it is applied in a Chinese context. Two issues are of special interest: voluntarism and the persistence of class conflict after the socialization of private property.

The conventional wisdom concerning the Chinese adaptation of Marxism holds that Marx's original economic determinism has been altered by a strong emphasis upon consciousness, or revolutionary will, which can overcome "objective" economic conditions. This voluntarism is often treated "as a Leninist sin: thou shalt not give the forces of history a push."¹³ which has been carried to new lengths of heterodoxy by the Chinese Communist Party. But recent scholarship on Marx has exposed as false the conception of Marx as a theorist of the one-way effects of economic base upon superstructure. Instead, Marx saw base and superstructure as dialectically interrelated in a subtly changing unity.¹⁴ This recognition has only begun to enter the study of Chinese ideology.¹⁵

It is nonetheless true that political movements calling themselves Marxist have differed in their interpretations of Marx's theory, some (including Marx's own German Social Democrats) reading Marx as the rigid determinist who has become the liberal stereotype.¹⁶ Chinese Marxism has devoted greater attention to superstructural issues, from the Party's long-established tradition of raising consciousness through political study to the mass mobilization of the Great Leap Forward. It is important to remember, however, that the realm of superstructure in Marxist theory

encompasses not only *ideas*, as Western students of China have long appreciated, but also *institutions*, which too often have been ignored. Above all, Chinese Marxism has followed Lenin in its concern for the state as the central institution by which coercion is organized in society, and in which are embedded many of the mysteries of class conflict. The issue, then, is not one of Chinese turning Marxism into a voluntaristic theory, but rather the specific ways in which Marx's analysis of superstructural phenomena have been received in China.

Voluntarism's mark on the Party's class theory before liberation was an insistence that persons could overcome the ideology of the class of their social origin.¹⁷ More concretely, formal economic criteria for class membership were sometimes supplemented by political standards. To a considerable extent, this practice was a function of the small number of proletarians in the Communist movement. To insist upon firm working-class credentials in a peasant society would have been to deny the possibility of a mass revolutionary party.¹⁸

Since the relationship of individuals to the means of production formed the basis for the Party's earlier class differentiation, has the socialization of private property reinforced the voluntarist heritage? After socialist transformation, Mao and other leaders so often stressed the primacy of politics—which must be "in command" because it was "the lifeline of all economic work"—that class took on an increasingly obvious political color. This trend reinforced earlier Party traditions of criticism, self-criticism, and the reform of mistaken ideas through participation in a larger consciousness.¹⁹ The problem of a political conception of class was that its standards could only be loosely defined, thus encouraging the casual use of class analysis to stigmatize any political rival. As we will see in later chapters, an extremely politicized class analysis encouraged much persecution of individuals during the Cultural Revolution.

Yet there has been a strikingly different concurrent development in Chinese class theory since socialist transformation: a reluctance to allow modification of the presocialist class designations of former class enemies. Indeed, there have been strong tendencies to regard the former relationship to the means of production as inheritable, so that the children of old landlords, rich peasants, and capitalists have at times been treated as a caste within Chinese society. The fact that one cannot simply proclaim that a had class

background has been willfully suggests that voluntarism in Chinese Marxism has important limits.

The Party thus has entertained contradictory notions—that class position can be changed with heightened consciousness, and that class is a question of heritage. Their interplay has been an issue only because of another hallmark of Chinese Marxism: the notion that class conflict continues after socialization of the means of production. At one time Stalin had argued that class contradictions sharpened after socialism, but Stalin had also argued against what he called “petty bourgeois equality-mongering” as the range of inequalities in Soviet society was systematically extended. To the contrary, the Chinese theory of socialist class conflict has been associated with radical initiatives to end special privileges and to spread the benefits of the revolution more evenly throughout Chinese society. This approach was all the more noteworthy because it appeared at a time (the early 1960s) when Soviet doctrine moved furthest away from admitting the existence of class conflict, arguing that the Soviet Union had become a harmonious “state of the whole people.”

But it has not been easy for Chinese Marxists to elaborate the notion that class contradictions exist between leaders and ordinary citizens in socialist society. Willingness to grapple with these new contradictions has required intellectual boldness, but the risks of political conflict have tempered that boldness with caution. Fear of providing Chinese and Soviet critics with ammunition for accusations of heresy certainly made Maoists reluctant to jettison the older Marxist fixation upon private property relationships. And the equally well-established Marxist inclination to regard bureaucrats as the servants of some other class muddled comprehension of the new contradiction. Ascendant classes often base their claims to privilege in universalistic language, thereby denying the existence of the class differences which they enjoy. The traditional Marxist treatment of bureaucrats has permitted Chinese cadres to do the same, presenting themselves simply as the vanguard of the proletariat. It is easy to understand the appeal of this aspect of Marxism to many postrevolutionary officials.

Maoist interpretations of the changes in China's social structure have assumed the language of past class analyses, with new connotations attached to old and familiar terms. Innovations in the theory of class have been presented as venerable Leninist tradition, with elaborate citations from Marxist classics to mask the new as

the old. Bureaucratic resistance to such novelty has meant that the forms taken by the Maoist class theory have been influenced strongly by calculations of the political movement. This suggests that the broader process by which Marxism has been turned from a foreign into a native Chinese theory must be understood in terms of the conflicts in which it has been used as a weapon.

Mao Zedong as Critic of Socialist Inequality

The tentative appearance of a new bureaucratic class and the adaptation of Marxism to resist this trend are linked through the third focus of this study. Mao Zedong's role as a theorist of class in socialist society. Mao's stature as a revolutionary strategist and as a political leader in the People's Republic have both long been recognized. Less fully appreciated, however, is Mao's activity as social thinker since liberation.

The growth of bureaucratic power and privilege presented Mao with one of his greatest intellectual and political challenges (the two are impossible to separate in this man's career), no less significant than the preliberation task of adapting Marxism to the needs of rural revolution. No ruling Communist Party has ever come to grips with this problem, and thus Mao's efforts, often made against the wishes of old revolutionary comrades, are especially noteworthy. Now that Mao is dead, it is appropriate to review the evolution of his thoughts on class conflict in socialist China, both to comprehend his major theoretical interest after liberation and to understand more clearly some of the issues which underlie the social conflict which has followed his death.²⁰ This task is especially timely now, when the continuing relevance of Mao's radical heritage is being challenged by his political successors in Beijing, as well as by many Westerners interested in Chinese affairs. While the former undoubtedly will use Mao's memory in accord with their immediate political needs, perhaps I may persuade some of the latter to pause before judging his ideas now merely to be curios from China's recent but quite dead past.

Mao's relationship to China's bureaucrats was complex. One can easily compile a long series of antibureaucratic statements by Mao, whose denunciations of red tape, pomposity, and formalism began early in the revolution and continued until his death.²¹ Despite the consistency of Mao's distaste for bureaucratic ways, one

cannot fairly portray him merely as the adversary of the bureaucrats. For Mao was not only the enemy of bureaucratic abuse, he was also China's leading cadre for over a quarter of a century. As such, Mao was the patron of the industrious official, the innovator of the organizational techniques which continue to govern the bureaucracy after his death. If Mao was clearly identified with opposition to bureaucratic faults, he was no less obviously associated with the proud successes of a social group which he helped to fashion.

Mao was not necessarily schizophrenic to feel alternate pride and contempt for the cadres he led. For Mao sought to nurture a dedicated band of leaders, closely bound in life-style and emotion to the populace of China. Speaking in 1937 on "The Question of Cadres," Mao demanded:

They must be cadres and leaders versed in Marxism-Leninism, politically far-sighted, competent in work, full of the spirit of self-sacrifice, capable of tackling problems on their own, steadfast in the midst of difficulties and loyal and devoted in serving the nation, the class and the Party. . . . Such cadres and leaders must be free from selfishness, from individualistic heroism, ostentation, sloth, passivity, and sectarian arrogance, and they must be selfless national and class heroes. . . .²²

Mao set high standards for cadre behavior, and the gradual change of antibureaucratic sentiment into "class" analysis was rooted in his disappointment with many cadres after the victory of the revolution.

The critical year for this study is not 1949, when Communist power was established throughout China, but 1956, when socialist institutions were introduced on a wide scale. In that year of socialist transformation, China's leaders were united in an optimistic assessment of class conflict in their country. China had succeeded in overthrowing the old ruling classes, in casting out the imperialist powers, in rebuilding a war-ravaged economy, in establishing an institutional basis for socialist construction, and in apparently forging a new unity among the Chinese people. All these factors contributed to a hopeful mood in which large-scale social conflict seemed less prominent than at any time in the Party's memory. This mood was strongly reinforced by the rising influence of the Soviet Union, whose Communist Party argued that antagonistic class conflict did not arise under socialism.²³ In the

course of the revolution, the Party in China had developed an elaborate analysis of classes, including a system by which the class of each individual was identified and recorded. In the optimistic year of 1956, it seemed as if class were simply a matter of these leftover presocialist designations, the significance of which had already been gravely undermined as private property ceased to be an adequate guide to primary social divisions in the populace.

The notion that the class issue had been largely resolved by the introduction of socialism contained a fundamental assumption about the Chinese revolution: the struggle had ended with liberation, land reform, and socialist transformation, when the former exploiters were relegated to inferior positions with respect to those whom they had formerly oppressed. Justice had been done, and the world had been righted. This was and is a static view of the revolution, in which the major political task of the present is to prevent a capitalist-feudal restoration in which the former exploiters and their children might usurp the fruits of victory from the worker-peasant masses.

Mao Zedong shared this deep concern toward the defeated enemy, but ultimately was unwilling to accept a conception of class in which the revolution was something to be preserved rather than continued. Even in 1956, when Mao shared with other leaders the feeling that class conflict was diminishing in China, he was busy applying his theory of contradictions to socialist society. Less remarkable for its originality than for the consistency with which Mao applied it, the theory of contradictions presumes that progress results from the dialectical resolution of social tensions, and that political leadership can identify and tap key points of friction in society, thus serving as midwife to the birth of new social forms.²⁴

From the early days of Mao's participation in the revolution he had visualized these social tensions through the principal medium of a property-linked concept of class, in the tradition of Marx and Lenin. When socialist transformation weakened the foundations of that concept, Mao maintained his commitment to a broader vision of social conflict in his celebrated speech, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People." In this speech, class categories played a much diminished role in the Chairman's analysis, but the dialectical unwinding of social tensions remained constant.²⁵

This outlook, dynamic as well as dialectical, could not long co-

exist comfortably with a notion of class which had become frozen in time, a relic of the revolution. But Mao's sensitivity to contradictions did not generate mere armchair speculation about the character of class in socialist China. Instead, his rethinking of class was shaped by the exigencies of political struggle.

Three particular episodes were critical in leading him to elaborate a new conception of class conflict.²⁶ Harsh criticism of the Party by the former bourgeoisie during the Hundred Flowers Movement in early 1957 convinced him that the influence of the former exploiting classes did not end with socialization, that class conflict was a long-term phenomenon. Equally harsh criticism within the Party of Mao's economic policies, especially the radical mass mobilization of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, persuaded him that even veteran Party leaders with exemplary class backgrounds could oppose socialism. And Soviet mockery of efforts to discover a distinctively Chinese road to socialism convinced Mao and his colleagues that revisionism could come to power in a socialist state. If the Soviet leadership could oppose revolutionary policies, could not also China's? For the first time it appeared that there was a serious possibility that the Chinese revolution might be overturned from within.

Thus, after a decade of Communist rule, Mao found his policies under both internal and external attack. Analytically, the party-bound theory of class conflict which the Party had used to secure victory was insufficient to explain these events. On the defensive in politics, and in need of a theory by which to relate this political struggle to China's changing social structure, Mao's response was to reconsider the nature of class conflict in socialism.

A major aspect of Mao's program for regaining power lost after the Great Leap Forward was to utilize in a highly conscious manner the old appeals of class conflict which had served so well in the years before liberation. During the civil war class struggle had unified diverse Communists beneath Mao's banner, a process which Mao hoped to recapture. But it was not to be so simple, for the intervening changes made by the Communist Party in the organization of society meant that the old appeals to class had to be refashioned for use in a new environment. This procedure was approached cautiously but with increasing determination as Mao discovered that many of his former allies had become adversaries who now seemed to the Chairman uninterested in continuing the revolution which they had once waged together.

The first phase of the Maoist reanalysis of class had begun with the recognition that the old class enemies still were not resigned to socialism, from which Mao concluded that socialism was characterized by the persistence of class conflict. A second and more controversial phase contained the notion that the success of the revolution was imperiled not only by former exploiting classes, but also by a new kind of class enemy, one specific to socialism: a group of fat and contented bureaucrats, happy to enjoy 'the privileges of the society which they administered. These were the "revisionists," "new bourgeois elements," and "capitalist roaders" who were the chief targets of Maoist criticism.

As Mao and his associates searched for ways by which this new and unpropertied "bourgeoisie" might be identified, attention was shifted away from the old system of property-based class designations. The new standard chosen was political behavior. The central question was no longer to what class one belonged in a narrow, juridical sense, but rather what class was served by one's conduct.

Implicit in this new approach to class was a more dynamic orientation toward a continuing revolutionary process. The fundamental division of society, Mao recognized, was now centered around the socialist institutions which had been created after liberation. As old classes were defeated, new class enemies emerged from the ranks of the victors. Liberation was not enough; inequality and injustice persisted, and further efforts at redistribution were necessary to prevent a revisionist abortion of the revolution.

A central theoretical issue became the relationship between the old class contradictions and the new ones. Mao's analysis suggested that the persistence, in socialist society, of superstructural remnants of bourgeois influence helped lead cadres, workers, and peasants into the arms of the old exploiters. An important aspect of the new theory of class, then, became the notion of "cultural revolution": transformation of the economic base alone was insufficient; only when China possessed truly proletarian culture and institutions could its socialism be secure. In the early 1960s this corollary of the new theory of class was manifest in a series of campaigns to study contemporary heroes who had resisted the bourgeois influences in their environment. In 1966, however, a more explicit kind of Cultural Revolution was initiated, backed by more forceful measures than emulation campaigns.

But Mao's adversaries within the Party discovered that they

could deflect criticism by interpreting class conflict one-sidedly in terms of past property relationships, directing attention away from the behavioral component of the new analysis. In this way, persons of good class designation were said to possess a "natural redness" early in the Cultural Revolution, as cadres under fire protected themselves by attacking former landlords, capitalists, and their children.

The Cultural Revolution overcame much resistance to Maoist social reforms. At the same time, anti-Maoist cadres were deprived of the ideological weapon of "natural redness." Maoists successfully insisted that when the two standards of behavior and class designation were at odds, greater weight must be placed upon behavior. In practice, however, persons from unsavory class backgrounds continued to be the objects of special political attention, frequently serving as scapegoats for conservative officials.

From the experience of the Cultural Revolution, Mao and his colleagues learned that the reestablishment of a doctrine of class struggle was not in itself sufficient to inhibit the rise of a new bureaucratic class intent on pursuing elitist policies. Class conflict in socialist China was an ambiguous weapon, one which could be used by conservatives to legitimize the status quo as easily as by radicals to inspire new revolutionary efforts. But it was only in the course of political conflict that Mao discovered the conservative connotation which might be attached to his emerging re-analysis of class.

Perhaps because of disappointments with the results of the Cultural Revolution, Mao initiated a third phase in his reanalysis of class shortly before his death. The first phase had focused attention on the old class contradictions of property, while the second phase added to these a concern for a new kind of class opposition. This most recent, most tentative, and most radical step in the refurnishing of the concept of class conflict was an effort to isolate more accurately the social basis of the "new bourgeoisie," with diminished attention to the capitalists and landlords of yesterday.

A campaign to study the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1975 and the Antirightist Campaign in 1976 provided the occasion for Maoists to argue in public for the first time that new exploiting groups found their strength precisely in the institutional structures which the revolution had established in order to remake society. For built into the social organization of the People's Republic of China were structural inequalities introduced before liberation but

perpetuated unavoidably in socialist society. The "bourgeois right" to inequality found its ultimate expression in the state apparatus through which that right was enforced, and although inequality had to be restricted if China was to advance toward communism, the new bourgeoisie would prefer to extend it. Although this final Maoist interpretation of class was expressed in language which was sometimes arcane, its logic was revolutionary: the workers and peasants who constituted the majority of the population were in a relationship of class conflict with the bureaucrats who formulated policies affecting their lives. In 1976, the year of his death, Mao was quoted as saying of China's cadres:

With the socialist revolution they themselves come under fire. At the time of the cooperative transformation of agriculture there were people in the Party who opposed it, and when it comes to criticizing bourgeois right, they resent it. You are making the socialist revolution, and yet don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right in the Communist Party—those in power taking the capitalist road. The capitalist-roads are still on the capitalist road.²⁷

The notion that Marx's theory of class provides an inadequate basis for understanding patterns of inequality in socialist society was certainly not new with Mao Zedong. Even within the Marxist tradition there have been others who have analyzed the rise of bureaucratic groups within socialist society in class terms—one thinks immediately of Trotsky and of Milovan Djilas as Mao's precursors. What makes the Maoist effort distinctive is not that it is a better analysis (although in some respects it is), but that it was the product of a Marxist in power. Earlier Marxist attempts to achieve a class-oriented critique of socialism have been offered by defeated politicians, arguing from resentful impuissance. It is the political strength which undergirded the Maoist perspective that gives this analysis special interest. Rather than observe the transfiguration of Marxist class theory into a device for legitimizing the new socialist order, Mao refashioned the concept of class into a tool with which to contest the accretion of privilege by a new class of dominant bureaucrats.

As a theoretical enterprise, this final Maoist effort added needed rigor to the search for the source of class tensions in socialist China. But as a practical political measure, the approach could not help alienating many of the officials whose interests it sought to

identify and limit. Soon after Mao's death in 1976, those of his associates who were most closely associated with the propagation of this theory (the so-called "Gang of Four") were purged and accused of distorting the Chairman's understanding of class. Since Mao's death, the discussion of class conflict has followed a course much less menacing to those who occupy favored positions in the new social hierarchy of China.

At the end of 1955, as socialist institutions were being introduced into China, Mao likened the event to "discovering a new continent."²⁸ As Mao attempted to chart this continent, however, he discovered that there were many among his Party comrades who did not wish all its features to be revealed. If socialism is a new continent, it is a land-mass still in formation, and Mao's theory demanded constant attention to keep it in touch with the changing social structure it needed to analyze. For the classes in socialist China were not sharply delineated, and "new bourgeois elements" were discovered through ongoing political struggle, not through dispassionate reflection. The novelty of both the situation and the analysis means that the Maoist revival of class cannot be dismissed as a mere romantic effort to recapture the great revolution. It was a new endeavor, designed to cope with the tensions presented by a distinctively socialist society.²⁹

The Communist Party's analysis of the classes of Chinese society was the basis for a broad series of structural reforms which ultimately rendered that analysis obsolete. But social change proved more rapid than the Party's ability to update its analysis, and in directions which weakened its enthusiasm for doing so.³⁰

The first generation of socialist China has been a troublesome time for dispassionate social analysis. In such an atmosphere, social theories have been political weapons, and the definition of social categories, which amuses academic sociologists in the West, has become at once the medium and the object of class conflict. For if a particular way of viewing social structure is apt to tilt future perceptions and encourage certain consequences over others, social categories cannot be said to be neutral or indifferent. In the People's Republic, alternative conceptions of class have been used to promote conflicting visions of what China is and should become; the conflict over class conflict is thus a subtle one, in which contrasting images have been backed by social forces competing to control the definition of China's social reality.

CHAPTER TWO

Two Models of Social Stratification

Taking the socialist transformation of 1955–1956 as a dividing point, two phases in China's changing postliberation class structure may be distinguished. In the first of these, the property-based classes against which the Communist Party had waged revolution were still active, although progressively restricted until the institution of socialist reforms undermined their material bases. The workers and peasants upon whose support the Party depended could similarly be distinguished by their varied relationships to the means of production. The second phase, which has continued from 1956 through the present, has been characterized by a restructuring of social relationships on a new and more bureaucratic foundation, following the collapse of landlord and capitalist authority. Although this process is far from complete, distinctions of political (rather than economic) power have increasingly become the axis around which social groups may be identified. The bureaucrats ascendant after 1956 may be viewed as a presumptive leading class, still not fully self-conscious of its social position but separated in power and life-style from the worker and peasant majority of the population.

Associated with these two patterns of class relationships have been two important official economic hierarchies: a stratification by class category, established in the years prior to socialization, and a stratification by occupational rank which has taken form since socialist transformation. These two models of stratification are abstractions, and cannot capture the rich complexity of social inequality in the People's Republic. Nonetheless, it is necessary to consider these two models of stratification in some detail in order to disentangle the web of class conflict in socialist China. In the

process, it is important to make a sharp distinction between class and stratification.

Stratification by Class Designation

One lesson of the Communist Party's protracted revolutionary struggle was a sensitivity to the shifting contradictions among the classes of Chinese society. From the outset, the Party's interest in class analysis was strategic, not academic. Mao's 1926 essay, the "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society," opens with the questions which Maoist class analysis has pursued ever since: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?"¹ In order to reach someday the classless society of Marx's communist future, the Party first had to specify the class relationships of the present. Only in this way could potential popular support be identified and mobilized, the enemy classes be isolated, and the wavering intermediate classes be won over to the side of revolution. The Party's early position as a minority under sustained attack by numerically superior opponents dictated a concern for class analysis in order to maximize its potential support. By the time of liberation, the Party had developed a sophisticated understanding of fluctuating configurations of class alignment as it skillfully worked its way through United Front politics against a series of successfully vanquished enemies.²

By the time of liberation in 1949, the abstraction of class had acquired a special concreteness as the Party implemented a series of broad social reforms. As an adjunct to policies such as land reform, in which it was necessary to identify those persons who should receive benefits and those who should lose them, the Party found it necessary to specify the class membership of individual Chinese. Building upon earlier rural policies, the Party applied a complex system of over sixty class designations³ in a series of sometimes violent campaigns (see the appendix).

These class designations ranged from categories which were clearly bad, such as capitalist and landlord, through the intermediate designations of petty bourgeoisie and middle peasant, to the workers and poor peasants in whose name the revolution had been made. In the period in which the designations were assigned, they provided a basis for consensus within the Party about the meaning of class: a person's class was a matter of record, the of-

ficially determined class designation. Prior to liberation, in areas under Communist control, detailed investigations were carried out in order to identify each person's class membership.

The definition of class which the Party employed is Lenin's:

Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labor, and, consequently, by the dimensions and mode of acquiring the share of social wealth of which they dispose. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labor of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.⁴

The class categories associated with this Marxist conception had been derived from the experience of nineteenth-century Europe, and there was a problem in fitting them to a society which was neither capitalist nor industrial. From a European perspective, Chinese Marxists had a surfeit of peasants in their Party, and some way had to be found by the Chinese to explain how these peasants could be the leading force in a revolutionary Marxist movement.

One solution was to incorporate political and attitudinal considerations into the calculation of class position, a trend which complemented the Party's traditions of distinguishing class standpoint from class origin, and of emphasizing rectification and thought reform as ways in which persons can acquire ideologies not characteristic of their class of origin. The intellectual problem of how to accommodate revolutionaries of nonproletarian origin (and counterrevolutionaries from the working class) is symbolized by the figure of Marx. If Marx was not somehow a proletarian, how could Marxism be a revolutionary theory? The same point applied to many of the Party's leaders, including the rich peasant's son, Mao Zedong.⁵

This development was also a response to the difficulty of making specific those social relationships which Marx had considered to be abstract in nature. A Russian revolutionary had earlier addressed this problem:

In an analysis of the "abstract type" of society, i.e., any social form in its purest state, we are dealing almost exclusively with its basic classes; but when we take up the concrete reality, we of course find

ourselves faced with the motley picture with all its social-economic types and relations.⁶

But the voluntarist strain in Chinese class identification should not be overemphasized.⁷ As the Party faced China's motley picture of social-economic types, it relied upon the relationship to the means of production as the basic test for class membership. And as the territory under Communist administration expanded in the years immediately prior to liberation, the Party began a systematic classification of the populace into property-based class categories, a process which was not completed until the early 1950s.⁸

Ordinary Chinese were unfamiliar with Marxist terminology, and even many cadres had but a rudimentary grasp of the language of class analysis. Thus after liberation many articles appeared in the Chinese press which described the structure of Chinese society in Marxist categories, enumerating the various classes so that all persons might comprehend the significance of their new class designations.⁹

Although such articles were part of a larger effort to acquaint Chinese with Marxism-Leninism, discussions of class often seemed to be linked to Chinese society in a particularly concrete way. Mao's 1926 "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society" was reprinted, along with many commentaries on how to study this opening work in the new first volume of Mao's selected writings.¹⁰ One of the commentators summed up the mood of the time with the blunt observation that discussing classes with reference to foreign books instead of Chinese characteristics was worth less than dog shit.¹¹

For purposes of discussion, the system of class designations may be divided into sets, according to the different types of economy, or modes of production, which characterized preliberation China. By far the most important of these are what the Chinese called the "semifeudal" class relationships of the countryside and the capitalist relations of urban centers.

Since the revolution led by the Communist Party was based in the rural areas, the semifeudal set of class designations was more elaborate than others. The differentiation of rural classes was complex, both because of the wide range of social relationships which they encompassed and because of the Party's extended experience with them, which heightened sensitivity to rather subtle distinc-

tions in class position. The most basic rural class designations were generally names of strata within classes, including hired agricultural laborer, poor peasant, middle peasant, well-to-do middle peasant, rich peasant, and landlord. The varieties of landlord are particularly impressive, including enlightened, bankrupt, tyrannical, reactionary, hidden, and overseas Chinese landlords.

Rural class designations were fixed in the course of land reform.¹² Before land could be confiscated and redistributed on a more equitable basis, local cadres had to determine from whom it should be taken and to whom it should be given. Land reform was thus the primary goal, to which the identification of class membership was ancillary. It is doubtful that the participants in this campaign could have imagined the long-range significance of the designations, but such knowledge could not have made the conflict over land reform any more severe.

Because the issues at stake were so great—one's livelihood and relations with fellow villagers—and because of Party's desire to employ the land reform campaign to mobilize the peasantry in the Communist cause, the process of designating class membership became a rather formal one. Outside work teams were sent to villages to lead land reform; to assist them in the differentiation of classes, the Party published a guide with definitions of the various categories.¹³

These definitions were often quite specific, with such details as the proportion of income derived from exploitation which distinguished rich peasants from well-to-do middle peasants, or the number of years of exploitation which were necessary to warrant classification as a landlord. To these definitions were added even more precise explanations and illustrations to assist cadres and the masses in their decisions. These were particularly important in resolving ambiguous cases, such as landlords who had married poor peasants or members of the Red Army who had rich peasant families. The standards required calculation of labor and of exploitation in order to put flesh on Lenin's definition of class, although considerations of political stance (as in the case of revolutionary soldiers with rich peasant fathers) were also incorporated into them.

The land reform campaign was often violent, as it concentrated ancient social tensions into an officially sanctioned form of class conflict. And although there was public discussion of the standards being applied, and opportunities for appeal of contested de-

cisions, there were numerous cases of local abuse of the central guidelines.¹⁴ Sometimes this resulted from the intrusion of personal grudges and favoritism into class determination, but there was also a frequent tendency to locate mechanically an assumed 10 percent quota of landlords and rich peasants.¹⁵

Since land reform took place in successive areas of China only after their liberation, the determination of class designations was accomplished far earlier and probably more thoroughly in North China, where liberation preceded the establishment of the People's Republic, than in the South, where land reform was not completed until the early 1950s. By that time, rural Chinese had been made keenly aware of their own class designations as well as those of their neighbors.

A different set of categories was employed for the classification of urban residents, one which reflected the Party's perception of the cities as centers of capitalist rather than feudal social relationships. The fundamental categories ranged from worker, through the various strata of the petty bourgeoisie—including such diverse types as peddlers, small shopowners, independent handicraftsmen, and those engaged in the liberal professions—to the bourgeoisie, among whom could be distinguished compradore, industrial, and commercial capitalists.

Surprisingly little is known about the ways in which these urban class designations were applied to individuals. In fact, it is striking that I have found nowhere a written account of this process, and that among Chinese emigrants in Hong Kong I met no one who was capable of providing a coherent description of it. The image which rather haltingly emerges is one in which urban residents of the early 1950s were asked to specify their own class membership, either through their work units or their neighborhood administrations. These self-reported class designations were then apparently examined for accuracy by the Party, and that was the end of it. The fixing of urban class designations was not a central aspect of a major political campaign.¹⁶

It seems probable that class relationships were more evident in the capitalist cities than in the countryside, and the profusion of articles on class analysis may have meant that most urban residents knew to what class they belonged. But it is also likely that the absence of issues so compelling as those raised by land reform, coupled with the almost casual manner of linking individuals to class designations, may have resulted in urban Chinese being less

well-versed in class categories and their political significance than their rural counterparts.

Although the vast majority of the population was included in these urban and rural sets of class designations, in some areas neither a capitalist nor a semifeudal conception of class relationships was appropriate. The Party's compulsion for classification thus resulted in still other sets of class categories.

Many of the areas inhabited by China's national minorities, for instance, were perceived as representing still different stages of historical-economic development. The case of Tibet may serve as an example.¹⁷ As with the rest of rural China before liberation, Tibetan society was characterized as semifeudal. But this was not because of capitalist intrusions into a feudal society; rather it stemmed from the lingering remnants of Tibet's prefeudal slave society. Tibetan class categories thus include a great mass of slaves and peasant serfs, and both religious and secular feudal lords, who formed 5 percent of the population.

Still other sets of class categories existed for groups engaged in various distinctive forms of economic enterprise. The fishing people of South China, for instance, have never been fully integrated into the peasant economy of their landbound neighbors. The peculiarity of their pre-collective social structure is reflected in the categories which the Party employed to describe it. The major designations include fishing worker, small boatowner, boatowner, and fishstall-owner—which suggest the special process of production in the fishing community.¹⁸

The system of class designations encouraged the perception of a China divided into hierarchies of related classes, with each individual occupying a niche determined by position in the production process. The catalog of possible designations had to be broad enough to encompass the entire range of Marxist historical stages, from slave society through feudalism and capitalism, all of which the Party maintained existed in China at the time of liberation.¹⁹

A few of the designations, however, are not unique to any one class hierarchy. These include some of the best and worst of possible categories: revolutionary cadre and revolutionary soldier were determined by service in the Communist cause, while a negative classification such as "military officer for an illegitimate authority" was designed to identify those who had worked for the Guomindang, regardless of social origin. Similarly, there were some feudal elements present in urban areas, and capitalist care-

gories in the countryside, as neither of the leading modes of production formed an isolated system.

By the end of the great classification, in theory each person could be located in an appropriate slot in this complex system of class designations, although in fact some individuals were not classified. We know that entire villages were omitted, and it seems likely that some non-Han Chinese, who were often isolated from political currents affecting the majority ethnic group, may also have avoided individual class identification.²⁰ The profusion of class categories necessary to accommodate the whole range of social relationships was perforce rather unwieldy. Since errors in its application in the countryside have been acknowledged, it is perhaps likely that greater mistakes were made in urban centers, where procedures for classification were less well developed.²¹

Class and Stratification

In order to comprehend this vast pigeonholing of the Chinese populace, one must refer to Karl Marx, whose theories the Party worked so systematically to apply. Gaining access to Marx's concept of class is no easy task, however, as he used the notion in a variety of contexts, never stopping to define it in uncertain terms. "Relationship to the means of production" and "position in the production process," phrases commonly employed as shorthand indicators of what Marx meant by class, fail to convey much sense of how he employed it. Many have commented, with some surprise, upon the lack of precision with which Marx treated this central idea in his social theory. One author attributes it to Marx's desire to refine class further before offering a systematic exposition.²² Another suggests that Marx sacrificed conceptual precision to his primary goal of explaining the structure and dynamics of bourgeois society.²³ And a third argues that "discrepant uses of the term 'class' were probably the less important for Marx because, according to his theory, further social development would render them obsolete."²⁴

Whatever Marx's reasons, his theory of class has been a subject of considerable controversy among both academic commentators and practicing revolutionaries. But if it is impossible to define rigorously what Marx "really" meant by class, much can be learned by considering what Marx's class is not. It is certain that Marx

never understood a class to be what twentieth-century western social science calls "social stratification." By this I mean the hierarchical ranking of individuals according to some single standard (income, wealth, prestige, and power are the most commonly used), or according to some composite set of criteria. Marx's use of class can be distinguished from social stratification in several ways.²⁵

Unlike social stratification, which typically deals with the relative placement of individuals on a scale of individuals, class is an abstraction for understanding the characteristics of groups within total societies. The ranking of individuals according to income or wealth may describe the distribution of benefits in society, but when such an enterprise is not bound up with a theory of how groups are related to production, it says nothing about class.

Unlike social stratification, which is essentially a static concept, class is embedded in history, is dynamic, and is centered upon the question of change. For Marx, "the theory of class was not a theory of a cross section of society arrested in time, in particular not a theory of social stratification, but a tool for the explanation of changes in total societies."²⁶ Social stratification is like a photograph—perhaps accurate and suggestive of relationships—but class is like a movie, in which each frame is perceived within the context of what has passed before and what may follow. Class attempts to capture a process which includes unstable relationships, a far more ambitious project than the more limited possibilities of social stratification.

Unlike social stratification, which may be applied in any social context, class is historically specific. The capitalist class system is not applicable to all times and places in the way that one might compare hierarchies of prestige or power from disparate nations. Instead, a nation's class relationships are peculiar to its own historically rooted mode of production.

Social stratification may describe relations of harmony as readily as hierarchies torn by dissension, but Marx's class cannot be detached from social conflict. Whereas social stratification looks at steps on a ladder, classes are defined by their opposition within a system. This conflict generates class consciousness and political organization, two important markers of a class's existence.

Social stratification is inclusive of all members of society. Marx's class concept is an exclusive one, admitting only those groups which meet its criteria. Indeed, in Marx's analysis of cap-

travail society, only proletariat and bourgeoisie are pure classes. For other groups, class is a matter of degree:

the absence of one criterion may be offset by a higher degree of another characteristic, just as in the evaluation of a work of art a lower level of artistic technique may be offset, for instance, by originality of idea or power of expression. A work of art can be a work of art to a greater or lesser degree, just as a social class may be a class to a greater degree.²⁷

This variability in what constitutes a class is nowhere clearer than in Marx's famous characterization of the French peasantry as isolated and self-sufficient.

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local inter-connection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.²⁸

With this distinction sharply drawn, it becomes apparent that the Chinese Communist Party, in the process of applying Marx's class analysis to Chinese society, subtly transformed class into stratification. Although class designations were intended to make concrete the abstractions of Marxist theory, in application they unavoidably assumed the character of a hierarchy of social stratification.

This change was perhaps unavoidable. Mao's early conception of the purpose behind class analysis—to distinguish enemies from friends—is not different from Marx's. In fact, one student of Marx asserts that "'Who is the enemy' is a question that can be asked whenever Marx uses 'class.'"²⁹ But when Marx inquired about the enemy, a different sort of response was possible than when the same question was posed by the Chinese Communist Party. I do not mean to dismiss Marx as a mere armchair theorist in noting that certain changes took place in his theory as the Chinese applied it because the Party was engaged in a protracted civil war, rather than an historical analysis. The detached, historically informed insight of Marx was not replicable as the Party

was forced to determine which groups could be relied upon in a life-and-death revolutionary struggle. For the Party, the task of discovering enemies possessed an immediacy which Marx, sitting in the British Museum, did not face.

In the course of the revolution, enemy and friend became concrete individuals, interacting within local communities, rather than grand social groups with shifting boundaries contending over the fates of total societies. A tendency to reify class reached its ultimate point in the assignment of class designations in the thousands of villages throughout China.

E. P. Thompson observes that

the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any moment and anatomise its structure. The finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give one of deference or love.³⁰

This fluency was halted as the Party used its analytical concept as an operational one. The choice was not willful, nor is it helpfully viewed as a betrayal of Marx by a Party acting in his name. On the contrary, it is difficult to imagine what alternative the Party had to identifying individual class membership.³¹ In what other manner could land be reapportioned and the revolutionary alliance be consolidated? Facing a problem which Marx had never confronted, in the effort to be true to their Marxist convictions the Chinese enacted a precision of class identification which Marx was unlikely ever to have imagined.

In the West, students of human inequality typically have employed either the concept of class or the concept of social stratification, but seldom both. The rejection of class, which has been strongest in the United States, has often held that class may have been useful for the analysis of early industrial Europe, but is simply too blunt a tool to apply to advanced industrial societies.³² The critique of social stratification, frequently European in origin or orientation, has insisted that attention to minute hierarchical gradations within a population obscures broader currents of social conflict, that stratification is an inherently conservative conception of inequality.³³

In this debate social scientists have too often forgotten that the choice need not be an exclusive one. Class and stratification cap-

ture different aspects of social reality, and may be not only complementary but mutually necessary. Rodolfo Stavenhagen argues that class structures give rise to distinctive stratification orders, as dominant classes influence hierarchies of social rank in the same manner that they imprint their interests upon other superstructural phenomena, such as religion, ideology, and politics. If this is so, an important question is the effect upon social stratification of a change in the class system with which it is associated. Stavenhagen's response is suggestive:

As with all phenomena of the social superstructure, stratification systems acquire an inertia of their own which acts to maintain them, although the conditions that gave rise to them may have changed. As class relationships are modified by the dynamics of class opposition, conflict and struggle, stratification systems tend to turn into "fossils" of the class relations on which they were originally based. For that reason they may cease to correspond to existing class relationships and may even enter into contradiction with them, particularly in the case of revolutionary changes in the class structure.³⁴

One example of a stratification order which has been turned into a sociological fossil is the persistence of aristocratic distinctions in Europe well after capitalist industrialization had undermined their basis in the power of a land-owning ruling class. Another example is the system of class designations in China.

In this perspective, the property-based class relations of pre-liberation China underlay the stratification of class designations by which the Communists ranked the population as they consolidated their power. But the success of the revolution brought on the destruction of the property system of which the class designations were an artifact. The new system of class relationships associated with the introduction of socialism to Chinese society is still embryonic, tentative, and obscure. Less obscure, however, is a new and bureaucratically oriented stratification by which Chinese are increasingly identified. As consideration of a prominent social hierarchy may illuminate the new class relationships upon which it rests, I will now turn to China's new social stratification of occupational rank.

Stratification by Occupational Rank

After a prolonged period of foreign invasion, civil war, and revolution, China cannot be said to have had a clearly defined social "structure," a word which suggests a certain permanence and regularity. The Communist Party, just beginning to turn itself from a guerrilla organization into a more routinized and bureaucratic one, played a central role in the postliberation reorganization of society. As if unconsciously acknowledging that the stratification of class designations had been outmoded by the socialist transformation of 1956, the Party advanced a new system of social stratification by which to categorize the population. Perhaps because of bureaucrats' concern for order and rationality in the planning of China's industrialization, individual Chinese have since been ranked within an elaborate system of work-grades, denoting with clarity each employee's position in a hierarchy of job-related rewards and privileges (see the appendix).

Among the most striking aspects of Chinese work-grades is their universality: almost everyone is given some sort of job ranking. These ranks indicate income levels, prestige, and authority. Income differentiation, far from having no place in Chinese socialism, is actually more highly structured than in the United States. Large sections of the American work force are not included in any systematic schedule of wages or salaries—farmers, operators of small businesses, physicians, and corporation executives at once come to mind—and even most scheduled personnel do not participate in very formal job hierarchies, apart from civil service and military employees. Furthermore, there are significant non-salary income sources in the United States which make the chaotic multiplicity of salary schedules inadequate as an index of income.

China is far from placing all of its work force on a single scale, but it does seem to approximate this more than most societies.³⁵ The number of work-grade hierarchies is small, and they are often compatible. Moreover, unlike in the United States, the role of salary supplements is limited.³⁶

The stratification of occupational ranks may be divided into horizontal groupings, which I shall call "sectors," much as the stratification of class designations may be divided horizontally into several modes of production. A sector³⁷ refers to a set of occupations related by shared participation in economic activity of a special type. Unlike class, which stresses a common position in

the production process (as among capitalists, no matter how their funds may be invested), sector calls attention to shared experience at all levels of the occupational hierarchy within a single functional realm. The industrial sector thus includes all persons whose livelihood is associated with factories, regardless of occupational rank.

Sector is not a theoretically derived conception, and is encountered in diverse formulations. One with a long history in the Party is the triad of worker-peasant-soldier (*gongnongbing*). Here horizontal distinctions of either occupational rank or class designation are not at issue, but rather the functional role played by all peasants, workers, and soldiers within Chinese society. A more inclusive set of sectors, used by Mao and thus often found in the Chinese press, is a grouping of seven: industry, agriculture, commerce, education, the military, government, and the Party (*gong, nong, shang, xue, bing, zheng, dang*).³⁸ After socialist transformation, the Party increasingly divided its own work along functional lines, recognizing several systems (*xitong*), such as finance and trade, rural affairs, and political-legal work.³⁹ These systems coincided roughly with sectors, whose prominence they enhanced.

In the years of revolutionary struggle, the cadres of the Communist movement were without a well-defined hierarchy of ranks.⁴⁰ Remuneration for work done followed the "supply system," in which cadres were provided with life's necessities in a rather egalitarian manner, with only three differentiated grades by which cadres were issued housing, food, etc. This procedure was maintained for several years after liberation, only to be replaced in the national wage reform which accompanied socialist transformation.

The formal hierarchy of civil service ranks which was introduced along with socialization reflected the strong Soviet influence then present in China. Each state cadre was assigned to one of 30 grades (*jibie*), with grade 1 for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the state, and grade 26 for the lowest cadre. Ranks 27 through 30 were reserved for janitorial and other service personnel.

The cadre ranking system contains a mechanism to compensate for regional disparities in the cost of living; it also contains a far less egalitarian distribution of income than did the supply system. Barnet's investigation of a single ministry concluded that the minister received a salary nine times greater than that of the lowest ranking cadre. But the system is important for providing markers of status and power as well as income differentiation.

Rank is known within an organization, and is even evident outside through such manifestations as distinctions in dress, deportment, or access to automobiles. And the civil service scheme obviously provides a ladder for bureaucratic promotions.⁴¹

Military bureaucrats, the cadres of the People's Liberation Army, are graded by a comparable system. The egalitarian relationships of the revolutionary Red Army were undermined by the establishment of a system of officer ranks (replete with fancy Soviet-style uniforms) in 1955. The well-known abolition of ranks in 1965 did away with gold braid and honorific titles, but it certainly did not imply the elimination of graded distinctions of authority and income within the armed forces. This system is closely coordinated with the grades of civilian cadres.⁴² Thus while a senior captain (*dawei*) was equivalent to a grade 17 civilian cadre (e.g., a county-level administrator), the bureaucratic position now held by that former captain (*yizhang*, or battalion commander) is still calibrated with the same civilian rank. Residents of China say that military grade distinctions, like those of civilian cadres, are often highly visible. Thus one can recognize personnel at the battalion level and below by their padded jackets (*mianao*), which set them apart from their overcoated superiors.

Another important cluster of work-grades introduced by the wage reform includes industrial workers.⁴³ Following Soviet practice, most state-owned enterprises divide their workers according to skill and experience into a hierarchy of eight (but sometimes fewer) grades. A typical ratio between the highest and lowest wages is three to one, although this may be misleading, insofar as workers might take as their reference point the higher salaries of the cadres who manage the factories. Very important distinctions exist among permanent workers, who receive pension and health-care benefits, and temporary workers, who do not. Contract workers, employed seasonally and drawn from agriculture, may not be graded in this system at all. Given the egalitarian tone of Maoist politics, it is striking that the work-grade hierarchy, like the cadre work-grades, has remained unchanged in its basic structure up to the present, including throughout the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. Reasons for this durability will be taken up in a later chapter, but it suggests that workers have had ample time to become accustomed to a clear hierarchy of positions by which they may gauge their relative standing.

Additional formal job-ranking schemes abound. There are 25

grades of educational administrators, 12 ranks of professors.⁴⁴ Engineers are divided into 8 levels, and technicians may attain 5 possible ranks.⁴⁵ Writers, actors, and opera singers are graded as state cadres, and even the inmates of labor reeducation camps are sorted into grades for wages.⁴⁶

Far less rigorously stratified into a hierarchy of occupational ranks are China's peasants. Agriculture is predominantly a collective rather than a state undertaking. The only fully socialist part of the agricultural sector consists of state farms, often located in underdeveloped frontier regions, whose workers presumably receive wages according to standardized work-grades. For the vast majority of peasants who work within the commune system, however, remuneration takes the form of shares of the collective production. But even here there have been strong tendencies to divide peasants into quasi-bureaucratic ranks.⁴⁷ While there is enormous local variation in rural incentive policies, the shares of output earned by most peasants are determined by some system of classification into ranks (*dengji*). The most widespread technique in the 1960s was the *Dazhai* model, in which peasants placed themselves in several grades through mutual evaluation. Ten or twelve grades were typical, with the strongest, most highly skilled, and politically most conscious peasants being assigned the first few grades, the lowest positions going to the elderly, the infirm, and the very young. These grades were reviewed periodically (annually, or often at each harvest), and provided a way of determining how much the work-points earned by a peasant would be worth at the division of the agricultural surplus.

Like cadre or worker stratification, the peasant ranks are typically known within the production unit, and offer a basis for identification, although other forms of social distinction are more likely to be popularly recognized. In part, this is because the peasant ranks do not form a hierarchy for career promotion, as a peasant typically attains the highest grade in early maturity, when productivity is highest. Drops in grade follow the decline in strength which accompanies increasing age, unless the peasant possesses such superior agricultural knowledge that a high grade may be retained. Decreasing rank, however, need not mean a declining income, if the unit's productivity increases at a rapid enough rate to raise the value of each work-point to offset the loss.

The agricultural sector is an important but only partial excep-

tion to the development of a persuasive and surprisingly stable stratification of occupational rank in socialist China. The significance of this social hierarchy is strongly colored, however, by the stratification of class designations which antedates it.

The Interaction of the Two Stratifications

The interrelationship of these two models of social stratification forms an important aspect of the context within which the transformation of China's class structure is taking shape. The political implications of their coexistence will be addressed in subsequent chapters. Here I will consider the connection between them in a preliminary manner: by asking what each stratification measures, by discussing the extent to which they intersect, and by evaluating briefly their links to changes in class relationships.

It should be clear that these are not the only stratifications of the Chinese populace: informal notions of relative wisdom, beauty, and occupational prestige are found in China as in any society. Class designation and occupational rank assume special weight because they are both (at least superficially) economic stratifications, and because they are both officially sanctioned.

The class designation system (which I will also call the property model of stratification) represents the Party's effort to capture economic relationships at a time when private property was still a primary element in the determination of social position. Even if the Party perhaps overemphasized property's impact, and even if it was sometimes sloppy in identifying individual social rank, the hierarchy of class designations nonetheless is rooted in a social structure in which propertied classes were a leading force. In socialist China, these designations must represent something else; they serve as an index to former relationships to the means of production, as historical markers to a social world which no longer exists.

Since 1956, the stratification of occupational rank (or the socialist model of stratification) has become a better index to current economic position. Its parallel ladders of nearly graded steps have emerged from the social reorganization which has been led by the Communist bureaucracy. As work-grades have usurped the economic aspects of the class designations, the property model has increasingly become a measure of political status, of social honor.

Another obvious distinction between the two models is locational. As the child of land reform, the property model is more elaborately drawn, and was more systematically applied in rural China than in urban areas. The opposite is true of the socialist model, which has had a greater impact in the cities, home of bureaucrats and industrial workers. The continuing dominance of collective rather than state enterprise in the countryside has deferred the extension of work-grade stratification there.

But the relationship between property and socialist models of stratification is more complex than this, for although the old class system was overthrown, the stratification hierarchy derived from it was not. Work-grades may have supplanted class designations as a current guide to the economic position of individual Chinese, but class designations have persisted as an officially structured memory of former social relationships. The superimposition of work-grades upon class designations has meant that individuals have been identified by two distinct scales of official social position. And because these scales measure different qualities, a person's position in one stratification may not accord with location as measured by the other.

The impact of such status discontinuity has not been constant. Interest in class (regardless of its meaning) has varied over time, and attention to class designations has varied with it. As public discussion of class has risen and fallen, the salience of work-grades has first diminished, then increased. The rhythm of political campaigns has also affected the relative significance of the two stratification models: at the height of most mass movements, class designations have been vital indicators of political security and anxiety. One young emigrant summed up a feeling no doubt common to the minority with bad class designations in the Cultural Revolution: "If your class designation is good, you can do anything you please; if your designation is bad, then you must endure a lifetime of bitterness."

The cross-cutting of the two stratifications is not random in its impact, but rather affects the sectors of the work-grade system differentially. This can be illustrated in a diagram where the horizontal categories are sectors and the vertical ones are groups of related class designations. The industrial and military sectors have fewer personnel with bad class designations than the commercial and educational sectors, both of which employ many persons of dubious class origin, primarily petty bourgeois. The Party's re-

Possible Class Designations in Seven Sectors

	industry	military	party	government	agriculture	commerce	education
worker	x	x	x	x			
poor peasant, lower-middle peasant	x	x	x	x	x		
petty bourgeois, well-to-do middle peasant			x	x	x	x	x
rich peasant, capitalist, landlord					x	x	x

NOTE: Data on the actual distribution of class designations among sectors are not available. Chinese press accounts of problems of class consciousness in different sectors sustain the image presented above, however. Class designations are collapsed into four groups on the basis of recurring Party estimates of their relative reliability and revolutionary commitment. An x in a cell indicates that a relatively large number of persons with those class designations are apt to be employed within that sector. I have not attempted to estimate the relative magnitude of these numbers, although one can easily imagine that the largest number of worker designations are to be found in the industrial sector, for instance, or that most rich peasants are in agriculture (see chapter 6 for a discussion of class designations of those born after liberation).

ponse to this differentiation of sectors has been twofold: first to make the commercial and educational sectors special targets in campaigns which stress class struggle, and second, to shore up these weak sectors through transfusions of personnel with good class designations (as in campaigns to transfer military personnel and poor and lower-middle peasants to commercial work).

How is this tension between two stratification models related to the ongoing changes in China's class relationships? The opposition of class and stratification which I have sketched suggests that the work-grade model might be seen as a device by which bureaucrats have attempted to shape society in their own image. As a new and still poorly consolidated class, however, these bureaucrats are ambiguously perceived by others in Chinese society. Certainly the parameters of China's bureaucratic class are cast in deeper shadow

than the stratification order that has flourished under its influence. And it is this socialist model of inequality which has been the focus for the postliberation restratification which aroused Maoist anxieties. Accordingly, the Maoist reanalysis of class in China shifted from a preoccupation with the old and familiar inequality of property to the new and still poorly understood distinctions of a more bureaucratized society.

The durability of class designations must be understood in terms of their usefulness to many groups in contemporary China. As economic inequalities of property have been supplanted by the new inequalities of occupational rank, many cadres have found class designations useful as a way of reducing popular consciousness of this change. Poor and lower-middle peasants, in particular, can find pride in class designations which accord them a status more lofty than their actual material position. Each of the stratifications dulls sensitivity to the inequalities represented by the other scale. The only group which has an unambiguous interest in dealing solely with the new socialist stratification model consists of those associated with the former propertied classes, who seek redress of their low status. Even radical cadres, alarmed at the development of bureaucratic privilege, might pause before attacking a stratification order by which they fare well.

Thus the competing claims of the two models have formed the background for Maoist theorizing about inequality in socialist society. The relationship between the two has been a prolonged process by which residues of the Party's presocialist class analysis have become attached to new social tensions. That bureaucrats would prefer focusing attention upon the property model, while ex-capitalists and landlords and their children would prefer the socialist model, is an irony of the revolution, the consequences of which have yet fully to be resolved.

CHAPTER THREE

Socialist Transformation and the Displacement of Class

In the midst of liberation, land reform, and the consolidation of Communist power in the cities, there was considerable curiosity about the socialism which the Party promised. Slogans such as "The Soviet Union's today is China's tomorrow" offered only vague clues about the Party's plans for Chinese society. Pressed by ordinary peasants, some cadres responded that "socialism is electric lights and telephones," or that socialism would mean the end of cooking: when guests came, all that would be necessary was to place a chicken into a machine and out would come a prepared meal.¹

The Party's leaders were conscious of both the promise and the potential difficulties of socialization—that it could not resolve all China's problems overnight, and that it might bring new tensions in a society still healing the wounds of civil war. Many cadres were thus prepared to introduce socialism in a series of deliberate stages. Mao and his supporters pushed instead for a more radical pace, ridiculing gradualist cadres as "tottering along like a woman with bound feet and constantly complaining: 'You're going too fast!'"² Mao's urgency rested upon a conviction that socialist reforms were the best way to increase production at a rapid rate, concern that a delay in the introduction of these reforms would permit the emergence of new landlords and capitalists, and anxiety that the Party would lag behind activist elements in the population.

Mao prevailed, and the speed of the socialist transformation of 1955–1956 astonished many Party members. In July of 1955, only 14.2 percent of peasant families were members of cooperatives.