

# The Bankruptcy of the Idealist Conception of History

Mao Tse-tung

The Chinese should thank Acheson, spokesman of the U.S. bourgeoisie, not merely because he has explicitly confessed to the fact that the United States supplied the money and guns and Chiang Kai-shek the men to fight for the United States and slaughter the Chinese people and because he has thus given Chinese progressives evidence with which to convince the backward elements. You see, hasn't Acheson himself confessed that the great, sanguinary war of the last few years, which cost the lives of millions of Chinese, was planned and organized by U.S. imperialism? The Chinese should thank Acheson, again not merely because he has openly declared that the United States intends to recruit the so-called "democratic individualists" in China, organize a U.S. fifth column and overthrow the People's Government led by the Communist Party of China and has thus alerted the Chinese, especially those tinged with liberalism, who are promising each other not to be taken in by the Americans and are all on guard against the underhand intrigues of U.S. imperialism. The Chinese should thank Acheson also because he has fabricated wild tales about modern Chinese history; and his conception of history is precisely that shared by a section of the Chinese intellectuals, namely, the bourgeois idealist conception of history. Hence, a refutation of Acheson may benefit many Chinese by widening their horizon. The benefit may be even greater to those whose conception is the same, or in certain respects the same, as Acheson's.

What are Acheson's wild fabrications about modern Chinese history? First of all, he tries to explain the occurrence of the Chinese revolution in terms of economic and ideological conditions in China. Here he has recounted many myths.

Acheson says:

The population of China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries doubled, thereby creating an unbearable pressure upon the land. The first problem which every Chinese Government has had to face is that of feeding this population. So far none has succeeded. The Kuomintang attempted to solve it by putting many land-reform laws on the statute books. Some of these laws have failed, others have been ignored. In no small measure, the predicament in which the National Government finds itself today is due to its failure to provide China with enough to eat. A large part of the Chinese Communists' propaganda consists of promises that they will solve the land problem.

To those Chinese who do not reason clearly the above sounds plausible. Too many mouths, too little food, hence revolution. The Kuomintang has failed to solve this problem and it is unlikely that the Communist Party will be able to solve it either. "So far none has succeeded."

Do revolutions arise from over-population? There have been many revolutions, ancient and modern, in China and abroad; were they all due to over-population? Were China's many revolutions in the past few thousand years also due to over-population? Was the American Revolution against Britain 174 years ago<sup>[1]</sup> also due to overpopulation? Acheson's knowledge of history is nil. He has not even read the American Declaration of Independence. Washington, Jefferson and others made the revolution against Britain because of British oppression and exploitation of the Americans, and not because of any over-population in America. Each time the Chinese people overthrew a feudal dynasty it was because of the oppression and exploitation of the people by that feudal dynasty, and not because of any over-population. The Russians made the February Revolution and the October Revolution because of oppression and exploitation by the tsar and the Russian bourgeoisie, not because of any over population, for to this day in Russia there is a great abundance of land as compared with people. In Mongolia, where the land is so vast and the population so sparse, a revolution would be inconceivable according to Acheson's line of reasoning, yet it took place some time ago.<sup>[2]</sup>

According to Acheson, China has no way out at all. A population of 475 million constitutes an "unbearable pressure" and, revolution or no revolution, the case is hopeless. Acheson pins great hope on this; although he has not voiced this hope, it has often been revealed by a number of American journalists – through the allegation that the Communist Party of China will not be able to solve its economic problems, that China will remain in perpetual chaos and that her only way out is to live on U.S. flour, in other words, to become a U.S. colony.

Why did the Revolution of 1911 not succeed and why did it not solve the problem of feeding the population? Because it overthrew only the Ching Dynasty but did not overthrow imperialist and feudal oppression and exploitation.

Why did the Northern Expedition of 1926-27 not succeed and why did it not solve the problem of feeding the population? Because Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution, surrendered to imperialism and became the chieftain of the counter-revolution which oppressed and exploited the Chinese.

Is it true that "so far none has succeeded"? In the old Liberated Areas in northwestern, northern, northeastern and eastern China, where the land problem has already been solved, does the problem of "feeding this population", as Acheson puts it, still exist? The United States has kept quite a number of spies or so-called observers in China. Why have they not ferreted out even this fact? In places like Shanghai, the problem of unemployment, or of feeding the population, arose solely because of cruel, heartless oppression and

exploitation by imperialism, feudalism, bureaucrat-capitalism and the reactionary Kuomintang government. Under the People's Government, it will take only a few years for this problem of unemployment, or of feeding the population, to be solved as completely as in the northern, northeastern and other parts of the country.

It is a very good thing that China has a big population. Even if China's population multiplies many times, she is fully capable of finding a solution; the solution is production. The absurd argument of Western bourgeois economists like Malthus<sup>[3]</sup> that increases in food cannot keep pace with increases in population was not only thoroughly refuted in theory by Marxists long ago, but has also been completely exploded by the realities in the Soviet Union and the Liberated Areas of China after their revolutions. Basing itself on the truth that revolution plus production can solve the problem of feeding the population, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has issued orders to Party organizations and the People's Liberation Army throughout the country not to dismiss but to retain all former Kuomintang personnel, provided they can make themselves useful and are not confirmed reactionaries or notorious scoundrels. Where things are very difficult, food and housing will be shared. Those who have been dismissed and have no means of support will be reinstated and provided with a living. According to the same principle, we shall maintain all Kuomintang soldiers who have revolted and come over to us or been captured. All reactionaries, except the major culprits, will be given a chance to earn their living, provided they show repentance.

Of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed. We are refuters of Acheson's counter-revolutionary theory. We believe that revolution can change everything, and that before long there will arise a new China with a big population and a great wealth of products, where life will be abundant and culture will flourish. All pessimistic views are utterly groundless.

"The impact of the West" is given by Acheson as the second reason why the Chinese revolution occurred. Acheson says:

For more than three thousand years the Chinese developed their own high culture and civilization, largely untouched by outside influences. Even when subjected to military conquest the Chinese always managed in the end to subdue and absorb the invader. It was natural therefore that they should come to look upon themselves as the center of the world and the highest expression of civilized mankind. Then in the middle of the nineteenth century the heretofore impervious wall of Chinese isolation was breached by the West. These outsiders brought with them aggressiveness, the unparalleled development of Western technology, and a high order of culture which had not accompanied previous foreign incursions into China. Partly because of these qualities and partly because of the decay of Manchu rule, the Westerners, instead of being absorbed by the Chinese, introduced new ideas which played an important part in stimulating ferment and unrest.

To those Chinese who do not reason clearly, what Acheson says sounds plausible — the influx of new ideas from the West gave rise to the revolution.

Against whom was the revolution directed? Because there was “decay of Manchu rule” and because it is the weak point that is attacked, it would seem that the revolution was directed against the Ching Dynasty. But what Acheson says here is not quite right. The Revolution of 1911 was directed against imperialism. The Chinese directed the revolution against the Ching regime because it was the running dog of imperialism. The war against Britain’s opium aggression, the war against the aggression of the Anglo-French allied forces, the war against the Ching regime, the running dog of imperialism, by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom,[4] the war against French aggression, the war against Japanese aggression and the war against the aggression of the allied forces of the eight powers — all ended in failure; hence the Revolution of 1911. broke out against the running dog of imperialism, the Ching Dynasty. That is modern Chinese history up to 1911. What is the “impact of the West”, as Acheson calls it? It is the effort of the Western bourgeoisie, as Marx and Engels said in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848,[5] to remould the world after its own image by means of terror. In the process of this impact or remoulding, the Western bourgeoisie, which needed compradors and flunkeys familiar with Western customs, had to let countries like China open schools and send students abroad, and thus “new ideas were introduced” into China. Concurrently the national bourgeoisie and the proletariat were born in countries like China. At the same time, the peasantry was bankrupted, and a huge semi-proletariat was brought into existence. Thus the Western bourgeoisie created two categories of people in the East, a small minority, the flunkeys of imperialism, and a majority which is opposed to imperialism and consists of the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and the intellectuals coming from these classes. Those in the majority group are all grave-diggers of imperialism, who were created by imperialism itself, and the revolution originates from them. It was not that the so-called influx of ideas from the West stirred up “ferment and unrest”, but that imperialist aggression provoked resistance.

For a long time in the course of this resistance movement, that is, for over seventy years from the Opium War of 1840 to the eve of the May 4th Movement of 1919, the Chinese had no ideological weapon with which to defend themselves against imperialism. The ideological weapons of the old die-hard feudalism were defeated, had to give way and were declared bankrupt. Having no other choice, the Chinese were compelled to arm themselves with such ideological weapons and political formulas as the theory of evolution, the theory of natural rights and of the bourgeois republic, which were all borrowed from the arsenal of the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie in the West, the native home of imperialism. The Chinese organized political parties and made revolutions, believing that they could thus resist foreign powers and build a republic. However, all these ideological weapons, like those of feudalism, proved very feeble and in their turn had to give way and were withdrawn and declared bankrupt.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 awakened the Chinese, and they learned something new, Marxism–Leninism. In China, the Communist Party was born, an epoch–making event. Sun Yat–sen, too, advocated “learning from Russia” and “alliance with Russia and the Communist Party”. In a word, from that time China changed her orientation.

Being the spokesman of an imperialist government, Acheson naturally does not want to breathe even a word about imperialism. He describes imperialist aggression thus: “These outsiders brought with them aggressiveness....” “Aggressiveness” – what a beautiful name! Having learned this “aggressiveness”, the Chinese did not aggress into Britain or the United States but only created “ferment and unrest” inside China, *i.e.*, carried out revolutions against imperialism and its running dogs. But unfortunately they never once succeeded; each time, they were defeated by the imperialists, the inventors of “aggressiveness”. The Chinese therefore turned around to learn something else and, strangely enough, they immediately found that it worked.

The Chinese Communist Party “had been organized in the early twenties under the ideological impetus of the Russian revolution”. Here Acheson is right. This ideology was none other than Marxism–Leninism. This ideology is immeasurably superior to that of the Western bourgeoisie, which Acheson calls a “high order of culture which had not accompanied previous foreign incursions into China”. The clinching proof of the effectiveness of this ideology is that Western bourgeois culture, which the Achesons can boast of as a “high order of culture” compared with China’s old feudal culture, was defeated the moment it encountered the new Marxist–Leninist culture, the scientific world outlook and the theory of social revolution, which the Chinese people had acquired. In its first battle, this scientific and revolutionary new culture acquired by the Chinese people defeated the Northern warlords, the running dogs of imperialism; in the second, it defeated the attempts by another running dog of imperialism, Chiang Kai–shek, to intercept the Chinese Red Army during its 25,000–*li* Long March;<sup>[6]</sup> in the third, it defeated Japanese imperialism and its running dog, Wang Ching–wei, and in the fourth, it finally put an end to the domination of China by the United States and all other imperialist powers as well as to the rule of their running dogs, Chiang Kai–shek and all the other reactionaries.

The reason why Marxism–Leninism has played such a great role in China since its introduction is that China’s social conditions call for it, that it has been linked with the actual practice of the Chinese people’s revolution and that the Chinese people have grasped it. Any ideology – even the very best, even Marxism–Leninism itself – is ineffective unless it is linked with objective realities, meets objectively existing needs and has been grasped by the masses of the people. We are historical materialists, opposed to historical idealism.

Oddly enough, “Soviet doctrine and practice had a measurable effect upon the thinking and principles of Dr. Sun Yat–sen, particularly in terms of economics and Party organization”. What was the effect produced on Dr. Sun by the “high order of culture” of the West, of which Acheson and his like are so proud? Acheson doesn’t say. Was it an accident that Dr. Sun, who devoted the greater part of his life to seeking from Western

bourgeois culture the truth that would save the nation, was finally disappointed and turned to “learning from Russia”? Obviously not. Of course it was no accident that Dr. Sun and the long suffering Chinese people he represented were all infuriated by the “impact of the West” and resolved to form an “alliance with Russia and the Communist Party” in order to wage a life-and-death struggle against imperialism and its running dogs. Acheson dare not say here that the Soviet people are imperialist aggressors and that Sun Yat-sen learned from aggressors. Well, then, if Sun Yat-sen could learn from the Soviet people and the Soviet people are not imperialist aggressors, why can't his successors, the Chinese who live after him, learn from the Soviet people? Why are the Chinese, Sun Yat-sen excepted, described as “dominated by the Soviet Union” and as “the fifth column of the Comintern” and “lackeys of Red imperialism” for learning “the scientific world outlook and the theory of social revolution through Marxism-Leninism, linking these with China's specific characteristics, starting the Chinese People's War of Liberation and the great people's revolution and founding a republic of the people's democratic dictatorship? Can there be such superior logic anywhere in the world?

Since they learned Marxism-Leninism, the Chinese people have ceased to be passive in spirit and gained the initiative. The period of modern world history in which the Chinese and Chinese culture were looked down upon should have ended from that moment. The great, victorious Chinese People's War of Liberation and the great people's revolution have rejuvenated and are rejuvenating the great culture of the Chinese people. In its spiritual aspect, this culture of the Chinese people already stands higher than any in the capitalist world. Take U.S. Secretary of State Acheson and his like, for instance. The level of their understanding of modern China and of the modern world is lower than that of an ordinary soldier of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

Up to this point, Acheson, like a bourgeois professor lecturing on a tedious text, has pretended to trace the causes and effects of events in China. Revolution occurred in China, first, because of over-population and, second, because of the stimulus of Western ideas. You see, he appears to be a champion of the theory of causation. But in what follows, even this bit of tedious and phoney theory of causation disappears, and one finds only a mass of inexplicable events. Quite unaccountably, the Chinese fought among themselves for power and money, suspecting and hating each other. An inexplicable change took place in the relative moral strength of the two contending parties, the Kuomintang and the Communist Party; the morale of one party dropped sharply to below zero, while that of the other rose sharply to white heat. What was the reason? Nobody knows. Such is the logic inherent in the “high order of culture” of the United States as represented by Dean Acheson.

#### **NOTES :**

1. The bourgeois revolution of 1775-83, known as the War of Independence, in which the people of North America opposed British colonial rule.

2. In their struggle for liberation in 1921-24 the Mongolian people, under the leadership of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, drove out the Russian White-guard bandit troops and the armed forces of the Northern warlords of China, both of which were backed by Japanese imperialism, overthrew Mongolian feudal rule and founded the Mongolian People's Republic.

3. T.R. Malthus (1766-1834), Anglican clergyman and reactionary economist. In his *Essay on Population* (1798), he wrote that "population unchecked... increases in geometrical ratio . . . [while] the means of subsistence... could not possibly be made to increase faster than in an arithmetical ratio". Basing himself on this arbitrary assumption, he came to the conclusion that all poverty and all evils in human society are permanent phenomena of nature. According to him, the only ways to solve the problem of poverty of the working people were to shorten their life-span, reduce the population or stop its increase. He regarded famine, pestilence and war as means to cut down population.

4. The War of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was a peasant revolutionary war waged against the feudal rule and national oppression of the Ching Dynasty in the middle of the 19th century. Hung Hsiu-chuan, Yang Hsiu-ching and others, the leaders of this revolution, staged an uprising in Kwangsi in January 1851 and proclaimed the founding of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. In 1852 the peasant army proceeded northward from Kwangsi and marched through Hunan, Hupeh, Kiangsi and Anhwei and in 1853 it captured Nanking, the main city on the lower Yangtse. Part of its forces then continued the drive north and pushed to the vicinity of Tientsin, a major city in northern China. Because the Taiping army failed to build stable base areas in the places it occupied and also because, after establishing its capital in Nanking, the leading group in the army committed many political and military errors, it could not withstand the joint attack of the counter-revolutionary troops of the Ching government and the aggressors, Britain, the United States and France, and suffered defeat in 1864.

5. See *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Chapter 1, "Bourgeois and Proletarians". The bourgeoisie "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, *i.e.*, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image".

6. In October 1934 the First, Third and Fifth Army Groups of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (that is, the First Front Army of the Red Army, also known as the Central Red Army) set out from Changting and Ninghua in western Fukien and from Juichin, Yutu and other places in southern Kiangsi and started a major strategic movement. In traversing the eleven provinces of Fukien, Kiangsi, Kwangtung, Hunan, Kwangsi, Kweichow, Szechuan, Yunnan, Sikang, Kansu and Shensi, crossing perpetually snow-capped mountains and trackless grasslands, sustaining untold hardships and frustrating the enemy's repeated encirclements, pursuits, obstructions and interceptions, the Red Army covered 25,000 *li* (12,500 kilometres) on this march and finally arrived triumphantly at the revolutionary base area in northern Shensi in October 1935.

**(This Article is taken from Com. Mao Tse-tung, Colletive Works, Vol-IV, Page: 451-459)**