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OUR PAPER'S SPECIAL COMMENTATORS

Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth*

What is the criterion of truth? This is a question that was resolved long ago by the revolutionary teachers of the proletariat. But as a result of damage done by the “Gang of Four” and a mass of distorted propaganda in the media under their control, it has become muddled beyond compare in recent years. In order to deepen the criticism of the “Gang of Four” and eradicate the remnants of their poison and influence, it is very important to clear this up and sort it out.

The Criterion of Truth Can Only Be Social Practice

How does one differentiate truth from falsehood? In 1845, Marx introduced the criterion of truth: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.”¹ This

*Benbao Teyue Pinglun yuan, “*Shijian shi jianyan zhenli de wei yi biao zhun.*” *Guangming ribao*, 11 May 1978. This text is identical to that published on 10 May 1978 in *Theory Trends*. The Hua Guofeng quote in part 3, paragraph 2, is from “*Ba wuchan jieji zhuanzheng xia de jixu geming jinxing daodi: Xuexi Mao Zedong xuanji di wu juan*” [Carry out the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat to the end: studying volume five of the Selected Works of Mao Zedong], *Hongqi*, no. 5, 1977, p. 4.

tells us very clearly that whether a theory correctly reflects objective reality, and whether it is the truth, can only be tested on the basis of social practice. This is a basic tenet of Marxist epistemology.

Practice is not only a criterion of truth, but indeed the sole criterion of truth. Chairman Mao says: "There is but one truth, and the question of whether or not one has arrived at it depends not on subjective boasting but on objective practice. The only yardstick of truth is the revolutionary practice of millions of people" ("On New Democracy"). "The criterion of truth can only be social practice" ("On Practice"). These references to "but one" and "can only" mean that there is only one criterion, and no more. This is because the truth of dialectical materialism is objective truth. It is the correct reflection in our thinking of the objective world and its laws. Consequently, we cannot look for the criterion of truth in the sphere of the subjective, or in the sphere of theory. Our criterion for judging whether ideology or theory accords with practice cannot itself be ideology or theory, any more than a plaintiff's indictment itself can be a criterion for judging the legal validity of that indictment. The criterion of truth must possess the specific property of linking human thinking to the objective world, otherwise it cannot be used for testing purposes. The social practice of human beings is an activity that transforms the objective world, and one whereby the subjective is manifested in the objective. Practice possesses the specific property of linking thinking and objective existence, and for this reason it is practice, and practice alone, that is able to fulfill the duty of testing the truth. The history of science provides us with abundant examples that demonstrate this.

Mendeleev drew up the periodic table of elements on the basis of changing atomic weights. Some people agreed with him, while others expressed doubts about what he had done. A debate raged until eventually a number of elements were discovered with exactly the chemical properties that the periodic table had predicted. In this way, the periodic table of elements was shown to be the truth. Copernicus's theory of the solar system was for

three centuries merely a hypothesis of sorts. When Leverrier on the basis of it not only calculated the definite existence of another as yet undiscovered planet, but also calculated the very position of that planet, and when Galle in 1846 actually discovered the planet Neptune, only then had Copernicus's theory of the solar system been verified, and become the generally acknowledged truth.

Marxism is held to be true precisely as a result of extended testing in practice by the masses in their millions. Chairman Mao says: "Marxism-Leninism is held to be true not only because it was so considered when it was scientifically formulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin but because it has been verified in the subsequent practice of revolutionary class struggle and revolutionary national struggle" ("On Practice"). At first, Marxism represented merely a faction within the workers' movement, and initially it was hardly famous. The reactionaries besieged it, the scholars of the bourgeoisie opposed it, and other socialist schools attacked it. But, over an extended period of revolutionary practice Marxism proved to be the truth, and finally became the guiding ideology of the international communist movement.

When it comes to testing the correctness or incorrectness of a line, the circumstances are the same. When Marxist political parties formulate their lines, they must obviously proceed on the basis of actual class relationships and actual class struggle, rely on revolutionary theory as their guide, and furthermore adduce proof. But whether the line of the international communist movement and the lines of various revolutionary political parties are correct or not still needs to be tested in social practice.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a fierce struggle erupted within the international communist movement and the Russian workers movement between Lenin's Marxist line and the revisionist line of the Second International. At the time, the most prominent figure in the Second International was Kautsky. The Leninists were in the minority, and the struggle continued for a very long time. But when the October Revolution and the practice of the proletarian revolution worldwide proved that Leninism

was the truth, it spelled the end for the revisionist line of the Second International.

Mao Zedong Thought is the product of an integration of the general truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of revolution. Chairman Mao's revolutionary line has been engaged in a protracted struggle against "left" and right opportunist lines. For a period, Chairman Mao's revolutionary line was not in a dominant position. Many years of revolutionary struggle, and positive and negative lessons of success and failure, have proven Chairman Mao's revolutionary line to be correct, and "left" and right opportunist lines to be erroneous. What is the criterion? There can be only one: the social practice of millions of people.

The Unity of Theory and Practice Is a Most Basic Principle of Marxism

Some comrades worry that adhering to practice as the sole criterion of truth will undermine the relevance of theory. This kind of worry is uncalled for. Theories that are scientific do not fear being tested in practice. On the contrary, only adherence to practice as the sole criterion of truth permits the exposure of the true nature of pseudo-science and pseudo-theory, and thus defends genuine science and theory. This is a point of the utmost significance when it comes to clarifying the theoretical issues that have been thoroughly muddled by the "Gang of Four."

With the counterrevolutionary aim of usurping Party and state power, the "Gang of Four" preached all kinds of idealist apriorisms and opposed taking practice as the criterion of truth. For example, they concocted the "innate genius theory," fabricated tales of "black line dictatorships" on the artistic, literary, educational, etc., fronts, invented a "law" calling old cadres democrats, who inevitably turn into capitalist roaders, cooked up a falsehood about how socialist relations of production "constitute the economic base from which new bourgeois elements emerge," fabricated nonsense about how the struggle between Legalists and Confucians persists to this day, and so on and so forth. These

were all at one point presented as sacred and inviolable so-called “theory,” and whoever opposed it was branded an opponent of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. But these multifarious falsehoods were altogether unable to survive testing in revolutionary practice, and together with all other “truth-criteria” put forward by the “Gang of Four,” they one after another rapidly dissolved like soap bubbles. This fact is elegant proof that their self-promotion could not prove the truth, their extensive propaganda could not prove the truth, and their brute force could not prove the truth. They posed as “authorities” on Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, but practice has shown them to be political swindlers and opponents of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought.

Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought is powerful precisely because it constitutes objective truth tested in practice, and because it represents highly generalized practical experience elevated to the level of theory and used to guide practice. For these very reasons, we must pay great attention to revolutionary theory. Lenin pointed out: “Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement.”² Theory is important because it is derived from practice, and is able to correctly guide practice. Whether theory has been capable of correctly guiding practice and how it is able to correctly guide practice cannot be settled except through testing in practice. Unless we understand this essential fact, we shall not be able to make proper use of theory.

Some comrades say that when we criticize revisionism, are we not judging it against Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, and thus proving that it is in error? We say, yes, Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought is the sharp weapon we employ to criticize revisionism, as well as the basis of all our arguments. We employ the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought to criticize revisionism. These basic tenets are ones that Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Chairman Mao generalized from their practical experience in revolutionary struggle. Extensive practice has proven that they are unchanging truths. At the same time, while we use these tenets to criticize revisionism, we

cannot even for a moment leave aside present (and past) practice. It is only by proceeding from practice that we are able to make these tenets demonstrate their enormous vitality. Our critique will only be convincing if it is combined with substantial amounts of factual analysis. If we do not study practical experience and proceed therefrom, we will ultimately be unable to refute revisionism.

The objective world practice is constantly developing. New material things emerge and new questions arise in an endless stream. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to investigate these new material things and new questions with the general tenets of Marxism as our guide, to constantly produce new generalizations, and to make theoretical progress. How does one test whether new theoretical generalizations are correct or not? Only through practice. For instance, Lenin's doctrine about how during the stage of imperialism one or a small number of countries may achieve a socialist revolutionary victory amounted to a new conclusion. Whether it was correct could not be tested with the help of the general Marxist theory concerning capitalism. Only through the practice of the imperialist stage, the First World War, and the October Revolution was this doctrine of Lenin's proved to be the truth.

Chairman Mao says: "Integration of theory with practice is one of the fundamental principles of Marxism."³ To adhere to practice as the sole criterion of truth is to adhere to Marxism, and to adhere to dialectical materialism.

The Revolutionary Teachers Set an Example by Consistently Testing the Truth in Practice

The revolutionary teachers not only introduced practice as the sole criterion of truth, but also set a glorious example themselves by testing all theories, including their own, in practice. One of many vivid examples of this is the attitude Marx and Engels adopted toward the famous Marxist scientific document they produced together, the *Communist Manifesto*. After its publication in

1848, Marx and Engels for forty-five years constantly subjected it to testing in practice. This fact is carefully recorded in the seven prefaces of the *Manifesto*. Marx and Engels first of all pointed out that: "However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever." At the same time, they also pointed out that "the practical application of the principles will depend, as the *Manifesto* itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing."⁴ On the basis of constant testing in new practice, including the discovery of new historical data, Marx and Engels revised some specific arguments in the *Manifesto*. For instance, the first sentence of the first chapter of the *Manifesto* reads: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." In the 1888 English edition of the *Manifesto*, Engels added an explanatory note to it: "That is, all written history."⁵ This was because, after the publication of the *Manifesto*, people had developed a better understanding of the prehistory of society. Morgan's research in particular proved that prior to class society there had been an extended class-less society, and that classes are the products of society entering certain historical stages and hence do not exist from the outset. We can see that the statement "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" is imprecise. Engels wrote this explanation, and revised the old formulation in the *Manifesto*, on the basis of newly discovered historical data. There is another passage in the *Manifesto* where it says that the proletariat will seize state power and overthrow the bourgeoisie by way of a violent revolution. In 1872, in their final joint preface, the two teachers of the revolution clearly indicated that:

In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry in the last twenty-five years, and of the accompanying improved and extended party organization of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February Revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this program has in some

details become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”⁶

Lenin paid great attention to this explanatory note by Marx and Engels, and was of the opinion that it constituted an “important correction” to the *Manifesto*.⁷

As Chairman Hua points out: “Chairman Mao always adopted an extremely serious and prudent attitude towards ideological and theoretical problems. He always wanted to see his own writings subjected to the test of practice for some time before editing and finalizing his selected works.” Chairman Mao always insisted firmly upon subjecting his own theory and line to constant testing in revolutionary practice. In 1955, while editing the book *Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside*, Chairman Mao wrote 104 notes. At the time, he had not yet anticipated the new developments in the international and domestic class struggle that were to take place after 1956. And so, when reprinting some of his editor's notes in 1958, Chairman Mao wrote a special explanation, pointing out that “to this day some have not lost their significance.” There is however one statement in the notes to the effect that 1955 was the year in which socialism won basic victory in the decisive battle with capitalism; it is not proper to put it in that way. This is the way it should be put: “1955 was the year in which basic victory was won as regards the aspect of ownership in the relations of production, while in the other aspects of the relations of production as well as in some aspects of the superstructure, namely, on the ideological and political fronts, either a basic victory was not won or, if won, the victory was not complete, and further efforts were required.”⁸

This serious scientific attitude of respecting practice on the part of our revolutionary teachers is a great education to us. They did not at all maintain that the theories they advanced were consummated absolute truths or “pinnacles” that needed no further testing in practice. They certainly did not maintain—irrespective of what the actual situation indicated—that the general conclusions they had drawn could not be changed, or that the specific

conclusions they had drawn from specific evidence could not be changed. In all places and at all times, they tested their theories, their theses, and their instructions in practice. They adhered to the truth, revised errors, respected practice, respected the masses, and were without bias. They never permitted others to worship their utterances as if they were “Holy Writ.” Without question, the basic principles of Marxism—the standpoint, viewpoint, and method of Marxism—must be adhered to, and on this point there can be no wavering. But, the theoretical treasure-trove of Marxism is not a pile of dead dogma. In practice, it has to constantly incorporate new viewpoints and new conclusions, and discard old viewpoints and conclusions no longer fitted to new circumstances. With regard to philosophy, Chairman Mao once said: “Now we have already entered the age of socialism, and a series of new problems have emerged. If all we possess is a handful of philosophical works from the past, if we do not meet the new needs and produce new works and shape new theory, it will not do. Perspectives on practice and life are the primary and fundamental perspectives of epistemology. The tree of practice and life is evergreen.” It is precisely this dialectical materialist stand of the revolutionary teachers, of persisting in taking practice as the sole criterion of truth, that has guaranteed the constant development of Marxism, and has allowed it to remain forever young.

Every Theory Must Constantly Face Up to Testing in Practice

We not only acknowledge that practice is the criterion of truth, but also that one has to approach the criterion of practice from a developmental point of view. Practice is in a state of constant development, and thus as a criterion of truth it possesses an absolute as well as a relative aspect. As far as the need for thinking and theory to be tested in practice is concerned, it is absolute and unconditional; as far as admitting that there are limitations to practice at given stages of development, and that practice therefore cannot unconditionally and absolutely verify or refute think-

ing and theory is concerned, it is relative and conditional. But questions that today's practice cannot provide answers to will ultimately be answered by future practice, and in this sense it is also absolute. Lenin said: "Of course, we must not forget that the criterion of practice can never, in the nature of things, either conform or refute any human idea completely. This criterion too is sufficiently 'indefinite' not to allow human knowledge to become 'absolute,' but at the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a ruthless fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism."⁹

The viewpoint of dialectical materialism on the dialectical unity of the absolute and relative natures of the criterion of practice—the view that all thought and all theory must constantly and forever be subjected to the test of practice—is the viewpoint of developing truth. Thought and theory, even when proven in practice at one stage to be the truth, must in the course of development still face up to new testing in practice, and be supplemented, enriched, and corrected. Chairman Mao points out: "The history of human knowledge tells us that the truth of many theories is incomplete and that this incompleteness is remedied through the test of practice. Many theories are erroneous and it is through the test of practice that their errors are corrected." He also points out: "The movement of change in the world of objective reality is never-ending and so is man's cognition of truth through practice. Marxism-Leninism has in no way exhausted truth but ceaselessly opens up roads to the knowledge of truth in the course of practice" ("On Practice"). Marxism stresses that practice is the criterion of truth, and that man's cognition of truth through practice is never-ending. It thus admits that our understanding cannot be completed in one instant or completed once and for all. This is to say, it admits that because of our historical and class limitations, we may arrive at mistaken understandings, and that our understandings therefore must be tested in practice. Whatever the thing, if it has been proven in practice to be mistaken or not to conform to reality, then it should be changed and no longer adhered to. In fact, such changes take place constantly. Chairman Mao says: "True revolutionary lead-

ers must not only be good at correcting their ideas, theories, plans or programs when errors are discovered, . . . but when a certain objective process has already progressed and changed from one stage of development to another, they must also be good at making themselves and all their fellow revolutionaries progress and change in their subjective knowledge along with it, that is to say, they must ensure that the proposed new revolutionary tasks and new working programs correspond to the new changes in the situation” (“On Practice”). With the aim of usurping Party and state power, Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” cooked up a story about how “a single sentence [of Chairman Mao’s] is worth ten thousand [of anyone else’s],” and “every sentence [of Chairman Mao’s] is the truth.” What they said was definitely not the truth of Mao Zedong Thought, but falsehood disguised as Mao Zedong Thought.

Now the “Gang of Four” and their bourgeois factional set-up have already been destroyed. However, the spiritual shackles that the “Gang of Four” put on the people are still far from smashed altogether. The tendency that Chairman Mao had criticized already at the time of the second revolutionary civil war—that “Nothing is correct except what is literally recorded in Holy Writ” (“On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism”)—still exists. In theoretical work as well as in practical work, the “Gang of Four” created numerous “taboos” that have confined people’s thinking. We must dare to deal with these “taboos,” and dare to clarify what is right and wrong. Science knows no taboos. Wherever there are supposedly absolute “taboos” held to be above practice, there is no science and no real Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. There is only obscurantism, idealism, and cultural despotism.

The Party’s Eleventh National Congress and the Fifth National People’s Congress have laid down the general task of the entire Party and the people of the entire country in the new developing era of socialist revolution and socialist construction. In many places, socialism still contains realms of necessity that we have not yet understood. We face many new problems that need to be

understood and investigated in the course of completing our great task. To rest on the ready-made clauses of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, or to go so far as to use ready-made formulae to restrict, oppress and exploit, and cut out the boundlessly rich revolutionary practice that is developing so rapidly, is to adopt an erroneous attitude. We must have the sense of responsibility and courage of communists. We must dare to investigate life in its actuality, real data, and new problems confronted in the course of recent practice. This is the only correct attitude towards Marxism, and it is the only one that will permit us to make gradual progress from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom, and readily carry out our new great long march.

Notes

1. *Marx and Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 16.
2. *Lenin Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 241.
3. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 5, p. 297.
4. See note 1, p. 228.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
7. See note 2, vol. 3, p. 201.
8. See note 3, p. 225.
9. See note 2, vol. 2, p. 142.

Editor's Introduction

In the jargon typical of far too many CCP publications, the authors of the official *History of the Chinese Communist Party: A Chronology of Events* write: “[The 1978] discussions on practice being the sole criterion for testing the truth . . . helped people to throw off the prolonged yoke of the erroneous ‘Left’ ideas and ushered in a nationwide Marxist campaign for ideological emancipation, thus preparing ideological conditions for the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party.”¹ The “discussions”—which by now have assumed almost mythical status in the writings of Chinese dissidents—were indeed important, and did pave the way for major changes in China’s ideological climate. However, virtually none of the relevant texts have, to this day, been translated into English. The primary aim of the present issue of *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* is to remedy this situation. A second aim is to present additional background material on earlier writings about the criterion of truth, as well as interviews with three of the people behind the *Guangming Daily* article “Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth” that triggered off the 1978 controversy.

The official position of the CCP, with respect to what constitutes the criterion of truth, has shifted back and forth over time. At times, debate concerning this issue has been relegated to the academic sphere and hardly received any high-level attention at all. But on occasion, as in 1979, the party’s supreme leader has personally stepped forward to declare that “debate concerning the criterion of truth is capital construction [*jiben jianshe*]. If problems in ideological line are not resolved, the political line cannot be implemented.”² In some sense, the practice of the CCP leadership has become the party intelligentsia’s criterion for judging whether or not the issue as such is important.

Of the texts translated here, the first is from a Soviet source, albeit one published in China and in Chinese. The entry on the

criterion of truth in Rozental and Yudin's classic *Short Philosophical Dictionary* represents one side of the orthodoxy from which debate proceeded in the early years of the People's Republic. (The other side, of course, is Mao Zedong's essay *On Practice*.) Here is the theoretical baseline: "If our understanding of a certain thing or a certain phenomenon proves to be true through practice, then that knowledge is real," and "the historical practice of establishing socialism . . . proves that socialism is a great truth of modern times." Assertions like these were never contested or subjected to criticism. Controversy arose about details, such as the content of "practice."

A first debate—largely overlooked by Western scholars—on the criterion of truth occurred in academic publications in 1962–1964. No texts from it are translated here, but it deserves mention as the disagreements that arose in the course of it were to persist long after it had been forgotten. In the *Guangming Daily*, on August 24, 1962, a writer by the name of Lu Kuihong maintained that although there were limits to the "practice" that actual people living under actual historical circumstances encountered, it was nonetheless possible for them to evaluate a theory and to "test" [*jianyan*] its correctness with the aid of materialist dialectics. For instance, although it was impossible to prove that man had evolved from the apes by way of directly repeating the evolutionary process, it was nonetheless with the help of dialectics possible to show that the reasoning leading up to Darwin's theory was itself correct. In the same way, even though the veracity of Karl Marx's theory concerning the "ultimate global victory of communism" had not yet been directly proven in practice, "we Marxists fully and firmly believe it to be a truth that cannot be subverted." What Lu's arguments boiled down to was that "the norms of dialectics do in no way exclude practice as a means for testing [the truth], but are a means of testing that supplements practice, and as such an *indirect way* of testing [the truth]."

Disagreeing strongly with Lu Kuihong's dialectics-as-supplementary-practice argument, a number of writers published refutations of his ideas. (Much of what was again said in 1978 echoed

the words of these writers.) On February 1, 1963, the *Guangming Daily* published Zhu Shiyao's critique of the notion that dialectics could somehow take the place of practice when it came to testing the truth. Zhu—whose article was entitled “Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth” [*Shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biao zhun*—noted that while practice was the sole criterion of truth, this by no means made scientific logical inference and proof superfluous, since ultimately “logical inference and proof also have practice as their foundation.” The “guiding function” [*zhidao zuoyong*] of materialist dialectics was merely one of principle and direction, and “cannot be employed to evaluate the achievements of natural scientific research.”

Unlike in 1978, the pre-Cultural Revolution debate remained confined to the *Guangming Daily*—the CCP's designated newspaper for intellectuals—and journals like *New Construction* and Shanghai's *Academic Monthly*. By early 1964 it had more or less come to an end with no clear “victory” for either side.³ Later that same year, a spate of articles published in the north China party journals *Practice* and *Frontline* were devoted to the related question of whether or not truth had a “class-nature,” and whether or not it was indeed possible for the “exploiting classes” to recognize the truth?⁴ This highly politicized question became one in which members of China's highest leadership involved themselves personally. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Beijing's mayor Peng Zhen noted that “everyone is equal in front of the truth,” and asserted by implication that the truth had no “class-nature.” In Central Document *Zhongfa* [66] No.105—the “February Outline”—issued on February 12, 1966, Peng Zhen's “Group of Five in Charge of the Cultural Revolution” repeated this assertion, and linked it to Mao Zedong's dictum that one should “seek truth from facts” [*shishi qiushi*].

The attacks on Peng Zhen at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution marked the temporary suspension of all serious debate concerning practice and truth in China. A new orthodoxy—radically different from anything seen so far—was established, one that broke with past criteria and the notion of dialectics as an

“indirect” way of determining the truth. Text 2 translated here presents it more bluntly and authoritatively than most. According to Zhou Enlai—addressing the members of Beijing’s rebellious Red Guard umbrella organization the so-called “Third Headquarters”—Mao Zedong Thought—was now not merely, as it had already been for some time, the “truth,” but had become the “criterion of truth.” If taken at face value, Zhou’s claim forces one to conclude that in such cases where “practice” clashes with Mao Zedong Thought, it is “practice” that is “untrue”—not the thoughts of the Great Helmsman! It is worth noting that Lin Biao, who in the CCP’s present historiography is presented as the most idealistic and sycophantic of all the men that surrounded Mao in his final years, never said anything implying that Mao Zedong Thought was the *criterion* of truth. He merely noted, in the *Liberation Army Daily* on January 25, 1966, that “every single sentence of Mao’s is the truth, and a single sentence of his is worth ten thousand [of anyone else’s].” (This remark of Lin’s was to be cited extensively in 1978 as the epitome of “ultra-leftist fallacies.”)

The absurdist philosophical position taken by Zhou Enlai et al. in the winter of 1966 was soon abandoned. In early 1970, in the course of the movement to denounce Mao’s former ghost-writer Chen Boda (Chen had called Mao a genius; Mao now called Chen a sham Marxist!) the CCP reverted to the position that “practice is the sole criterion of truth.” In an internal study document entitled *Things Gained from Studying “On Practice,”* distributed among party cadres in Beijing in 1971, the unknown authors again maintained that “practice is the criterion of truth,” and “the practice of the broad revolutionary masses is the sole objective criterion of truth.”

During Mao’s final years, there was relatively little talk in public about the criterion of truth. Occasionally there would be denunciations of the “bourgeois slogan of all men being equal in front of the truth,” but few articles made practice and the truth their specific topic. It was not to be until after the death of Mao, and the beginning of the movement to denounce the “Gang of Four” that some philosophers again began contem-

plating the answer to the question “What is the criterion of truth?”

The circumstances surrounding the 1978 controversy have been dealt with in detail elsewhere, and will not be reiterated here.⁵ Text 3 is the earliest extant draft of the most important article from the controversy—Nanjing University professor Hu Fuming’s “Practice Is the Criterion of Truth,” as submitted to the *Guangming Daily* in the winter of 1977. Originally meant to appear on the paper’s philosophy page on April 11, 1978, it was withdrawn at the last moment. After numerous revisions by Wu Jiang and Sun Changjiang at the Central Party School in Beijing, it subsequently appeared a month later under a different title. Readers interested in the finer points of CCP political discourse will find a comparison between it and the final version (translated here as text 5) a rewarding exercise.

Text 4 is one that went largely overlooked when it first appeared in the *People’s Daily* a month and a half before the publication of “Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth.” It may not have been politically significant, but that is not the only reason why the authors of the *Annotated “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China”* (published under the aegis of the CCP Center in 1983) make no mention of it. Personal animosity between Wu Jiang, Sun Changjiang, et al. and the (anonymous) author also played a part. “Zhang Cheng” was one of Deng Liqun’s proteges, and in the factional battles of the 1980s he was to become one of the “bad guys.”

The 1978 truth criterion-controversy amounted to a not always very veiled attack on the so-called “two whatevers,” that is, that one should “defend whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, [and] steadfastly abide by whatever instructions [he] gave.” In text 6, from the pens of Wu Jiang and Sun Changjiang, the political imperative formulated by CCP Chairman Hua Guofeng’s ghostwriters in early 1977 is the main target. Here, in the text as published at the time, it is not mentioned by name. In 1982, Wu and Sun included “A Most Fundamental Principle” in

a collection of texts on practice as the criterion of truth which they edited and published at the Central Party School. In typical fashion, they made alterations (described in a preface as mere “cuts”) to the text and inserted an explicit reference to the “two whatevers,” which they now said “represented the ideological system of Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four,’ and which must be swept away together with all that filthy horse shit.” Wu and Sun also cut out every mention of Hua Guofeng, and instead of beginning “Chairman Hua emphasized . . .,” their improved-upon article began “Comrade Ye Jianying stressed and pointed out . . .”⁶ So much for a good example of what the CCP by then had labelled “abandoning what has been proven in practice to be mistaken and untrue.”

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the “discussions that helped people part company with superstition,” *Guangming Daily* journalist Dai Qing led a group of her colleagues in putting together a book of recollections and interviews with participants, and texts 7 to 9 are translated from that book. In text 7, Wu Jiang discusses the “contemporary significance” of what had taken place a decade earlier, and elaborates on some of the points he had made in “A Most Fundamental Principle of Marxism.” Specifically, he again discusses how one can “prove that communism is true.” Text 8, in which Sun Changjiang is given his opportunity to speak, is less theoretical and more polemical than Wu’s. Anyone familiar with Sun’s earlier works, though, can easily see that he himself at times is a representative of precisely the kind of person which he chooses to attack—the professional CCP “theoretician” engaged in the exercise of proving the truthfulness “of what has been spoken or thought by a certain leader.” Hu Fuming, in text 9, tries to set the record straight as far as his own role in the controversy is concerned. To the student of history, his interview is perhaps more interesting than those with Wu and Sun.

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EDITOR

Notes

1. Party History Research Centre of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, comp., *History of the Chinese Communist Party: A Chronology of Events* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991), pp. 389–90.
2. Deng Xiaoping, quoted in Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao lilun yanjiushi, ed., *Zhenli biao zhun wenti taolun wenji* [Collected articles from the debate on the criterion of truth] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1982), p. 160
3. For an overview of this debate, see Ai Zhong and Li Huan, eds., *Jianguo yilai zhexue wenti taolun zongshu* [Overview of philosophical debates since the founding of the nation] (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 255–77.
4. Ai Zhong and Li Huan, pp. 278–97.
5. Michael Schoenhals, “The 1978 Truth Criterion Controversy,” in *The China Quarterly*, 1991, pp. 243–68.
6. *Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao lilun yanjiushi*, pp. 13–39.

1

The Criterion of Truth*

The criterion of truth is the measure of the truthfulness and reliability of our knowledge. It is also the basis for determining the correctness of our concepts and how much our perceptions, ideas, and concepts accord with objective reality. Idealism holds to the idea that the criterion of truth does not involve the integration between theory as created by human intelligence and objective reality, but rather that the criterion of truth involves the “clarity and correctness” (*mingxi he queqie*) of perception, viewpoints, and concepts by the subject. For instance, the Machists (*Mahezhu yi*)¹ think that the criterion of truth is experience, however, they neither interpret experience from a materialistic viewpoint, nor view experience as the result of humans interacting with nature as they reform it. The Machists view experience as a summary of perceptions and as the subjective experience of humans. In this sense, perception must be tested by perception itself. In attempting to escape the trap of solipsism (*weiwolun*), they proposed “collective experience” as the criterion of truth. According to such a view, anything that involves “common significance,” that is, anything acknowledged by everyone, is the truth. Lenin exposed the absurdity of idealist theory by pointing out that by following the view of “socially formed experience” it is very easy to consider as normal the most absurd and farcical notions, such as ghosts, for such beliefs are also a form of human “experience.” Religion also possesses a “common significance,”

*Luosentaer and Yujin, eds., *Short Philosophical Dictionary [Jianming Zhexue Cidian]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1955), pp. 412–14.

for innumerable people believe in ghosts and miracles, etc. Nevertheless, religion does not become the truth because of this. The concept of the “criterion of truth” held by the Machists played a dominant role in modern bourgeois philosophy. Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey, along with other reactionaries in philosophy all denied scientific criteria. They would rather that the masses remain ignorant of how to understand and determine the truth.

Marxist philosophy is the only philosophy that arms human understanding with a true scientific criterion enabling us to distinguish truth from fallacy and correctly determine each truth. This criterion is human practice, the actual production activities of humans, their industry, and the revolutionary activities of the masses. Marxism views practice as the basis of understanding and the criterion for the truthfulness of practice, and, hence, it achieved a real reform in epistemology. The old materialist theories that preceded Marx involved a concept of direct materialism and failed to associate understanding with practice and the practical activities of humans. Even though the concept of practice as the criterion of truth was proposed by other materialists, because their understanding of practice was narrow-minded, they failed to view it as historical practice and in terms of the production activities of humans. Marxism is the first theory to illustrate the close connection between understanding and practice and thus for the first time it correctly resolved the issue of the criterion of truth. As Marx stated in his *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* [emphasis added by Rozenal and Yudin Chinese version, eds.] question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the ‘this-sidedness’ of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.”² The theory of agnosticism negates the possibility of correct understanding. It is a theory which Marxism proved absurd and lacking the slightest evidentiary basis. If our understanding of a certain thing or a certain phenomenon proves

to be true through practice, then that knowledge is real and cannot be negated by any agnosticism. For instance, advocates of life power (*huolilunzhe*), along with other enemies of science, casually boast that the life of the organism is dominated by a certain "life power." However, humans have achieved an understanding of the true, objective laws of the development of the organism and have mastered these laws through practice, and thus have proved that the life power theory is without any substance whatsoever. Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin's method in biology of altering animals and plants armed mankind with a new understanding. Michurin himself brilliantly proved the correctness of his theory through practice and by creating hundreds of [new] fruit seeds.³ Practice is the touchstone of all theories. It is practice that exposed the pseudo-science of the August Weissmann⁴-Thomas Hunt Morgan school and in the meantime thoroughly proved the correctness of Michurin's biology. This has also been the case in all other areas in science (including social science). Bourgeois thinkers hold to the idea that socialism is merely an illusion, a fiction. However, the historical practice of establishing socialism by the Soviet people along with the practice of peoples whose countries are in the process of diverging from capitalism and converting to socialism all prove that socialism is a great truth of modern times and the theories of those bourgeois thinkers are merely lies adhered to by their defunct class. Practice verifies and proves scientific truth. It negates and eliminates all pseudo theories.

At the same time that Marxism proposes the irrefutable notion that practice is the criterion of truth, it also asks us to assess the development of practice itself. For the development of practice itself demands the reexamination of truth based on old practices which have been replaced by a new and higher standard of human practice. Such a way of understanding practice can promote the continued development of human thought, and thereby prevent it from stagnating. It also prevents the truth gained by human thought from becoming dogmatic. With each step forward

taken by practice, it helps perfect our understanding and makes certain truths more correct and more concrete on the basis of further development.

Notes

1. A reference to the philosophical school inaugurated by Austrian physicist and philosopher, Ernst Mach (1836–1916), eds.
2. Translation from Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1941), p. 82.
3. Michurin [1855–1935] was a Russian scientist who successfully developed various hybrid seeds and produced eugenic fruit tree seeds, eds.
4. Weissmann asserted that hereditary characteristics were transmitted by a germinal plasm and that acquired characteristics were nontransmissible, eds.

2

ZHOU ENLAI

Letter to Red Guard “Third Headquarters”*

Students and fighters of the Revolutionary Rebel Headquarters of Red Guards in the Capital’s Institutions of Higher Education:

Yesterday I gave a speech at a Red Guard mass rally organized by your headquarters in which I made one rather incomplete remark. I now correct and complement that remark of mine as follows:

Immediately after “which you consider to be correct, and consider to be the truth, you may adhere to for some time,” it should say “If in discussions or in practice, if you yourselves or someone else has proven that indeed they are wrong or partially wrong, then you should admit your mistakes and rectify them. If it has been proven that indeed they are correct or partially correct, then you should continue to adhere to those words or actions which are correct.” This is, as Chairman Mao often teaches us, the principle of “adhering to the truth while rectifying one’s mistakes.” In the course of this Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of ours there can be only one criterion of truth, and that is to measure everything against Mao Zedong Thought. Whatever accords with Mao Zedong Thought is right, while that which does not accord with Mao Zedong Thought is wrong. This is why comrade Lin Biao tells us to “Read Chairman Mao’s works, obey

*Zhou Enlai, “Letter to Capital University Red Guard Revolutionary Rebel Headquarters” [Gei Shoudu Dazhuan Yuanxiao Hongweibing Geming Zaofan Zongbu de xin], 27 September 1966 (unpublished).

Chairman Mao's words, and act according to Chairman Mao's instructions." This is something you must bear in mind constantly.

It is my hope that you shall be able to pass on these words to the Red Guards and revolutionary teachers and students.

Great Proletarian Cultural Revolutionary greetings,

Zhou Enlai
September 27 [1966]

Note

1. *Zhou Zongli de yi feng xin*, as copied down by students in the Beijing Normal University biology department.

3

HU FUMING

Practice Is the Criterion of Truth*

In 1845, while developing a new world view, Marx introduced practice as the criterion of truth: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.”¹ Whether a theory correctly reflects the objectively existing objects with which it concerns itself, and whether it is the truth, cannot be determined within the sphere of thinking, or by means of theoretical argument, but only on the basis of testing in social practice. This is a basic principle and characteristic feature of Marxist philosophy.

1.

Testing the truth through practice is a matter of employing a theory about material things in guiding the practice of transforming objectively existing things. In general, if one is victorious and reaches one’s anticipated goal in practice, then this proves that one’s theory accords with objective laws and is the truth. On the other hand, if one is defeated and does not reach one’s anti-

*Hu Fuming, “*Shijian Shi Jianyan Zhenli de Biaozhun*,” in *Guanyu “Shijian Shi Jianyan Zhenli de Weiyi Biaozhun” Yiwun Xiezu He Fabiao de Jingguo* [How the article “Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth” was written and published] (Beijing: *Guangming Ribao* Pinglunbu, 1985), app. 1. This is the earliest extant version of Hu’s article, as typeset by the *Guangming Daily* on 14 January 1978.

pated goal, then this proves that one's theory does not accord with the objective laws and is erroneous. The criterion of practice permits the differentiation of truth from falsehood, the verification of truth, and the refutation of falsehood. Naturally, the practice criterion is also dialectical. Lenin says: "The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge, and it inevitably leads to materialism, sweeping aside the endless fabrications of professorial scholasticism. Of course, we must not forget that the criterion of practice can never, in the nature of things, either conform or refute any human idea completely. This criterion too is sufficiently 'indefinite' not to allow human knowledge to become 'absolute,' but at the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a ruthless fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism."² Practice is subject to development. History imposes limitations upon the social practice of each epoch, and hence there are certain theoretical questions belonging to each epoch that contemporary practice cannot resolve, that is, neither verify nor refute. But what today's practice cannot provide answers to, some future practice will certainly succeed in resolving. Whether a theory is truth or falsehood ultimately has to be tested in practice. Social practice is the touchstone that permits us to distinguish truth from falsehood. Only social practice is able to thoroughly shatter idealism, agnosticism and any and all falsehoods. Only social practice can establish the authority of truth, since only practice allows us to verify theory against objectively existing things, and to determine whether or not our theory conforms to the essence of objectively existing things.

Chairman Mao points out, "There is but one truth, and the question of whether or not one has arrived at it depends not on subjective boasting but on objective practice. The only yardstick of truth is the revolutionary practice of millions of people."³ Here we are told that self-promotion cannot prove the truth, extensive propaganda cannot prove the truth, the approval of large numbers of people cannot prove the truth, and

brute force cannot prove the truth. The truth proven by past practice cannot be employed as today's criterion of truth, since all objective material things unite general and specific characteristics. Different material things, and different stages in the development of a given material thing, embody their own particular contradictions. Each branch of science has its own objects of investigation, and reflects the particular laws that govern those differing objects. The truth is concrete, and consists of the correct reflection of the totality, essence and law-bound nature of the objects of investigation. A doctrine concerned with general laws governing the objective world cannot be used to test specific concrete theories, since the general truth does not cover the special laws that govern each concrete material thing. Materialist dialectics is a science concerned with the most general laws of nature, society, and thinking. It is the world-view and method that guides us in our investigation of objective things. But it is not in any sense a tool of verification. The truth about one concrete material thing cannot verify a theory about another concrete material thing, since all material things are governed by special laws. One cannot employ plane geometry to test Riemannian geometry, since their objects of inquiry differ. One cannot employ Newtonian mechanics to test quantum mechanics, since their fields of inquiry are not the same. In the social sciences some conclusions, while not identical, are nonetheless all the truth. For instance, to countries subject to aggression and oppression, the defense of the motherland is the truth. To the working class of an imperialist engaged in aggression, on the other hand, the truth is that workers have no motherland. To use one of these two theses to verify the other is impossible, as they must be tested in practice. The Marxist conclusion that the revolution of the proletariat may emerge victorious in a single country first, are both the truth: in the first instance with respect to an era when capitalist countries compete among themselves, and in the second instance with respect to the stage of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. The circumstances differ, and so do the conclusions. The first conclusion cannot be used to test the sec-

and conclusion. Practice verifies them both. The victory of the October Revolution was achieved by way of armed uprisings in large cities, and China's opportunists argued on the basis of it that in China we should also carry out armed uprisings in large cities. The result was always defeat. The first conclusion did not verify the second conclusion. The answer could only be provided by practice. Material things are subject to development and change, and when their nature has changed, theory must also change accordingly. Past scientific conclusions are incapable of verifying present conclusions, since everything depends on time, place, and conditions. Scientific principles are not the criterion of truth, since they remain within the sphere of theory, and therefore cannot answer the question of whether or not a theory accords with the objectively existing objects with which it concerns itself. To claim that scientific principles may be used as the criterion of truth is simply to claim that the truth about all material things is already accounted for by known scientific principles, and this is metaphysics. It is tantamount to claiming that the practice criterion is "out of date," and it can only lead to idealism.

Chairman Mao points out, "Integration of theory with practice is one of the fundamental principles of Marxism. According to dialectical materialism, thought must reflect objective reality and must be tested and verified in objective practice before it can be taken as truth, otherwise it cannot."⁴ Theories in the natural as well as in the social sciences must be verified in practice in order to count as truth and as science. If they're not verified, they don't count. To take an example from the natural sciences, Copernicus's theory of the solar system was for three centuries merely a hypothesis of sorts. It did not matter that this hypothesis happened to be 99 percent, 99.9 percent, and 99.99 percent reliable, and that one could safely assume that it was the truth. Until it had been proven in practice it was still merely a hypothesis, and not in fact the truth. When Leverrier, on the basis of it, not only calculated the definite existence of another as yet undiscovered planet, but also calculated the very position of that planet, and when Galle in 1846 actually discovered the planet

Neptune, only then had Copernicus's theory of the solar system been verified as the truth. In the natural sciences, truth is subject to practical verification. Marxism, then, must it too be subjected to testing in practice? It too must similarly be subjected to testing in extended practice by the masses in their millions. Chairman Mao says: "Marxism-Leninism is held to be true not only because it was so considered when it was scientifically formulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin but because it has been verified in the subsequent practice of revolutionary class struggle and revolutionary national struggle. Dialectical materialism is universally true because it is impossible for anyone to escape from its domain in his practice."⁵ Marxism is the truth, not because it styles itself thus. At first, it represented merely a faction within the workers' movement, and had neither power nor influence. Initially, it was hardly famous. The reactionaries besieged it, the scholars of the bourgeoisie opposed it, and other socialist schools attacked it. But, over an extended period of three-fold revolutionary practice [in class struggle, in production, and in scientific experiments—Trans.]. Marxism proved to be the truth, and finally became the guiding ideology of the international communist movement. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most prominent figure in the Second International was Kautsky. The Leninists were in the minority. But when the October Revolution and the practice of the proletarian revolution in various countries proved that Leninism was the truth, it spelled the end for the revisionism of the Second International. The practice of the Chinese revolution over the past decades has proven Mao Zedong Thought to be the truth, and has shattered bourgeois theories and opportunism within our Party. History tells us that every new thought, every new conclusion, and every new viewpoint that emerges within Marxism in the course of its development must first be verified in social practice, before it can become the truth. This is unconditionally so. It was like that in the past, it is like that now, and it will be like that in the future.

2.

The fathers of Marxism introduced practice as the criterion of truth, and furthermore consciously employed the practice criterion to test and develop their own theories, and to revise specific conclusions. The history of the development of Marxism is the history of deriving theory from practice, of testing theory in practice, and of using theory to guide practice. Let us now take a look at how Marx and Engels on the basis of practice put the *Communist Manifesto* to the test. After its publication in 1848, they, for forty-five years, constantly subjected the *Manifesto* to testing in practice. Its seven prefaces vividly illustrate this. In 1872, Marx and Engels pointed out in the preface to the German edition that: "However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever."⁶ This was a conclusion based on twenty-five years of practical class struggle. In the seven "Prefaces," on the basis of the development of the international communist movement, they summed up a whole series of new experiences. In particular on the basis of the practice of the proletarian revolution and new factual material, they revised some specific conclusions. Here is one example: the first sentence of the first chapter of the *Manifesto* reads, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." In the 1888 English edition of the *Manifesto*, Engels added an explanatory note to it:⁷

That is, all written history. In 1847, the pre-history of society, the social organization existing previous to recorded history, was all but unknown. Since then, Haxthausen discovered common ownership of land in Russia, Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history, and by and by village communities were found to be, or to have been the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland. The inner organization of this primitive Communistic society was laid bare, in its typical form, by Morgan's crowning discovery of the true nature of the gens and its relation to the tribe. With the dissolution of these primeval com-

munities society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes.

This important revision, subsequently touched upon on numerous occasions by Engels, distinguished between the more than one million years of class-less society, and the millennia of class society, and explained that classes are the products of definite historical stages. The attitude of Marx and Engels to the *Manifesto* showed the seriousness with which they approached their own doctrine. They were not at all of the opinion that it was perfect from the very beginning, and did not in any way regard it as "absolute truth." From beginning to end, they approached their own doctrine from the standpoint of dialectics, and tested their own theories in practice. They humbly drew upon the scientific achievements of others, including factual material supplied by bourgeois scholars. They introduced practice as the criterion of truth, earnestly practiced what they advocated, and from beginning to end tested their own theories in practice, verifying, enriching, and revising their own points of view. They were utterly without bias, and their attitude was solely one of respecting practice, of respecting the facts, and of respecting science. Marxism is first of all a science, and for this reason it has succeeded in becoming a powerful ideological weapon of the proletariat for transforming the world. Science takes the attitude of seeking truth from facts. Marxism is wholly incompatible with all forms of blind allegiance and superstition. Wherever there is blind following, and wherever there is superstition, there is no science, and no Marxism. Marxism stresses that practice is the criterion of truth, and acknowledges that in our understanding we may commit mistakes that have to be rectified on the basis of practice. If we believe that in our understanding we do not commit mistakes, we have in fact discarded the practice criterion. Chairman Mao points out: "The history of human knowledge tells us that the truth of many theories is incomplete and that this incompleteness is remedied through the test of practice. Many theories are erroneous and it is through the test of practice that their errors are

corrected.⁸ Opportunism is characterized by a split between theory and practice. In the history of our Party, this was particularly evident in the cases of Wang Ming, Lin Biao, and the Wang-Zhang-Jiang-Yao “Gang of Four.” They made more Marxist noises than anyone else, while being furiously opposed to Marxism. Theologians openly propagate religious dogma; Wang Ming, Lin Biao, and the “Gang of Four” cloaked themselves in Marxist garb and propagated religious dogma. They denied that Marxism stems from practice, that Marxism must be tested in practice, and that it must be enriched and developed in practice. Wang Ming opposed seeking truth from facts, and opposed investigation and research. He denied the unity of theory and practice, and took odd Marxist quotations as a dogma. Chairman Mao hit the nail on the head when he said:⁹

Our comrades must understand that we study Marxism-Leninism not for display, nor because there is any mystery about it, but solely because it is the science which leads the revolutionary cause of the proletariat to victory. Even now, there are not a few people who still regard odd quotations from Marxist-Leninist works as a ready-made panacea which, once acquired, can easily cure all maladies. These people show childish ignorance, and we should enlighten them. It is precisely such ignorant people who take Marxism-Leninism as a religious dogma.

Wang Ming took odd Marxist quotations as a panacea and a religious dogma, and this resulted in the loss of 90 percent of the revolutionary base areas, and in more than 90 percent of the revolutionary forces. It put China’s revolution in an impossible situation. That was when Wang Ming’s opportunist line was finally overcome. Thirty years later, Lin Biao’s anti-Party clique and the Wang-Zhang-Jiang-Yao “Gang of Four” acted even more brazenly than Wang Ming had done. The traitor Lin Biao preached the innate genius theory, and denied that the root of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought is to be found in three-fold revolutionary practice. He claimed that “every sentence [of Chairman Mao’s] is the truth, and a single sentence [of Chairman

Mao's] is worth ten thousand [of anyone else's]." He denied that Chairman Mao's instructions must be tested, enriched, and developed in practice. He opposed the practice criterion. Chairman Mao scathingly denounced Lin Biao's idealism and apriorism. Lin Biao's partners the "Gang of Four" ran amok with idealism. They were frenzied in their opposition to dialectical materialism and historical materialism, and denied altogether the practice criterion. Yao Wenyuan attacked the formula "existence is primary, thinking is secondary; the objective is primary, the subjective is secondary," calling it "reactionary metaphysics." He advocated the idealist primacy of the spiritual, and totally denied that the root of theory is in practice, and that theory has to be tested in practice. He also made the absurd claim that "if one has no sense of beauty, the distinction between what is beautiful and what is ugly does not exist," and argued that subjective consciousness is the criterion on the basis on which the beautiful must be distinguished from the ugly. Zhang Chunqiao at an informal meeting openly preached the reactionary formulae of "knowledge-practice-knowledge" and "theory-practice-theory." Even more flagrantly, he opposed the fact that practice constitutes the foundation of knowledge. The "Gang of Four" preached "making opposition to empiricism the key link" denied the validity of practical experience, and slandered the practical experience of the broad cadres and broad masses, labeling it "dated rules and old habits." In short, they preached subjective idealism, opposed the Marxist theory of knowledge that takes practice as its foundation, and denied the practice criterion of truth. What was particularly reactionary was how they wantonly distorted and tampered with Mao Zedong Thought, picking up a word of Chairman Mao's here and another word there, isolating them from the Mao Zedong Thought-system, and discarding the Mao Zedong Thought-system while taking odd phrases from it as a religious dogma, frightening and hitting people everywhere. There is a fundamental divergence between those who are of the opinion that Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought is the science of revolution, and those who take it as a religious dogma. The

“Gang of Four” took Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought as a religious dogma in the very same way that Wang Ming took Marxism-Leninism as a religious dogma. The “Gang of Four” turned their backs upon the practice criterion, and blindly worshipped the fascist philosophy of “force is truth” and “a rumor repeated a thousand times becomes the truth.” They used the propaganda apparatus they controlled to create counterrevolutionary public opinion on a grand scale, denounced the truth that had been proven in practice as revisionism, and praised material that had failed in practice as truth. They totally negated the great practice of socialist revolution and construction during the seventeen years after liberation, totally negated the great practice of the Chinese Communist Party for more than fifty years after its foundation by Chairman Mao personally. They tampered with history, turned things upside down, trumped-up charges, spread rumors, and persecuted Premier Zhou and other veteran proletarian revolutionaries and revolutionary comrades. The “Gang of Four’s” criterion of truth was their ambition to usurp Party and state power. But, practice criterion is an objective criterion, and the practice of millions and millions of members of the popular masses is not only the most powerful means for verifying the truth, but also the ultimate authority for pronouncing the death sentence upon revisionism and any and all falsehoods. In view of the revolutionary practice of hundreds of millions of members of the people, the counterrevolutionary revisionism of the “Gang of Four” has gone completely bankrupt and has been swept onto the rubbish heap of history.

Notes

1. *Marx and Engels, Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 16.
2. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, 1960 edition, pp. 134–35.
3. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 2, p. 523.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 29.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 269.
6. See note 1, p. 228.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
8. See note 5, p. 269.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 778.

6

LIBERATION ARMY DAILY'S SPECIAL COMMENTATORS

A Most Fundamental Principle of Marxism*

**The Fundamental Reversal of Theory and Practice
by Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four”**

Chairman Hua emphasized in his speech last year at the opening ceremony of the Central Party School that: “Chairman Mao instructed us over and over that ‘the integration of theory and practice is the most fundamental principle of Marxism.’ Chairman Mao fought all his life against the evil work style of boasting and of separating theory from practice. . . . Political swindlers such as Lin Biao, Chen Boda, and the “gang of four” have messed up many basic theoretical issues and damaged our Party’s good learning style. We must make a tremendous effort to correct that.”

In a similar situation and on the same issue, Vice Chairman Ye [Jiaying] also emphasized: “As far as I am concerned, the close integration of theory and practice contains two meanings: First, without mastering theory [our minds] would merely be a blank sheet of paper incapable of guiding us in practice. Second, [we] must base everything on facts. What kind of theory would it be if it failed to guide us in practice and could not be tested and verified through practice! [We] must never mix up practice with hollow talk, boasting, or even lies.” Ye also stated: “Our great revolutionary master once also stated that if we only rely on

**Liberation Army Daily's* Special Commentators, “A most basic principle of Marxism” [*Makesizhuyi de yige zui jiben de yuanze*], *People's Daily*, 24 June 1978.

Marxist books, deviate from reality, and take words and phrases from Marxism as a cure-all, then we could only 'fly in the sky' of life's realities."

We would be wrong as wrong can be if we took the important instructions of Chairman Hua and Ye's merely as aimless arrows or hollow words. These instructions hit the target of the defect caused by Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four." Among the many issues messed up by these political swindlers, namely Lin Biao, Chen Boda, and the "Gang of Four," two of them require special attention: First, the complete reversal, politically speaking, of the relationship between friends and enemies; and second, the complete reversal, ideologically speaking, of theory and practice. The serious results stemming from the first reversal is explicit and clear, while the aftermath of the second reversal was the destruction of Chairman Mao's ideological and political line and of Mao Zedong Thought, which caused considerable damage. It is here where we have to embark on our journey of clearing up this mess, reversing those who have been misled, and distinguishing right from wrong.

As everyone knows, Chairman Mao pointed out two of the most salient characteristics of Marxism: Apart from its class nature, there is also its practice nature (*shijianxing*). This so-called practice nature refers to the emphasis on the dependent relationship of theory on practice which is the basis of theory and serves practice in return. Chairman Mao stated: "Where do mankind's correct ideas come from? Do they fall from the sky? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice, and from it alone." (*Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?*) The correctness of thoughts generated from practice should be proved by the results of practice instead of relying on certain subjective perceptions. Thus Chairman Mao also stated: "Only social practice can be the criterion of truth." ("On Practice") The more theory's dependency on practice is emphasized, which enables theory to be constantly verified by practice, the more theory becomes increasingly correct and thorough and the more it can move the masses, and thus the easier it is converted into a mate-

rial force, and the more instructive is its impact on practice. It is no coincidence that Chairman Mao named his first significant philosophical work that was published and which shook the world of Marxism as “On Practice.” In his talk with the American journalist Edgar Snow on January 9, 1965, Chairman Mao mentioned that “On Practice” was more important than any other philosophical articles he had ever written. This point requires special attention from us. What is Mao Zedong Thought? Mao Zedong Thought is the combination of the common truth of Marxism with the concrete revolutionary practice in China and in the contemporary world. Chairman Mao placed practice at the top, emphasizing that practice and the seeking of truth from the facts is everything, and thus he carried out the great development of Marxism and Leninism in China’s revolutionary practice. Chairman Mao also greatly emphasized this point when talking about revolutions in other countries. For instance, he once proposed to Japanese friends [members of the Japanese Communist Party, eds.] that they combine Marxist theory with the concrete revolution in Japan and avoid blindly copying experiences from other countries, for each country’s experience differs from that in other countries. Chairman Mao also constantly warned us that the “books” of Marxism must be studied, but we must combine them with practice in our own country, and apply them to analyze, research, and resolve our problems. He opposed the separation of theory from practice and instructed us to create new situations in the struggle of practice to generate new theories, etc. Obviously, not paying attention to this point when talking about Mao Zedong Thought means abandoning the fundamentals of Mao Zedong Thought.

Lin Biao, Chen Boda, the “Gang of Four,” and others are not only political swindlers (*zhengzhi pianzi*), but also are theoretical swindlers (*lilun pianzi*). The slogan of “holding high” was constantly on their lips while in reality they were constantly ravaging this basic principle. And they were also constantly destroying the integration of theory and practice and the principle of basing everything on reality and seeking truth from facts. Lin Biao’s

“reversal philosophy” (*daoguolai*) is the reverse of the relationship between material and spirit, and secretly places spirit in the first position in the epistemological process. Zhang Chunqiao came up with the formula of “theory — practice — theory” claiming blatantly: “The correctness or incorrectness of ideology and theory is determined by theory which mainly focuses on ideological issues.” According to this idea, the criterion of truth of an ideology is not practice but theory. It is not theory that is examined through practice but, instead, practice is tailored by theory. Who said that Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” did not have any “theory”? The aforementioned was their “reversal philosophy.” According to Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four,” emphasizing practice is empiricism (*jingyanzhuyi*), while the mere mention of seeking truth from facts touched their raw nerves. Instead of viewing Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought as a science and as the truth deriving from a vivid and lively practical life, they turned Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought into absolutes with claims like “every line is the truth,” “one line is worth ten thousand lines,” “the zenith” (*dingfeng*), “the most sublime truth,” and “absolute authority,” etc. On such a basis, they provided themselves with the “reason” for arbitrarily treating, dismantling, or taking apart Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought to meet the needs of their own pragmatism in order to “use the great banner as a tiger-skin” (*ladaqi zuohupi*) [i.e., to deck themselves in Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought to intimidate others, eds.]. On the same basis, Lin Biao blatantly claimed: “[We] may acquire Marxism by quoting it out of context (*duanzhang quyì*).”

The meanest and most vicious method of Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” in ravaging Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought was in quoting out of context from these philosophies. After Chairman Mao criticized their absurd notion of “one line is worth ten thousand lines,” they attempted to defend their other turf of “blindly following each line.” Is it acceptable to quote sentences from the works of Marx, Lenin, and Chairman Mao? Of course it is. We don’t oppose using quotations. However, we firmly oppose the practice of quoting out of context and distorting their

true essence along with “blindly following each line.” Chairman Mao himself once said: “It would lead to a mess if every single sentence, even of Marx’s, were followed.” (*On the Ten Major Relationships*) Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” attempted to practice their pragmatism in spreading a special kind of religious superstition. The quotations out of context were all “absolute legal orders” surpassing time, space, and history. In this notion, practice was completely useless and was deprived of any right to be heard. Their doing so was not because they were ordinary dogmatists such as those who had once appeared in China’s revolutionary history and who had rigidly held to the lines of Marxism claiming themselves as representing revolution [a reference to Wang Ming and the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks in the 1940s, eds.]. On the contrary, Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” were a group of professional counterrevolutionaries whose practice of quoting out of context aimed at negating the entire science of Marxism and burying the Party’s tradition of seeking truth from facts. They did not hold to the view that only by rigidly adhering to those lines can the revolution be carried out. On the contrary, they used those lines to disguise their counterrevolutionary acts and criminal activities of usurping the Party’s authority.

However, it must be seriously stated here that, just because they were counterrevolutionaries, we cannot underestimate the poison and the negative impact they spread in terms of ideological theory. For their impact was profound and their acts were a catastrophe for Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought. From what has been said above, one can clearly see that, indeed, Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” promoted an epistemological line contrary to Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought. The core of their epistemological line reversed the relationship between theory and practice by turning theory into an empty abstraction. And this “abstraction” made it easier for them to introduce their own kinds of private stuff and thus confused two essentially different things. That was the ideological foundation of their counterrevolutionary, revisionist line. Hence, to Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” we ought not to be satisfied with just condemning them as “de-

funct counterrevolutionaries” and discarding the criticism of their theory. Nor should we intentionally or unintentionally blunt the knife of criticism. Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” belonged to an ideological system. Their filthy horse shit (*angzang mapi*) must be thoroughly cleaned up. The aim of our criticism is to re-reverse things that were reversed by them, especially restoring the authority of “On Practice,” seeking truth from facts, and the criterion of practice, all in order to develop and glorify once again the fundamental concepts in Mao Zedong Thought.

Does our emphasis on practice, the reliance that theory has on practice, and the notion that theory must be tested and verified by practice, belittle the significance of theory and display a skepticism towards the truthfulness of Marxism? Our answer can, of course, only be negative.

**The Process of Theory Guiding Practice
Is at the Same Time a Process of Practice
Testing and Verifying Theory in Order to
Replenish, Rectify, Enrich and Develop It**

Practice must be guided by revolutionary theory. Practice without the guidance of theory is blind practice. Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought are our indispensable compass in our work and we must take the concepts and principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as the basis for analyzing, evaluating, and making judgments. These are issues that cannot be questioned. It must be done in this way. However, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought must all be tested through practice and their correctness proved through practice. Ideology cannot prove itself. The issue of theory as the guidance for practice and the issue of practice as the criterion for testing and verifying theory (truth) are two different issues (although they are connected) and cannot be intermingled. The reason theory is able to guide practice is because and only because theory derives from practice and is proved correct through the examination of practice. The process of theory guiding practice is one of practice testing and

verifying theory. Many theories are correct or basically correct and are replenished and developed as a result of examination through practice. Some theories, however, are incomplete and this is rectified by examination through practice. Some theories are erroneous and their errors are rectified as a result of examination through practice. The theory that guides practice is replenished, rectified, enriched, and developed through a process of coming from practice and being tested and verified by practice. If a theory does not follow such a process, or deviates from reality, or is not developed through practice, and thus stagnant, then such a theory is not able to guide practice. These are all matters of common sense. However, at the present key juncture of moving from a chaotic situation to the reestablishment of order, it is necessary to re-elaborate such common sense things.

Here we are confronted with the following issue: Once Marxism is proved as the objective truth by human social practice, is it necessary for this already-established truth to continue to undergo examination through social practice? If the answer to this question is affirmative, then does it mean that truth cannot ever be taken absolutely, and to doubt the existence of relative truth? As far as we are concerned, the reason such an issue has emerged is because the human epistemological process is taken as a singular and disconnected “ideological product” and that being scrutinized by practice is viewed in the same sense as the inspection of products by factory inspectors. Thus a question has emerged in this sense: Is it true that to continue to inspect an already inspected product means to negate the product as a quality product? This way of viewing things is obviously the result of overlooking the fact that the issue being discussed here is one of epistemology. It completely ignores the fact that practice as the criterion of truth is both absolute and relative (we need not repeat the points in Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*[:*Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*, 1909], see chapter two, section six). It also completely ignores the fact that the dynamic movement of the objective world is forever endless and that human understanding of truth in practice is also a forever

endless and obvious notion. In reality, posing the question in this way constitutes a view that a scientific principle is the absolute truth before being proved by practice and that once it is proved by practice it becomes the "absolute truth" forever and no longer needs further verification through practice and that understanding has reached an "apex." Viewing such an "apex" with great astonishment, science becomes helpless. This is a sheer metaphysical epistemology.

From the perspective of the epistemology of Marxism, discovering new truths, or establishing new schools of thought on the basis of certain principles and practical experiences (or newly-gained historical knowledge) is one story. And whether these truths or schools of thought are proved to be true by current or future practice is another story. Despite the fact of being proved partially true, they still need to continue to be verified through new future practice in order to gain new content and a new look. To cite one example: The famous classic formula regarding historical materialism as stated by Marx in his 1859 "Preface to a 'Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'" consisted of a general conclusion drawn by Marx as a result of studying and summarizing the historical process of human social development from which he gained an understanding of the law of regular patterns (*guilixing*). It is by all means the truth. Most noteworthy here is that after Marx completed *Das Kapital* and understood the contradictory movement of capitalism along with its law of development, the historical materialist view gained further scientific proof. Does this principle, which has already been proved scientifically true, need to be put into practice to undergo further examination? The answer is affirmative. Over the long period since the publication of *Das Kapital*, the scientific principle of historical materialism has been constantly tested out and has proven to be true in practice and, in addition, has gained enrichment and development. From Marx's *Das Kapital* to Lenin's *Theory of Imperialism* was an epoch-making development. From the October Revolution to the present, capitalism has undergone numerous changes in practice which has raised quite a few new

issues for us to examine. In the socialist era, the scientific principle regarding the basic contradiction in society, that is the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production and the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, was developed further in the hands of Chairman Mao. Based on this scientific principle, Chairman Mao proposed the great principle regarding the continuation of the revolution under proletarian dictatorship. This is because Mao creatively applied the principle of historical materialism to socialist practice and recognized that the practice of socialism differs greatly from that of capitalism. The great truth of the continuation of the revolution under proletarian dictatorship will undoubtedly be verified and developed by the practice of the entire socialist enterprise. Religious superstition adopts an imperious attitude toward practice. In contrast, scientific truth listens to the call of practice with great modesty. The development of practice always promotes the development of truth, or further conceptualizes the truth.

In Lenin's view, the possibility existed in the imperialist era for a socialist revolution to succeed in one country or in a few countries. That was a new conclusion and a new scientific truth in the school of Marxism. It was a scientific truth because it was proved in terms of the law of regular patterns by Lenin's scientific analysis of practical activities in the phase of capitalist imperialism and by the discovery of the law of uneven development of imperialism which then underwent an exacting scrutiny in terms of class relations in the imperialist era. However, regarding the objective truthfulness of this new conclusion and its consistency with objective reality, along with whether or not it would be able to reach the expected goal, it also had to be proved by examination through practice. Despite the fact that from the perspective of the law of regular patterns, this scientific truth, prior to the victory of the October Revolution, presented 99 percent, 99.9 percent, or 99.99 percent reliability, it was still something that had not been fully proved by practice. Through the victory of the October Revolution, along with the success of Soviet socialist

construction in the eras of Lenin and Stalin, this truth was verified through practice and was proved to be true and thus became a great exemplification and a revolutionary encouraging force containing great materiality. Later on, this truth continued to be tested and verified by the practice of world revolution, especially following World War II, and gained constant enrichment.

This is what is stated in [Mao's] "On Practice": "Marxism-Leninism is held to be true not only because it was so considered when it was scientifically formulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin but because it has been verified in the subsequent practice of revolutionary class struggle and revolutionary national struggle." What Chairman Mao was discussing here were the two leaps in acquiring knowledge. That is, the leap [from perceptual knowledge] to rational knowledge and the leap from rational knowledge to revolutionary practice. Chairman Mao emphasized the latter leap which involves the process of verifying and developing the truth. To quote Chairman Mao: "This leap is more important than the previous one. For it is this leap alone that can prove the correctness or incorrectness of the first leap, that is, of the ideas, theories, policies, plans or measures formulated in the course of reflecting the objective external world. There is no other way of testing truth" (*Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?*¹). Chairman Mao also stated: "[T]hought must reflect objective reality and must be tested and verified in objective practice before it can be taken as truth, otherwise it cannot" (*Strengthen Party Unity and Carry Forward Party Traditions*). Whether something is taken as the truth depends upon the result of practice. If by being static and yet satisfied with the first leap — thinking that all the truth is there — then one is caught in the obscure trap of "absolute truth" which results in not basing everything on reality and a [belief in] the truth that leads to an arrogant attitude towards practice and a refusal to verify the truth through practice. This is an example of not understanding "On Practice" both in terms of thought and action. (The examination of truth by practice is also a process and it usually waxes and wanes. This issue will be discussed some other time.)

Someone might ask: In scientific research there is the theory of "logical proof" (*luoji zhengming*). What is the relationship between that and the criterion of practice? The so-called logical proof is that in scientific research one must apply mathematical deduction and logical inference as the instruments of proof in order to elicit new conclusions from a series of axioms, definitions, and theorems. However, such a process cannot deviate even the slightest from practice: First, what appeared in the form of logical inferences are formulated as a result of several thousand [examples] of practices within the scope of human consciousness which are themselves the products of social practice; second, the conclusion elicited from the inferences cannot replace the criterion of practice, although it is subject to rigorous logical proof. On the contrary, the inferred conclusion must be tested and verified in practice in order to prove its correctness and consistency with reality. If it deviates from the logical proof of the criterion of practice, it will unavoidably become intermingled with the method of pure logical analysis in positivism. This is the way scientific theories are established and developed, which is similar to the way a correct [political] line is formed and implemented.

Line, policies etc. are key junctures in the determination of theory by practice. The revolutionary line of the political party of the proletariat is the policy and objective of the revolutionary acts gained by taking the reality of class struggle as the starting point, applying Marxist theory, summarizing the revolutionary practical experience, and analyzing class relations and the situation of class struggle. If our line is based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and is based on an earnest summary of the practical experiences of both the negative and positive sides and is concentrated with the entire experience and wisdom of the Party by applying the democratic-centralist method, then we can firmly make the statement that our line is correct. However, must the correct line be tested and verified by practice after its formulation? Must the correctness of the line be proved on the basis of practice? And, must the line itself be

revised, replenished, and developed by practice? The answer is also affirmative. Just as the process of theory guiding practice is the process of the examination of theory through practice, the process of implementing the line is the process by which the line is tested and verified by practice. Such a process is usually one containing many repetitions. For instance, after the formulation of a political line, it ought to be propagandized and implemented among the masses and mastered by the masses and thus become the action of the masses. This process of guidance is also the process by which the line is tested and verified by the masses. In general, the degree to which the line is accepted and turned into a material force by the masses is proof of the degree of the correctness of the line. In addition, the general principle proposed by the Party's general line is a general task. When it returns to the individuals and to practice and is carried out in the various specific work areas, it is bound to be combined with the practice of various areas and to be examined through practice in these various areas. The various specific working areas, in accordance with the general line and with its own specific conditions, form the specific working lines and policies and gain success in practical implementation. This provides proof of the correctness of the general line. Moreover, such conceptualization inevitably enriches the content of the general line.

In addition, in the long process of implementing the [general] line, due to the fact that practice is a developmental process and that class relations also undergo changes, the content of the line itself is bound to be developed and altered following the development of practice and changes in class relations. For instance, during the era of the long-term struggle of the Democratic Revolution and up through the Anti-Japanese War period (1937–45), our Party formulated its general line with a whole set of concrete policies consistent with the situation. Only then did we understand the realm of necessity (*biran wangguo*) of the Chinese Democratic Revolution. However, things did not cease at that point. For practice was still undergoing development and our understanding was also deepening, plus the fact that the line also

needed to be examined through practice in order to gain a certain level of development. Chairman Mao, who had long characterized the Chinese bourgeoisie as a national bourgeoisie and a compradore bureaucratic bourgeoisie, thus adopted different policies of treatment [of these classes]. In the Anti-Japanese War period, Chairman Mao drew distinctions between the big bourgeoisie allied with Japan and the big bourgeoisie who to a certain extent participated in anti-Japanese actions. However, it was not until the era of the liberation war (1945-49) that Chairman Mao explicitly announced that our revolution was not only an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal one, but also an anti-bureaucratic and anti-monopoly capital revolution. Chairman Mao also announced the confiscation of monopoly capital owned by the four big families (which accounted for over 80 percent of total capital in China) and its reversion to the new democratic nation. Undoubtedly, that was an important development in the content of our Party's democratic revolutionary general line. And it is because monopoly capital owned by the four big families and others had developed to its peak both during the anti-Japanese War period and following Japan's surrender that there resulted the sharp contradiction between monopoly capital and the ordinary masses. There are two aspects to the opposition to bureaucratic, monopoly capital: It contains both the essence of the democratic and the socialist revolutions. Taking opposition to monopoly capital as the content of the democratic revolutionary line is one of the important premises which provided for the thorough victory of the democratic revolution and a nonstop conversion of the democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. That not only involved development of the [general] line, but was also a significant contribution to the revolutionary science of Marxism.

Right now we are in the process of implementing the line of the CCP's Eleventh Congress (1977). The formulation of this line underwent a long process of being worked out in practice and in fact can be traced back to the end of the 1950s. In 1963, Chairman Mao, reacting to the condition of China's backwardness and of having confronted aggression for the last one hundred

years, pointed out that we must adequately utilize the advantages of the socialist system and must take as our starting point the condition of confronting [foreign] aggression so as to alter China's backwardness in economic and technological terms in the near future. Following Mao's instructions, Premier Zhou [Enlai], at the Third and Fourth sessions of the National People's Congress, proposed the grand plan of developing the national economy which demanded the overall realization of modernization in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology so as to assure that China's economy would be at the forefront of the world. After the smashing of the "Gang of Four," the Central Committee headed by Chairman Hua [Guofeng] carried out Chairman Mao and Zhou Enlai's will by developing a summary of the rich experiences, both positive and negative, involving our country's socialist revolution and construction and by also proposing the strategy of grasping the key link of class struggle and bringing about great order throughout the land along with the eight major fighting tasks [set forth at the Eleventh Party Congress, eds.]. The Congress line was formed and the general task of socialist revolution and construction in the new era of development was proposed on the following practical basis: Adhering to the continuation of the revolution under proletarian dictatorship, deepening the three great revolutionary movements [of class struggle, the struggle for production, and scientific experiment, eds.], and building our country into a powerful socialist nation by realizing the four modernizations within this century. Since the announcement of the Eleventh Congress Party line and the general tasks of the new era, the masses have cheered with great excitement and the situation in various walks of life has also been great. That was a clear indication of the correctness of the line. Thus, is it still necessary for this line to be tested and verified by practice? Must this line be proved by practice in the various walks of life and be replenished, revised, and enriched and developed? Anyone who has earnestly and seriously read "On Practice," and who possesses any revolutionary practical experiences, will, without the slightest hesitation, give an affir-

mative answer to these questions. This means that, despite the fact that we firmly believe in the correctness of the line based on our understanding, understanding (*renshi*) does not equal proof and understanding itself also needs proof. Only practice and only practice by the revolutionary masses can provide proof of the objective truthfulness of the line. The only judgment on the correctness of this line results from the consequences of practice: That is, whether the line is beneficial to the development of social productivity and whether the line brings about real benefits to socialism and to the masses.

Throughout history we have observed that the formulators of erroneous lines time and again reiterated that their line was the "absolute truth," and one hundred percent Bolshevik. They neither allowed their line to be tested and verified by practice, nor did they allow others to come up with opposite views. Wang Ming and others were such formulators. The formulators of a correct line, on the contrary, do not claim that their line is the perfect, "absolute truth." Chairman Mao, for instance, repeatedly emphasized that the people's commune system [during the 1958-60 Great Leap Forward] must be tested and verified by practice in order to achieve perfection. On the one hand, the implementation of a correct line must present the correctness of the Party's line to the masses with one hundred percent confidence in order to insure that the line is turned into the conscious action of the masses and overcomes various deviations involving disobedience from the line and to struggle for the realization of the Party's correct line. On the other hand, however, the implementation of the correct line requires prudence, an emphasis on investigation and research, a determination of our work policy and method on the basis of the actual conditions, cautious attention to the call of practice, observation of any changes in the emotional feelings of the masses, timely improvement of our work, and opposition to "a formalistic attitude based on the concept of the 'authority' " as ascribed by Chairman Mao, etc. Without so doing, the possibility exists that the correct line will become erroneous, distorted, and interfered with by other erroneous things.

It was our great master Comrade Mao Zedong, not anyone else, who made special mention of this issue in a talk on July 10, 1959. In it, he said: The proof of the correctness of the line is not an issue of theory, but one of practice. It takes time, and [the line] must be proved by the results of practice.

Was that idea correct? Correct by all means! For that is a true materialistic view on line instead of a view of “doubting everything.”

The Most Telling Refutation of Agnosticism and Skepticism as with All Other Philosophical Fancies Is Practice

The most telling refutation of agnosticism and skepticism as of all other philosophical fancies is practice. This is a famous line from the criticism by Frederick Engels of the agnosticism and skepticism of David Hume and Immanuel Kant [in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, eds.]. Therefore, it is of great significance to quote it here today.

This line from Engels communicates an important historical fact: The issues of whether human understanding is able to reflect reality correctly and whether it possesses objective truthfulness remained unresolved and impossible to be resolved prior to the introduction of practice into epistemology and the establishment of the objective criterion of truth in Marxism. At that time, people formulated various schools of thought each thinking that he possessed the ultimate or absolute truth. It's the style of thought in which the “father-in-law says he is right, and the mother-in-law says she is right.” There were constant arguments and expressions of different opinions within the realm of subjective thinking. Under such conditions, agnosticism and skepticism naturally flourished for, just as Chairman Mao pointed out, only subjectivism and metaphysics required the least effort due to the fact they did not need to base anything on reality, nor did they need to have it verified by practice. Old-style materialists did not realize the dependent relationship of understanding on practice.

Therefore, they were unable to resolve this problem. The emergence of dialectical materialism introduced the notion of practice into epistemology and established objective criteria for determining the truth and thus announced the bankruptcy of skepticism and agnosticism.

Hence, the epistemology of Marxism acknowledged that practice is the real authority. The situation where agnosticism and skepticism flourished could only exist prior to the establishment of practice as the objective criterion for testing and verifying the truth. It was impossible for agnosticism and skepticism to flourish after the objective criterion for testing and verifying the truth was formulated. Whoever opposes such a view certainly demonstrates an astonishing “reversal”!

The subjectivism and metaphysics of Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” was overwhelmingly evident in their views on truth. For a long time they presented truth as something which relied on human subjective thought and also took theory itself, speeches and statements made by authorities, and [central] documents, as the criterion of their finding the truth while they ignored objective practice. By doing so, they aimed at making arbitrary interpretations, arbitrary accusations, such as turning white into black and vice-versa, accusing good people of being evil and vice-versa, and by totally ignoring the facts and basing everything on the “necessities of class struggle.” They described this as “facts serving necessity” (*shishi wei xuyao fuwu*). By respecting the facts and not disguising them and allowing practice and facts to speak for themselves, it is not hard to distinguish the correctness or incorrectness of a [political] line. Lin Biao and the “gang of four,” however, used the beautiful word of “revolution” to mess up the situation so as to disguise themselves and decorate their counterrevolutionary, revisionist line as the sole revolutionary line. That was the reason why the phrase “line struggle is agnostic” (*luxian douzheng bukezhi*) was so popular among the masses. All in all, the reason Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” preempted any discussion of the objective criterion of truth was to open the flood gates to such nonsense as acting and behaving recklessly

and fabricating facts. Almost everyone was touched by the severity of their influence.

It must be emphasized that the severe destruction of theory and of Marxism caused by the deeds of Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” has not been fully realized by people today. The absurd way of thinking aroused by them, namely of destroying the notion of seeking truth from facts and reversing the relationship between theory and practice and taking theory itself as the measure for determining the truthfulness of theory, not only won over quite a few people lacking in actual experience and without theoretical training (even to this day there are still people who stick to the notion that ideology is superior to everything else), but also affected a number of experienced leaders. The double-faced strategy, namely to “use the great banner as a tiger-skin” and “seeking personal benefits by holding the banner high” adopted by Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four,” certainly intimidated many people. At the same time, they also ruthlessly accused those who opposed or expressed doubt about their practices as being “revisionists,” a technique which still frightens people today.

Is acknowledging practice as the sole criterion of truth, Marxist theory as science in place of superstition, the reliance of theory on practice prior to guiding practice, theory as something changeable and capable of being replenished, revised, enriched, and developed by practice, a revisionist practice or is it true Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought?

It is well-known that Engels often made the following statement: “Marx’s view of the entire world is not a religious creed, but a methodology. What we are provided with is not ready-made doctrines but the starting point for further research and research methodology.”² Lenin also stated: “An indisputable truth that must be made clear is that Marxists must take into consideration actual life and the real facts instead of holding fast to yesterday’s theory, for such a theory as with other theories could, at most, illustrate the most basic and ordinary things and merely provide a general summary of the complicated situations of real life.”³

Chairman Mao has offered us additional instructions in this

field and by going over works such as “Oppose Book Worship,” “On Practice,” “Reforming Our Study,” and “Rectify Our Party’s Style of Work,” it’s not hard to see how Chairman Mao dealt with Marxist-Leninist theories. Chairman Mao unmercifully ridiculed idiotic people who “considered whatever is mentioned in a book as correct,” “constantly trumpeted ‘bring on the books,’ ” and those who viewed Marxism-Leninism as a religious doctrine. Those were the people who, upon reading the ideas in Lenin’s books of the proletariat gaining power in the big cities, exerted the utmost strength to oppose Chairman Mao’s correct policy [in the 1930s–40s] of occupying the rural areas first and having the countryside encircle and then occupy the city. In their view, the objective world of China was not understood through the practical activities of the Chinese people, but was only understood by experts on China in the Communist International whose words could not be altered. They also “took certain phrases and words from Marx and Lenin’s books as a panacea,” wishing for an effortless cure. According to Chairman Mao: “[Such a notion] has hindered the development of theory impairing both themselves and other comrades.” These kind of people are the so-called dogmatists. Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” belonged to this group and took Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as a religious doctrine. However, instead of taking it as a panacea, they did not have any intention of really achieving a cure, but merely used it as a disguise for their counterrevolutionary acts. We refer to these kind of people as double-faced counterrevolutionary revisionists (*fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi liangmianpai*).

These two kinds of people are like two mirrors placed before us and they have at least one formal thing in common in that they both took Marxism-Leninism as a religious doctrine.

Nevertheless, do not assume that revisionism is only reflected in its direct negation of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism. Chairman Mao once rebuked the “Gang of Four” for only opposing empiricism but not dogmatism, intimating that the “Gang of Four” themselves were counterrevolutionary revisionists who at times intimidated, deceived, and hoodwinked people with

certain dogmas (including [Mao's] "quotations" (*yulu*). That was also the practice of old-style revisionists as Stalin once characterized them: Revisionism as opportunism "sometimes demonstrates an attempt to adhere rigidly to certain out-of-date principles in Marxism and to convert them into dogmas such that they ultimately hinder the forward development of Marxism and the development of the proletarian revolutionary movement" ("Concluding Remarks" to *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik), Short Course*).

The entire theory of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought along with the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, are irreversibly correct and must always be adhered to without the least disobedience. However, fundamental principles must be combined with reality and developed forward. Certain specific principles, conclusions, and slogans in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought change in accordance with alterations in historical conditions. And the degree of human understanding of the world is forever shaped by historical conditions and the proficiency of practice. Understanding is bound to move forward along with changes in historical conditions and the development of practice. New historical conditions will inevitably promote changes in theory. According to Chairman Mao, now that we have entered the socialist era and have confronted a whole new series of issues, relying on old works is now insufficient and we must adapt ourselves to new requirements and produce new works. In the past, we used to think that eliminating the bourgeoisie and gaining the complete victory of socialism would not be that difficult. Now it seems that things are not so easy as we expected. Thus Chairman Mao pointed out, we should not declare the ultimate victory cavalierly. On the contrary, we must stick to the continuation of the revolution under proletarian dictatorship and get ready for many possible great difficulties both at home and abroad. Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Chairman Mao never denied the necessity to revise or amend that which was obsolete (including their own works) and to replace them with new conclusions. But in so doing they never considered negating

their own theory or “doubting” its correctness, for what they were engaged in was scientific work in which they showed great adherence to the truth and facts, instead of crowning themselves as the god or deity, or being taken as the deity by others. Classical writers of Marxism have always despised and sometimes repelled such naïveté and absurd acts which were founded on incorrect motives. For instance, Chairman Mao not only expressed “deep resentment” of Lin Biao’s promotion of “the three adverbials” (*sange fuci*), “the four greatnesses” (*sige weida*), and “absolute authority” (*juedui quanwei*), but also reprimanded Lin Biao as a “hypocrite.” Everyone knows how Marx and Engels amended certain specific principles in the *Communist Manifesto*. In the history of the development of Marxism, such occurrences were countless, including some by Stalin himself. If one reviews Stalin’s *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, it would not be difficult to discover that he personally amended incorrect remarks he had previously made, or those he declared as inoperable to be discarded. Chairman Mao in his talk about the ten major military principles also pointed out: “By employing the ten major principles we gained a victory in the liberation war and in the war to resist America and aid Korea (of course there were other reasons). The ten major principles are still of some use today in a variety of areas and in the future. However, since Marxism-Leninism is not static but dynamic, the ten major principles must also be replenished, developed, and sometimes revised in accord with the actual conditions in future wars.” (Quoted from Ye Jianying, “Promoting the Advanced Proletarian Military Science in Our Nation”.)

Revising, replenishing, and rectifying the incompleteness of truth involves one thing, namely the intersection in the development of understanding and theory. Revising certain obsolete principles on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and in accord with actual reality is necessary, normal, and unavoidable. For instance, our Party and State constitutions have undergone numerous and necessary alterations some of which involved principles. The process of the formulation of these two

constitutions involved extensive research and discussion by Central Committee members and the common people. However, it was because these two documents underwent serious research and discussion that any additions should be avoided under new conditions. Some of the additions were made because formerly correct things were now obsolete as conditions changed, some because they were never in tune with reality, while some others had their content absorbed by new conclusions (as an example, on the issue of the victory of the socialist revolution, although Lenin drew the conclusion that a possibility existed for socialism to be victorious in one country during the imperialist era, he still believed that the ultimate victory of socialism could only be gained with the collective effort of the working class in many nations). All in all, truth is in a constant process of development. The development of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought undoubtedly involves alterations of certain obsolete principles. However, that is not an act of revisionism just as relative truth is not relativism and an emphasis on practical experiences is not empiricism.

At historical turning points in particular where rapid changes are occurring, it is very likely for slogans formerly proposed to fail suddenly. According to Lenin: "At historical junctures, even advanced political parties would fail to understand the new situation for some time and repeat the old slogans which were important yesterday but are meaningless today."⁴ Lenin also stated: "Any slogan proposed by the party to the masses has an inherent rigidity and inflexibility that may affect many people even after a change in the context in which the slogan was proposed. Such a defect is unavoidable. However, failure to learn how to struggle against it and overcome it will result in an inability to guarantee the correctness of the party's policies."⁵

Such cases are numerous in the history of the Chinese revolution, including that of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. As an example, during war when conditions warrant following a slogan to "emphasize mobile warfare" but instead the slogan of "emphasize guerrilla war" was adhered to, this immensely imperiled the revolution.

What Lenin emphasized here is to “struggle against and defeat the defect” of adhering to obsolete slogans. Why was that? It was because it would be very difficult to alter these slogans, in part because of the backwardness of some people’s ideology relative to reality, and also out of the tentative connection between certain people’s interests and those obsolete slogans. Those people paid lip-service in saying that they worried most about the fact that the alteration of certain obsolete slogans and phrases might result in the negation of the entire revolution and the entire theoretical system (obviously, that was nothing but an illusion). In reality, they mostly feared that certain personal interests might be impaired.

The most important thing to consider is this: Under Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four,” the destruction of the integration of theory and reality, the taking of reality as the starting point, the principle of seeking truth from facts, along with persecutions and attacks on people who for a long time persistently adhered to those principles, brought about a situation where even today some people (especially leaders at various levels) still have the habit of not daring to touch or study new issues, and refusing to reply to questions from the masses. Instead, they are used to avoiding the real issues and blindly following the [verbal] instructions of authority and those in documents without relating anything to actual conditions of their district or unit and without conducting revolutionary work “on the basis of the actual situation and the feelings of the masses” (“Pay Attention to Economic Work”). Rather they act exactly contrary to the feelings of the masses. They also ignore the effects of practice and are unconcerned with whether things are conducted in a correct way and whether any problems are solved. Instead of taking facts and practice as the criterion, they make judgments and conclusions following the requirements from higher-level authorities or themselves. Such practice completely disobeys the instructions of Chairman Mao. Moreover, ignoring facts and the principle of seeking truth from facts provides an opportunity for various types of careerists and conspirators to create chaos and engage in vari-

ous tricks aimed at destroying the nation and the people. We have suffered very long both spiritually and materially as a result of deviating from the principle of seeking truth from facts! It's hard to deny this deeply felt lesson.

Some comrades even came up with such a rebuke: By putting practice first and taking practice as the only criterion for testing and verifying the truth, where would Mao Zedong Thought and Chairman Mao's instructions come into play? For people who produce such muddle-headed questions, in addition to providing them with food for thought from the aforementioned statements, we must also ask them a rhetorical question: Chairman Mao once said, "only revolutionary practice by several thousands of people can be taken as the measurement of testing and verifying the truth" ("On New Democracy") and "there is no other way of testing truth" ("Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?"). Where would you place these instructions of Chairman Mao's? What constitutes proper action in following Chairman Mao's instructions? It seems that Marxism as a science cannot be fully understood without serious study and by merely relying on gut feelings. Therefore, we should study it earnestly. The Central Committee headed by Chairman Hua calls for unity of the entire Party and all the people. The banner of Mao Zedong Thought was and always will be the banner of our unity and struggle. Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four" blatantly falsified Mao Zedong Thought while carrying the banner of Chairman Mao to sell their own black stuff (*heihuo*). Quite a few of us have been cheated by them and that is a very profound lesson. Now we should emphasize opening up our minds and clarifying the fundamental ideas of Mao Zedong Thought. Only by clearing the dirt from our eyes so as to distinguish right from wrong on this important issue and completely and correctly mastering Mao Zedong Thought by following its original features can we assist our united efforts. Regarding the fundamental principles of Mao Zedong Thought, Comrade Deng Xiaoping made an incisive statement in his speech at an All-Military Political Work Conference (*Quanjun zhengzhi huiyi*) convened by the Central Military Commission.

Chairman Mao starting from his earliest participation in the communist movement and in creating our Party always advocated and carried out investigations and research on objective social conditions and firmly struggled against any erroneous tendencies such as theory deviating from reality, basing everything on subjective will, and blindly following books and higher-level instructions instead of relating everything to concrete realities.

Chairman Mao also persisted in employing the standpoint, viewpoint, and method of Marxism-Leninism to propose, analyze, and solve questions. Chairman Mao always referred to issues in accordance with different time, locations, and conditions . . . and employed primarily the standpoint, viewpoint, and method of Marxism-Leninism to propose, analyze, and solve questions. The life soul of Marxism is to analyze specific questions based on specific conditions. Without being related to reality, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought would lose its vitality.

The obligation of us leading cadres is to relate instructions from the Central Committee and from higher-level authorities to specific actualities of our own specific units in order to solve questions. We must also avoid simplistically copying and transmitting as if we were merely a “mail room.”

Comrade Deng Xiaoping also stated:

It’s been a long time since an All-Military Political Work Conference has been convened. What method should we adopt in holding this conference? Obviously, we should only adopt the method of seeking truth from facts, basing everything on reality, and relating theory to practice in order to summarize past experiences, analyze new historical conditions, and propose new questions, new tasks, and new policies. Only in such a way can this conference be capable of solving problems in a correct manner. The reason why Comrade Wei Guoqing’s report is so good is that it is based on a study of new issues which have emerged under new historical conditions and it has proposed specific new ways of solving problems. This is a demonstration of our firm support of Mao Zedong Thought in concrete situations.

In contrast, if we only follow old documents verbatim then there

would be no way to solve any problems let alone solving problems in a correct manner. To do so would be tantamount to disobeying Mao Zedong Thought, despite any lip service of supporting it. We must clear out the residual poison left behind by Lin Biao and the “gang of four,” bring order out of chaos (*boluan fanzheng*), and dismantle spiritual yokes in order to emancipate our thought. This indeed is a very significant task.

And Deng further commented:

There are still quite a few comrades in our Party who firmly adhere to the study of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and the principle of relating the common truth of Marxism-Leninism to our revolutionary practice. This is a very good point and it must be developed further. However, there are also other comrades who always forget, discard, and even oppose the fundamental Marxist viewpoint and method of Chairman Mao of seeking truth from facts, basing everything on reality, and relating theory to practice, despite their paying lip-service to Mao Zedong Thought. In addition, some people even think that whoever adheres to the principle of seeking truth from facts, basing everything on reality, and relating theory to practice has committed a heinous crime. In reality, they advocated that if the original words of Marx, Lenin, and Chairman Mao were blindly followed, everything would be just fine. And if this were not the case, they would accuse people of disobeying Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and the spirit of the Central Committee. The issue they raised is not a small one, but a rather large one relating to the issue of how to view Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

So much to the point! How profound! How great!

Indeed, how to view Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought is not a small issue, but one relating to a genuine or a fake defense of Mao Zedong Thought. Just as Vice-Chairman Deng pointed out, some of our comrades tend to forget, discard, or even oppose the fundamental viewpoints and methods of Mao Zedong Thought, although they pay lip service to it. Some comrades even forbade others from adhering to the principle of seeking truth from facts, demanding, instead, that everyone rely on and blindly follow the ready-made works of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought while ignoring actual conditions. Some

even forbade others from taking practice as the criterion for testing and verifying the truth and also forbade others from disrupting the “ideological forbidden zones” (*sixiang jinqu*) established by Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” as if the very mentioning of practice as the criterion and of disrupting the “forbidden zones” would cause the collapse of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, thereby bringing about a great catastrophe. What absurdity! Where does this kind of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought exist in this world? Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought constitutes the most advanced and most revolutionary scientific ideological system in human history and is a common truth constantly verified by the practice of innumerable people. It is capable of defeating all backward and reactionary ideological trends and could never be defeated by them. The banner of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought will remain upright forever. Any maniacs, including Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four,” who attempt to chop it down, have all collapsed one after another. How come some of our comrades lack confidence? The kind of weak and feeble Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought that is fearful of being related to new historical conditions, fearful of the notion of practice, and fearful of being chopped down, as it is imagined by some of our comrades, is not true Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. True Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought exercises, develops, and enlarges its field of battle through the profound practice of the three great revolutionary movements and in the great practice of struggling face-to-face against various kind of anti-Marxist ideological trends. Some of our comrades identify themselves as materialists and as having thoroughly read “On Practice.” How is it that once they hear about practice as the criterion, they feel a great disaster is approaching? It should be noted that this is a contemporary ideological trend that must be attended to. Such an ideological trend is antagonistic to the recently restored and developed principle of seeking truth from facts, basing everything on reality, and the good work style of having the courage to propose and study new issues. The struggle between the two undoubtedly reflects the significance and com-

plexity of the movement of clearing out the residual poison of Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four."

The waves of history roll forward irreversibly. "Marxism-Leninism has in no way exhausted truth but ceaselessly opens up roads to the knowledge of truth in the course of practice" ("On Practice"). Since the emergence of Marxism, the path to understanding the truth has widened. In the more than fifty years of Chairman Mao's leadership of the Chinese revolution, profound changes occurred in almost all the realms of human society and the natural world. Chairman Mao employed the weapon of understanding Marxism in this era always viewing practice as the most fundamental aspect of epistemology. According to Chairman Mao, Marxism is a science because it is capable of opening roads for understanding the truth, emphasizing practice, and putting practice first. Mao Zedong Thought is the biggest enemy of all superstition, dogmas, and rigid things. Engels once said: "The more science is unfettered and objective, the more it fits the benefits and desires of the workers"⁶ Chairman Mao also stated: "We must believe in science and nothing else, that is to say, we must not have blind faith in anything. What is right is right and what is wrong is wrong, whether it concerns the Chinese or foreigners, whether it concerns the dead or the living. To believe otherwise is blind faith. We must do away with blind faith." ("On the Draft Constitution of [the] People's Republic of China"). Showing respect to practice and science, dismantling superstition, and emancipating our minds will enable us to promote theory and acquire new truths. At great historical turning points, just as Lenin described it, "everything is determined by practice and we are at such an historical juncture when theory is converted into practice and theory is enlivened, revised, and verified by practice."⁷

Let us, under the banner of Chairman Mao and the leadership of the Central Committee headed by Chairman Hua, bravely throw ourselves into the great practice of the three great revolutionary movements under the new historical conditions and into the struggle of thoroughly revealing and criticizing Lin Biao and

the “Gang of Four,” turning theory into practice, and allowing practice to verify [theory] — study, and study through practice in order to constantly push Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought forward through practice.

Notes

1. Translation from K. Fan, editor, *Mao Tse-tung and Li Biao: Post-revolutionary Writings* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972), p. 268.
2. *Marx-Engels Complete Works*, Volume 39, p. 406.
3. *Lenin Selected Works*, Volume 3, p. 26.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 611-12.
5. *Marx-Engels Selected Works*, Volume 4, p. 254.
7. See note 2, p. 398.

TAO KAI

Determine the Truth Through Practice, Acquire New Knowledge from Experience

An interview with Wu Jiang*

Wu Jiang was born in November 1917, in Zhuji county, Zhejiang Province. He began work in the theoretical field in the 1950s, and has worked at People's University, *Red Flag*, the Central Party School, and the Central Academy of Socialism (*zhongyang shehuizhuyi xueyuan*). He has published the following works: *Issues on the Reform of the Capitalist Economy in China*, *On the Proletarian Dictatorship*, *Collected Works on Historical Dialectics*, *Ten Lectures on Epistemology*, *Twenty Lectures on Philosophical Issues*, *Several Issues Relating to Contemporary Socialism*, and *Origins and Development of the Theory of the Initial Stage of Socialism*, and others.

Question: It's been two years since the beginning of the debate over the criterion of truth. You were involved in finalizing that famous article "Practice is the sole criterion of truth." When the article was slandered with such phrases as "chopping down the banner," you wrote another article titled "A most fundamental principle of Marxism" to further the public debate which thus

*Tao Kai, "Discussing truth founded on practice and gaining new knowledge from experience—An interview with Wu Jiang" [*Yi shijian lun zhenli you jingyan de xin zhi—fang Wu Jiang*], in Tao Kai, Zhang Yide, and Dai Qing, *Leaving modern superstition behind* [*Zouchu xiandai mixin*] (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988), pp. 101–9.

brought it to the national level. As a participant, there must be many things worth being recalled!

Answer: Past events disappear like smoke. Great changes have taken place within the old theoretical circles over the past ten years. Since this is a fairly well-known story, I need not mention the details here. In fact, practice in the past few years has tested quite a few people and things, and has come to a necessary conclusion. Regarding the debate, [I would like to] show my gratitude to the comrades at *Guangming Daily*, *People's Daily*, *Liberation Army Daily*, and the *Xinhua News Agency* who, despite tremendous pressures, pioneered the debate in our society. In addition, without the support of Deng Xiaoping, who was restored to work just before the beginning of the debate, it would have been impossible for the debate to have been carried out so smoothly. These are the only old occurrences I would like to recall.

Question: Then, what comments would you like to make about the present?

Answer: Only two points: First, the abstract topic of “practice as the sole criterion of truth” has affected so many areas and has had a great impact politically well beyond most people’s expectations. Second, the ups and downs of the past ten years prove that it is by no means easy to adhere to the principle of social practice as the criterion of verifying the truth. In fact, it is very difficult. Some people took it as a polite formula, others adopt an attitude of not acknowledging the results of practice over the past ten years. Things like this are everywhere in real life. Of course, everyone must eventually stand before the judge of practice equally. That’s one of the important reasons why we must continue to advocate emancipation of thought.

Question: The current situation is quite different from that of ten years previous, despite the ups and downs in the interim. Therefore, is there a new significance to the implication of adhering to the criterion of practice and the emancipation of thought?

Answer: Today, in order to adhere faithfully to the criterion of practice, we must possess a true democratic and scientific spirit,

instead of merely paying lip-service to them. This requires the courage of acknowledging the results of practice and to learn wholeheartedly from experience and lessons provided by practice. Otherwise, there would be inconsistency between words and actions, talking one way and acting another. In general, the definition of adhering to the criterion of truth, or the criterion of practice, is whether policies, plans, and methods are correct and how much truthfulness they possess as eventually proved by practice. This is a correct, but inadequate, explanation. As for our real actions, I would like to add one point, and that is we must respect practice and in the process of making decisions on policies, plans, and methods place practice in the forefront. The method refers to the implementation of democratic discussion, drawing on collective wisdom and absorbing all useful ideas, and making scientific analyses (quantitative and qualitative) and assessments. Only by so doing can we integrate numerous practical experiences, from past and present, in order that the decisions we make have a higher ratio of truthfulness, that is, [they] are more consistent with objective reality. This method is called “democratization and scientification of policy-making” (*juece de minzhuhua yu kexuehua*). Democratic policy making is not personal policy-making. Policy making does not involve making rash decisions, nor does it mean adopting a “wait and see” (*zouyibu kanyibu*) attitude. The democratization and scientification of policy making constitutes the spirit of adhering to the criterion of practice and the practical experiences of the masses. Therefore, adhering to the criterion of truth or the criterion of practice does not mean that the results of all things are determined after the fact. On making a decision, [we] should integrate the wisdom and experiences of the masses and collectives as much as possible. In addition, [we] should also try to determine the various kind of problems we might confront. Such a practice can help avoid or reduce mistakes or at least it can prevent us from deviating too much from the actual reality and the desires of the masses.

Question: If every matter involves everyone trying to get in a word at once, what would happen to the decision-making princi-

ples of the Party organization? Should we stick to the Party's leadership?

Answer: The logic of this argument is absurd. How can you separate or oppose the democratization and scientification of policy making to the Party's principles and leadership? The democratization and scientification of policy making constitutes the Party's policy making, that is, policy making within the Party must also carry out democratization and scientification to a certain degree. There's no need to worry about possibly weakening the Party's principles. Everyone knows that the highest authority that emphasized the Party's principles is Lenin! So let's take a look at Lenin's definition of the [Communist] Party's organizational principles. Lenin stated in an article written in November 1906: "Numerous definitions have been given to the importance and to the concept of the principles of the workers' political party. Consistency of actions, freedom of discussion and criticism—such is our definition. Only this principle is the kind that the democratic political party of the vanguard class should have." Lenin also stated: "Organization refers to consistency of action and consistency of real activities." However, Lenin stated further: "Without the freedom of discussion and criticism, the proletariat would not recognize the consistency of action." Lenin's explanation is clear enough and there's no need for further elaboration!

Question: During the debate over the criterion for verifying truth, there were accusations to the effect that emphasizing the criterion of practice amounts to negating the guiding functions of theory. What's your opinion on this?

Answer: I have responded to this in my article titled "A most fundamental principle of Marxism." Here I would like to elaborate further. The guiding functions of theory for practice cannot be separated from the verification and development of theory through practice. The two are inseparable. Thought, theories, policies, plans, and methods emerge on the basis of practice and rely on practice. This is what is referred to as coming from practice and returning to practice. Returning to practice means using the-

ory to guide practice and, at the same time, theory is verified by practice. The two are closely combined and move in tandem. There's virtually no practical work by humans that is not determined by a certain purpose or objective, intention, ideology, or theory. That is the conscious initiative possessed by human kind. The attempts at survival by other animals (bees constructing their beehive, spiders spinning their webs), irrespective of how magnificent they appear, lack such initiative and lack the content of the guiding functions of ideological theories. Human activities are guided by ideology (some correct and some incorrect) and hence, under no conditions, can we say that theory does not function as a guide to practice. However, that which guides must be verified just as an educator must be educated. This is, first, determined by the nature of theoretical understanding. Theories are neither words from god nor absolute truths established by mankind. At the same time, when theory is produced out of practice and returns to guide practice, it is being verified through practice. The truthfulness of many guiding theories is unsound and is corrected as a result of verification through practice. Many incorrect theories are corrected through practice. New practical experiences provide the new basis of theories and, therefore, to say that practice verifies theory does not mean that theory is degraded. For this is exactly what theory requires. Otherwise, there would be no way for theory to be perfected and developed, and theory itself would lose its vitality and thus loses its capacity to provide guidance.

Question: I remember that there was another question raised at that time: Given the fact that we haven't yet entered the stage of communism and have no experience with such a society, how can we prove that communism is true?

Answer: That was certainly a challenging question. The general response to it elicited different conclusions which related to the issue of the historical stage of our nation's current position. Therefore, this question is still worth raising. The general response emphasized: Communism, both as an ideological and social system, is undoubtedly an objective and scientific truth that

was scientifically proved by Marxist workers on the basis of revealing the developmental pattern of capitalism, its historical fate, and the summary of experiences from workers' movements. It has been proved by the practice of the past one hundred thirty years or so (starting with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*) and it is historically inevitable that the communist system will be realized. This is by all means a correct answer. It is also an unshakable standpoint of ours. However, when people observe the development of the actual movement guided by communist ideologies, especially when people observe our current historical stage, divergent opinions emerge. This is an outstanding theoretical issue and an issue involving reality which we have confronted in the past few years.

According to Marxism, the realization of communism is inevitable. However, neither Marx, Engels, nor Lenin were able to describe the path and the method through which communism would be achieved, nor the number of transitional phases through which society would have to traverse in reaching communism. Nor did they describe the exact features, blueprint, and model of communism. Of course not, for it was impossible. Everything is provided by practice and everything must be verified through practice, including certain statements about communism contained in Marxism. It's just as Lenin stated in 1908: "The criterion of truth, that is the objective truth as demonstrated by the developmental process of all capitalist countries in the past few decades, is contained in the complete social-economic theories of Marx not just in a certain section or in a single statement." The same method should be adopted in viewing Marx's statement regarding the two stages of communist society (socialism as the first stage). Both Marx and Lenin took communism and socialism as synonymous (Lenin made a slight distinction between the two). However, socialist practice in the twentieth century and our practice of socialism are clearly distinguished from communist society (including the first stage) as envisioned by Marx. This is an undeniable objective reality. One school of thought holds that our form of socialism must comply with the features of the first

stage of communism as Marx envisioned it, for that is the “absolute truth” of socialism. Any society that does not meet that criterion, for instance, our current form of socialism, cannot be called a socialist society. This is a sheer, rigid misunderstanding. On May 14, 1981 (under the rubric of a specially invited commentator) I published an article titled “Contemporary social features of our nation” in *Guangming Daily* in which I argued against this viewpoint. On the other hand, there’s another school of thought that holds to the idea that our current form of socialism is exactly the same as the first stage of communism as envisioned by Marx which effectively means that we have already entered communist society. That was also a sheer, rigid misunderstanding. The kind of socialism envisioned by Marx was a theoretical inference based on an analysis of the contradictory movements of the capitalist economy. It was not a fixed model designed for socialism in the future. The kind of socialist society, that is the first stage of communism Marx envisioned, is one that grew out of a highly developed capitalism and which had already achieved a high level of production efficiency that made it possible to make the direct transition to communism. Compared to that [standard], our current socialist society has a long way to go. It is far from “incomplete communism” (the first stage of communism envisioned by Marx) let alone “perfect socialism” (*wanbeide shehuizhuyi*), but it is merely the initial stage of socialism, or rather the initial stage in the spontaneous development of socialism. The various kinds of defects that have occurred in our [socialist] construction and in our system have a lot to do with the fact that we overestimated the historical stage of our socialism and we adopted many aspects from the higher stage. On May 5, 1986 I had an article published in *People’s Daily* titled “On the historical stage of socialist construction” in which I dealt with this issue. As far as I am concerned, it is imperative that this issue be clarified in terms of the standpoint of adhering to reform.

Question: This is pertinent to the issue of adhering and developing Marxism. Some people blatantly believe in adhering first

and developing second. Otherwise, we would “slip into a tendency towards liberalization.” Is that so?

Answer: This statement is, to say the least, a little rigid. On the issue of understanding and on the issue of truth, we must recognize practice as being at the forefront. Adhering refers to adhering in the process of practice, and development refers to the process of development. Adhering separated from practice is nothing but adhering to abstract documents and concepts. Such practice cannot be considered as true Marxism despite its firm belief. Talking about development separate from practice is merely a hypothesis either imagined or lacking in proof (even though it may be a scientific hypothesis). Adhering must be integrated with development; however, such integration can only be achieved on the basis of practice, for there is no integration between adhering and development once they are separated from practice. At present, reform is naturally the most important practice. Hence, adhering and development must achieve integration in the process of reform and must prove effective in the reform.

Question: It is not hard to understand this issue in terms of theory. Could you provide more specific examples?

Answer: The theory of the initial stage of socialism is a concrete example. At present, we haven't reached communism yet, in fact, we are far from it. The socialism we have gained is still in the state of spontaneous development, it is far from being mature, complete, and developed. It hasn't demonstrated any of its advantages. Such an understanding is by all means an outstanding development in theory, and at the same time, it is also adhering. It is adhering in the process of development and adhering is contained in the development. In my opinion, it is a better way of adhering. This theoretical development is acquired through the reform process and on the basis of practical experiences summarized from the great sacrifices in the past. In the past, the idea of an “initial stage” was mentioned, for instance, as early as 1958 reacting to the frustrations over the “Great Leap Forward,” Mao Zedong mentioned the concept that our society was still at the “initial stage of socialism.” However, compared to the theory

presented at the Thirteenth Party Congress, the previous theories lack a conscious and definite notion which views socialism as an extended historical stage. They cannot be taken as evidence for the current reform. In addition, the [old] theories sometimes tended to be mingled with Marx's vision of the initial stage of communism. Therefore, there are major distinctions between the two theories. Of course, the theory of the initial stage of socialism must also be verified through practice in order to be replenished, perfected, and developed. The conclusion is that practice determines the truth and new knowledge is gained through experience. It is crystal clear that it is impossible to develop any new theories of socialism without adhering to and developing truth in practice and by just merely reciting words from books over and over again.

ZHANG YIDE

Adhering to the Criterion of Practice, Regaining an Understanding of Socialism

An Interview with Hu Fuming*

Hu Fuming was born in Wuxi county, Jiangsu Province. In 1958 he graduated from the Journalism Department at Beida and in 1961 received a graduate degree in philosophy from People's University. Later he became an associate dean and associate professor in the Department of Politics and Philosophy. Afterwards, he worked in the Propaganda Department of the Jiangsu provincial Party committee. He's currently a member of the Standing Committee of the Jiangsu Party Committee, and president and professor at the Jiangsu Provincial Party School. He also helped draft the editorial, under the title of special commentator, "Practice is the sole criterion of truth," published on May 11, 1978, in *Enlightenment Daily*.

Question: The tenth anniversary of the debate over the criterion of truth will soon arrive. Would you please discuss just how it was that you became involved in that debate.

Answer: Sure. I'll begin from the smashing of the "Gang of Four" which brought an end to the situation where "ten thousand horses stand mute" [no one dared to speak up, eds.]. At that time,

*Zhang Yide, "Adhering to the practice criterion, gaining a new understanding of socialism—An interview with Hu Fuming" [*Jianchi shijian biao zhun, chongxin renshi shehuizhuyi—fang Hu Fuming*], in Tao Kai, Zhang Yide, and Dai Qing, *Leaving modern superstition behind* [Zouchu xiandai mixin] (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988), pp. 120–6.

everyone held great expectations thinking that incorrect verdicts and the [April 5, 1976] Tiananmen Incident would soon be reversed and that Deng Xiaoping would be restored to the leadership. To us, these were the only rational and logical things to be done. However, the emergence of the “two whatevers” brought about great pressure and everything was shackled.

At that time, higher level educational institutions especially resented the notion of the “two appraisals” (*liangge guji*): Namely, the idea that for seventeen years prior to the Cultural Revolution education was under a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat and it was a dictatorship of the black line (*heixian*); and the notion that the overriding views of the intellectuals was bourgeois and that all intellectuals were bourgeois intellectuals. Those were two ropes binding the intellectuals. At a meeting criticizing the “Gang of Four,” I gave a speech criticizing the “two appraisals.” After the implementation of the “two whatevers,” I was then told by someone: “You were wrong. You opposed Chairman Mao’s instructions.” At another meeting, I made a statement that ever since the “Cultural Revolution” the quality of education [in China] had dramatically declined and that most universities had the appellation of higher education while in reality their proficiency was lower than that of middle schools. I was then later told by someone: “You shouldn’t have said what you did, for it amounted to a negation of the Cultural Revolution and disobeyed Mao Zedong Thought.” And at yet another meeting, I proposed that the only rational thing to do was to reverse the [original] judgments on the Tiananmen and Nanjing Incidents. Just like before, I was once again rebuked: “You are defending counterrevolutionary incidents. [The judgments on them] have been decided by Chairman Mao.”

Question: The bondage of the “two whatevers” was apparently very profound. Please describe how you managed to struggle against them in terms of theory?

Answer: The fourth issue of *Nanjing University Journal* in 1976, published an article by me titled “On the overall dictatorship over the bourgeoisie” in which I criticized Zhang

Chunqiao's article on the same topic for advocating the superiority of the superstructure in terms of theory and as an example of historical subjectivism. I also criticized Zhang's article in that it advocated a fascist political dictatorship and effectively negated people's democracy. At that time, Wang Huide didn't know me. Upon reading the article, he commented to a professor at Nanjing University: "There's someone at your school named Hu Fuming who has written a good article." Later Wang himself had an article published in *People's Daily* with the same theme and was himself later attacked by Wang Dongxing.

In May 1977 at a Theory Discussion Meeting convened by a university in Jiangsu province, I gave a speech in which I stated that the theory of concentrating solely on the production forces (*wei shengchanli lun*) should not be criticized and that criticism of that theory would amount to criticizing historical materialism. Someone then jumped out immediately and attacked me: "You are defending revisionism." That speech of mine, titled "Criticizing the theory of concentrating solely on the production forces amounts to opposing historical materialism," was published in the 1978, first issue of *Nanjing University Journal*. Later, on March 26, *People's Daily* printed a synopsis of the article.

Question: Those were attempts to bring order out of chaos in terms of some theoretical issues. However, what preparations did you make to attack the "two whatevers"?

Answer: Hua Guofeng had mentioned the "two whatevers" at a Central Work Conference in March 1977. I learned about it at a meeting a little later for I was then deputy Party secretary and an associate dean in the Department of Politics at Nanjing University. I immediately thought that the "two whatevers" were actually being used to protect Cultural Revolution practices and to defend personal worship and dictatorship. As long as this was followed, there was no chance for democracy, but only continued class struggle. In my opinion, the criticism of the "two whatevers" was not the core issue. Instead, the central aim of criticizing the "two whatevers" was to negate the Cultural Revolution, reverse [judgment] on the Tiananmen Incident and all incorrect

verdicts and bring order out of chaos in order to launch criticism against Chairman Mao's errors committed in his later years. The aforementioned efforts to criticize the "two whatevers" were to clear the path for reaching this central goal. Hence, in reality, the aim of criticizing the "two whatevers" was to criticize the two chairmen [Mao and Hua, eds.]. It was not hard to envision the risks involved.

Question: Quite a few people saw through that. The key question was to adopt real actions and to write articles to attack the "two whatevers." That, of course, required, first, guts, and, second, an appropriate method.

Answer: Indeed. I thought to myself that to launch a direct attack would not achieve the desired results. So I looked for a breach (*tupokou*)—a topic appropriate for beginning my article. Discussing the issue of seeking truth from facts did not lend itself directly to attacking the issue of the "two whatevers." And, it would be a cliché to criticize Lin Biao's notion of "every sentence [of Chairman Mao's] contains the truth." Therefore, I was confronted with the dilemma of, on the one hand, hitting the "two whatevers" on target without explicitly mentioning the "two whatevers." I once co-authored an article, with Lu Xishu, titled "Marxism as a science" which was published in the 1978, first issue of *Nanjing University Journal*. In that article, I mainly focused on the issue of correcting our attitude towards Marxism, taking Marxism as a science, and treating Marxism as a science instead of as a religious doctrine. However, I felt that this was an inadequate attack which did not solve any of the basic issues. I then summarized the two major defects of the "two whatevers": First, the notion that Mao Zedong's words were the absolute truth and therefore did not need to be verified through practice; and, second, that Mao Zedong's instructions, speeches, memoranda, and written comments on reports were all absolutely correct. Not only were his words taken as the truth which did not require verification, but those words were used as the instrument and criterion of [all] truth. Such a practice violated the basic tenets of Marxist epistemology and the principles that practice is the basis

of understanding and the criterion for verifying the truth. Therefore, I decided to begin my article with the issue of the criterion of truth and became very excited once I had found the right topic because I thought I had really captured the core of the “two whatevers.”

Question: How did you actually go about writing the article?

Answer: That was in June or July 1977. My wife was ill in hospital waiting to have an operation. During the evening when I attended to her it was so hot and the place was full of mosquitoes that I couldn't fall asleep and so I decided to examine all of Marx and Mao Zedong's works for their comments on practice as the criterion of verifying the truth. I did it in the hallway of the hospital and it was from my reading and thinking about the topic that the basic outline of the article was formulated. After my wife was released from hospital, I began to actually write the article. I produced four drafts and in the final version decided on the title “Practice is the criterion for verifying the truth.” I then sent the article to Wang Qianghua first and later it was sent to *Guangming Daily*. As to what happened later, this is fairly well-known and so I don't think it needs repeating.

Question: What would you like to say to your readers ten years later?

Answer: Naturally, I have a lot to say. But first, I would like to point out that the initial decision to write the article was my mine and mine alone. As for later alterations and its publication, that was a collective effort. There were many comrades involved in this with some playing crucial roles in terms of communication. Therefore, it was a collective effort and an organized action. I myself did what I had to do as a Party member and a theoretical worker.

Question: Let's now focus on what's happening today. Would you care to talk about the issue of adhering to the criterion of truth and today's reforms?

Answer: The key here is still emancipating thought. The debate over the criterion of truth provided a strong boost to the campaign for ideological emancipation. This campaign still con-

tinues today and will continue into the future. The emancipation of thought is really a matter of abolishing personal worship and eliminating dogmatism, breaking through the bondage of “leftist” ideology, and dismantling the old socialist style incompatible with China’s realities, the result of which inevitably demands reform, that is, the reform of the old system that hinders the development of production forces. This is certainly the rational and logical thing to do.

Question: Over the past ten years, the campaign to emancipate thought has been gradually deepened. Would you like to comment on this process?

Answer: Basically, this process has gone through three phases: First, bringing order out of chaos in the political realm, abolishing the idea of “taking class struggle as the key link” and the theory of “continuing the revolution under proletarian dictatorship,” and thoroughly negating the Cultural Revolution in order to emancipate ourselves from the erroneous “leftist” ideology, which included, primarily, correcting errors committed by Mao Zedong in his later years. Second, to dismantle the old style socialist construction which had been created by blindly following the Soviet model and some of the practices adopted under the guidance of “leftist” ideology. Third, that further consideration be given to the views of our predecessors and to rectify obsolete opinions or opinions that had not been previously rectified through practice but have now been proved to be incorrect. The entire campaign was gradually deepened by taking practice as the criterion and by following the development of practice.

Question: Then can we say that the result of verifying theoretical opinions through the criterion of practice is always negative?

Answer: Of course not. Some are affirmative and some negative. Whatever is proved to be true by practice must be adhered to and whatever is proved incorrect must be abolished. This is the principle that was established during the debate over the criterion of truth. In following this principle there’s no need to worry about coming to incorrect conclusions on what has already been proved true scientifically.

Question: In your opinion, what's the major issue that the emancipation of thought presently confronts?

Answer: The issue of regaining an understanding of socialism. From the perspective of theory, I don't think scientific socialism should be viewed as a mere component of Marxism, but rather as an overall integral feature of Marxism, especially in the sense of scientific socialism as combined with dialectical materialism and historical materialism.

Question: Engels once stated that with the discovery of the materialist historical viewpoint and the theory of surplus value, socialism was turned from an illusion into a science. His was a viewpoint that was acquired by looking at socialism as an integral whole.

Answer: That's true. However, in later views on socialism, scientific socialism was usually separated out from Marxism as a whole, especially from dialectical materialism and historical materialism. And once scientific socialism was detached from its theoretical base, it lost its scientific character and thus became a partial or total illusion. Hence, it is extremely important to gain an understanding of the scientific features of socialism by viewing scientific socialism as an integral feature of Marxism and by emphasizing the interdependent relation between Marx's dialectical materialism, historical materialism and scientific socialism.

Question: Your view on this issue is very interesting. Can you elaborate further?

Answer: Sure. First, we must get rid of the concept that socialism is unchanging and pay attention to the particular context of socialism. Scientific socialism as a product of a particular era must develop along with the development of that era in order to be compatible with scientific and technological proficiency, new levels of production forces, and special social features. It is certainly a deviation from reality if the era undergoes new developments, but socialist theory remains static. Socialism will lose its scientific features if we rigidly adhere to certain notions of socialism as expressed by our predecessors and take those notions as abstract religious doctrines while ignoring changes of the era.

Question: What do you mean by changes of the era?

Answer: According to Comrade Deng Xiaoping, peace and development are the two major trends in the present world. This is a major transition in that the trends of war and revolution have been changed into that of peace and development. Scientific socialism must also change in accordance with these new trends by changing revolution into construction and the development of the production forces. And for the sake of the development of the production forces, we must reform the old system that hinders these production forces and combine scientific socialism with dialectical materialism and practice. This is what is referred to as the practical features [of socialism]. The process by which socialism has been converted from theory into practice—from practice in a single country to practice in many countries to the practice of reform in socialist countries—has provided a more solid foundation for the development of socialist theory which enables a broader vision and greater depth of understanding, and certainly is a leap from practice to understanding.