CHAPTER TWO

ENEMIES FROM THE PAST

Bureaucracy, Class, and Mao's Continuous Revolution

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION was an extraordinary political crisis that jolted the political foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The spectacle of widespread, violent rebel assaults on China's party and governmental structures, initiated by the head of that apparatus, was baffling to say the least. A common question among many seasoned observers of Chinese politics was simply "Why?" As Roderick MacFarquhar, the leading scholar of the Cultural Revolution, once wrote:

> In the spring of 1966 China seemed a stable, disciplined, and united nation. It was led by a group of men whose comradeship had been forged by the Long March, Japanese aggressions, and civil war. . . . Within months, this image of peace and harmony had been shattered. . . . The Communist party machine was reduced to shambles; its local leaders were paraded through the streets in dunces' hats by youthful Red Guards who drew their inspiration from Mao's electrifying injunction—"To rebel is justified!"
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> None of the results of the cultural revolution could have been foreseen by Mao with precision. But the dangers of the course on which he was embarking must have been evident to him from the start. Why, then, did he, who had done so much to make the Chinese regime what it was in the spring of 1966, decide to tear down and rebuild?[1]

Franz Schurmann, another veteran China scholar, posed the same question: "Why is Mao throwing it all away? After all, six years of careful rebuilding of the economy [after the Great Leap Forward fiasco] and the growing

threat of the Vietnam war had given the Chinese government widespread support from its people within the country and from millions of Chinese abroad." Schurmann then wondered, in the midst of the turmoil in 1968, "whether China was not committing political suicide for some obscure reason."[2]

The obscurity was perhaps more in the eyes of the beholder. Clearly, there was more to the Cultural Revolution than merely a bloody purge or a Byzantine power struggle. Its tragic consequences for numerous ordinary Chinese notwithstanding, the Cultural Revolution was a significant event as an expression—though in painfully distorted fashion—of important problems inherent in its social and historical contexts.

Led by a Communist party with a vast popular base, the revolutionary struggle in twentieth-century China transformed a dilapidated country into a modern state. Suffice it to say that the idea of continuing the revolution emerged when a segment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership realized that taking state power was not the end point of the revolution. Even before the founding of the PRC, Mao was acutely aware of the problems associated with revolutionary transformations after the taking of state power. In a conversation in 1945 between Mao and Huang Yanpei, leader of a left-wing political party who was visiting the Communist base area, Yan'an, Huang asked Mao what would happen if the Red Army succeeded in taking state power, and he expressed concern that the CCP might become degenerate and corrupt, as had previous dynasties founded by peasant rebels. "Dynasties begin with a surge of vigor and then decay and disintegrate," Huang noted. "Has the Communist Party found a way to break this vicious cycle?" "We have found the new way," Mao replied confidently. "We can escape this cycle. This new way is democracy. Only under people's constant watch, and only when everyone takes the responsibility of state affairs into his own hand, will the government not become lax."[3] It is notable that while sympathizers of the revolution were concerned that revolution might be corrupted by power, adversaries of the revolution believed that this would be its inescapable fate. After Madame Chiang Kai-shek heard glowing stories of the Communists' integrity, idealism, and devotion to their cause from a group of journalists returning from Yan'an, she paused for a few minutes and then said: "If what you tell me about them is true, then I can only say they have never known *real power.*"[4]

Accelerating in the late 1950s, Mao's partial but significant divergence from the Soviet model of socialism was exemplified by the theory of continuous revolution.[5] For Mao, the revolution was merely beginning after the conquest of state power. "We began a new Long March in 1949, and

we are still only on the first lap," a noticeably apprehensive Mao remarked on the eve of the Cultural Revolution to André Malraux, the visiting French minister of culture. Mao continued: "Victory is the mother of all illusions. . . . Humanity left to its own devices does not necessarily re-establish capitalism, but it does re-establish inequality. The forces tending towards the creation of a new class are powerful."[6] Mao was convinced that after exploitative class relations based on private ownership were abolished, class conflicts would shift to the terrains of politics, ideology, and culture. The degeneration of socialism therefore would not necessarily occur through the violent overthrow of the socialist state by its former foes, but more likely through the penetration of bourgeois figures and ideas into the revolutionary ranks. The greatest danger would come from a political leadership that turned its back on the socialist road. These new bourgeois elements would set about transforming the class character of state power and eventually create a new exploiting class. This view formed the central doctrinal justification of the Cultural Revolution, which Mao launched in 1966.

This schematic summary leaves a number of crucial points to be clarified. For example, what kind of social and political analysis does such a project entail? How do we situate the theory of continuous revolution in its specific historical context? In seeking to explain the origins of the Cultural Revolution, some scholars have stressed the importance of ideological visions, whereas others have focused on internecine leadership conflicts and, in particular, on how a purportedly sidelined Mao mobilized the Red Guards to reassert undivided power. Although the Cultural Revolution was far from "a coup d'état against the party . . . over which Mao had lost all control" as some have portrayed it,[7] Mao's growing sense of alienation from the party and many of his old comrades was clearly a central factor. During the years leading up to the cataclysm, Mao's concern with political succession was compounded by the perceived betrayal of the revolutionary cause by Nikita Khrushchev after the passing of the founding fathers. It was also exacerbated by his partial withdrawal from routine administrative duties in the wake of the Great Leap Forward as his colleagues cautiously reversed the radical policies that had led to the economic fiasco.[8] The differences over policy lessons to be drawn from the Great Leap Forward increasingly divided the CCP leadership. Surrounding himself with a coterie of lieutenants who owed their loyalty more to the Supreme Leader than to the party, and whose political interests would benefit from the weakening of other leaders, Mao launched a ferocious attack on many of his comrades and the party organizations allegedly under their control by appealing directly to the masses and calling for rebellion.

It is important to note that these interpretations, which focus on power conflicts, clash of personalities, or broader political and ideological disputes, do not necessarily contradict one another. Although the Cultural Revolution had much to do with Mao's suspicion of (or even paranoia about) those around him and with some of his close associates' ambitions to exploit the turmoil to enhance their own political positions, Mao's motive in targeting both his colleagues and the party also reflected his longstanding concerns with broader problems inherent in post-1949 Chinese society: the decline of revolutionary élan, the mutation of a popular revolutionary movement into a socialist bureaucracy, and, in particular, the possible emergence of a new ruling elite that, as Mao saw it, would lead China toward a class-stratified society. By the mid-1960s, Mao had largely lost faith in the methods of top-down mobilization that had been the hallmark of various CCP campaigns to curb bureaucratic growth. He remarked at the height of the Cultural Revolution in early 1967: "In the past we waged struggles in rural areas, in factories, in the cultural field, and we carried out the socialist education movement. But all this failed to solve the problem because we did not find a form or a method to arouse the masses to expose our dark aspects openly, in an all-round way, and from below."[9] The Cultural Revolution, as MacFarquhar succinctly noted, "was rooted in both principled and personal disputes."[10] Doctrinal disputes endowed personal rivalry with new meanings, and leadership conflicts sharpened and further amplified policy disagreements of national political import. Its ideological ambiguities and bizarre Byzantine power struggles notwithstanding, the Maoist project of continuous revolution raised vital questions about Chinese socialism and reflected both a genuine desire for change and the intrigues of a small clique. In the reciprocity and exchange between the ideological and the personal, petty conflicts among the leadership cumulatively built into larger clashes among polarized political factions, identities, and programs, and the process culminated in the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s.

The Cultural Revolution was rhetorically all about class and class struggle, which were enduring motifs throughout the Mao era. Many scholars have argued that Mao's project of continuous revolution, that is, the Cultural Revolution, was an active attempt to tackle the problem of the bureaucratic institutionalization of the Chinese Revolution and above all to forestall the rise of a new socialist ruling elite. This problem is of great importance: do socialist bureaucrats constitute a class, and if so, what is to be done? The answer, insofar as late Maoism was concerned, seemed evident. Indeed, was it not Mao himself who argued that a new privileged class was arising at the very heart of the Communist Party? And were not the targets

of the Cultural Revolution defined as the party power holders, who essentially constituted a bureaucratic class? This familiar scholarly interpretation of late Maoism and the Cultural Revolution, I will argue, is flawed in two crucial respects. First, it overlooks the inherent incoherences and ambiguities of the late Maoist ideology of class; and second, it fails to fully comprehend the political and ideological consequences of such ambiguities and fragmentariness as amplified by the specific historical circumstances in which they were pragmatically received and enacted. The point here is that an ideology does not form a static, self-contained system, and the Cultural Revolution did not occur in a social or historical vacuum. Instead, its course was crucially mediated by existing social practices, institutional arrangements, and categories of political understanding.

In this chapter, I examine the discursive and institutional aspects of class in post-1949 China as a way of contextualizing the subsequent discussions. The chapter proceeds on three interrelated fronts. First, I give an account of the emergent social and political antagonisms in Mao's China, particularly with respect to the rise of a bureaucratic state apparatus. Second, I offer a brief discussion of the Maoist ideology of class, with its manifold incoherences and contradictions. Finally, I examine the political and ideological consequences of such ambiguities in their specific historical context through focusing on the institutional codification of class in post-1949 China. Artificially perpetuating a social field of antagonisms that had largely ceased to exist by the 1960s, the discourse of the class-status system was superimposed on an inchoate language of class critical of bureaucratic inequalities, a language that became mostly assimilated into the existing class discourse based on a rigid classification of classes. This entanglement of disparate forms of class analysis and practice had profound consequences for the Cultural Revolution as discourses about old and new class adversaries—each with distinct structures of antagonism and developmental dynamics—became fused or confused. As the rest of this book will show, the political and theoretical initiatives that emerged from the mass movements proposed various ways out of this impasse. The party-state's containment and repression of these subversive currents ultimately resulted in the suppression of innovative class discourses.

When Revolutionaries Became Rulers

The apprehensions of Mao and other CCP leaders about the future of revolution reflect an intractable problem in the history of modern socialism and revolutions. The early socialist thinkers generally had much less to

say about the political organization of the future society than about its economic structure. It was usually expected that after defeating the old elites and taking state power, the working class, led by a vanguard party, would become the new ruling class. Except for a small minority, socialist revolutionaries were reluctant to respond to the challenge posed by the thorny problem of the relation between the class and its vanguard because the abolition of private ownership seemed to have eliminated the classical Marxian criterion for class distinctions. Long before such early twentieth-century socialist thinkers as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, Anton Pannekoek, and Paul Mattick became critical of the tendencies of authoritarian socialism in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, Michael Bakunin warned of the dangers of the "official democracy and red bureaucracy" that would prove to be "the most vile and terrible lie our century has created."[11] Instead of seeing the state as deriving from working-class power and as an instrument of revolution, the skeptics believed that the state actually has its own structural logic of domination and self-perpetuation that may be largely independent of existing class interests, and that even under socialism, state forms would generate a whole series of new class antagonisms. Bakunin was perhaps the first to challenge the prevalent Marxist faith in the centralized revolutionary party and strong state as the vehicle for realizing socialist goals. Warning that socialists in power might simply replace the capitalists they had overthrown and thereby leave the position of popular classes they claimed to represent essentially unchanged, Bakunin made a chilling prophecy—over half a century before the birth of Stalinism—of the rise of a new ruling elite in what he condemned as the "pseudo-popular state" characterized by the "government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority."[12]

Although Mao's ideas were often contradictory or fragmented, he clearly saw the dilemma suggested by earlier socialist thinkers: that party and state power can be an important revolutionary instrument, but it may also hamper revolutionary objectives. In apparent defiance of the deeply pessimistic "iron law of oligarchy" theorized by Robert Michels, the German sociologist and student of Max Weber who argued that any large-scale political organization (in particular, revolutionary parties committed to radical goals) inherently concentrates power in a ruling oligarchy, Mao's views challenged the prevalent wisdom that as revolutionary movements succeed, they inescapably routinize, deradicalize, and bureaucratize.[13] Often expressed in abstruse ideological language, Mao's anxiety over the degeneration of the country's new ruling elite reflected a deep concern about an enduring problem that had plagued the CCP leadership ever since the founding of the People's

Republic of China, the metamorphosis of a party-led popular revolutionary movement into an entrenched state and party bureaucracy.

The establishment of the PRC in 1949 marked China's emergence as a unified, modern nation-state. In the euphoric moment of victory, the CCP faced a daunting array of new challenges, such as meeting the basic welfare needs of China's impoverished population, strengthening the country's position in the interstate system through accelerated economic accumulation, and bringing about radical social transformations in accordance with its stated socialist objectives. The prolonged war experiences deeply shaped social and political relations in the PRC. From the start, Chinese Communist rule took a harsh and authoritarian form that involved strengthening the one-party system, increasing political repression, and tightening control of information. A highly repressive garrison state was created in which institutions of the party, the military, and the state were closely intertwined. Because of the CCP's successful seizure of state power by military means, the party was really a rebel army that transformed itself into a state, and military-style bureaucracies and militaristic concepts and practices played prominent roles in the country's everyday social and political life.[14] During the CCP's early years in power, Soviet-style organizations and techniques provided the country's new rulers with ready-made models, albeit with Chinese characteristics. Its radical revolutionary rhetoric notwithstanding, the new regime also embraced many of the practices and institutions that its predecessor had left behind or failed to implement fully.[15] For the CCP, this militarized and disciplinarian model was well suited to the tasks of leading a revolutionary civil war, but it was not particularly conducive to constructing an open, democratic politics after the old regime had been destroyed. Under such circumstances, the challenges of regime consolidation, economic development, and radical social changes rationalized the creation of a highly centralized bureaucracy. Within less than a decade, China's transition to socialism witnessed the metamorphosis of a victorious revolutionary party into a colossal bureaucratic state apparatus. By mobilizing the popular classes into the political process, the Communist-led revolution destroyed the old political and economic elites. However, the same historical process also gave rise to a much larger and more powerful bureaucracy than that of the prerevolutionary regime, one that joined distinct functions of revolutionary transformation, popular empowerment and social leveling, and highly centralized control in a single political formation.

The new party-state was staffed by a gigantic cadre corps. Ezra Vogel has discussed the transformation of party cadres "from revolutionaries to bureaucrats." When the CCP took over the government, the role of cadres

"began to undertake a fundamental change. With the growth and regularisation of a stable civilian organization to deal with the more complex tasks of reconstruction and development, cadres gradually left the fields for the offices. . . . Revolutionaries who had been provoking disorder became functionaries preserving order. Publicists who had been criticising authorities took on the responsibility of defending them. . . . The cadre, in short, was well on his way to becoming a bureaucrat."[16] With the expanded role of the party-state, the size of the cadre corps increased immensely. The Kuomintang (KMT) regime employed 2,000,000 state functionaries in 1948. The new Communist state began with 720,000 in 1949 but quadrupled to 3,310,000 in the first three years. Within less than a decade, from 1949 to 1957, the cadre corps increased tenfold both in absolute number and in percentage of the population—to 8.09 million and from 0.13 to 1.2 percent of the population.[17] This occurred on the eve of the Hundred Flowers movement, when criticisms of bureaucracy and the bureaucrats became the focal point of political contention. The total number of party and state functionaries grew steadily until it reached 11.6 million at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (see Figure 1).[18] The party and state bureaucracy was clearly the top growth sector. In Shanghai, for example, where total employment between 1949 and 1957 grew by only 1.2 percent and the number of factory workers grew by 5.8 percent per year, government staff increased at the much higher annual rate of 16 percent. From another perspective, by 1955, government cadres were eating up nearly 10 percent of the national budget, almost twice the 5 percent ceiling the national leadership had originally planned; and by the Cultural Revolution decade this figure had risen to 30 percent.[19] Arguably the most radical challenge to the bureaucracy in the history of the PRC, the Cultural Revolution led to a reduction of the bureaucracy and decreased the number of cadres to 9.2 million in 1969. This bureaucratic downsizing, however, was short lived. What is intriguing—and ironic—is that the reemergence of the party-state from the onslaught of the Cultural Revolution resulted in the greatest and fastest expansion of Chinese officialdom, which nearly doubled from 9 million in 1969 to 17 million in 1973.

The new socialist state built elaborate hierarchies, its official ideology of equality notwithstanding. The sprawling bureaucracy was organized in accordance with a complex system of ranks and statuses. Although bureaucratic privileges were nothing new in the history of the CCP, during the earlier revolutionary decades their manifestations were far more subdued.[20] During the early years of the PRC, there were no formal systems of cadre ranking and statuses except differential job titles, and income distribution was regulated by what had been known as the "free supply system" inher-

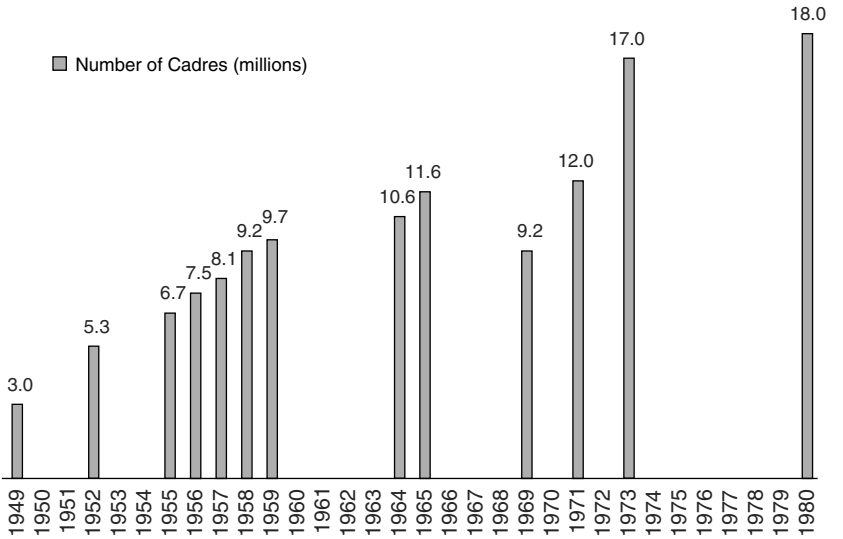

Figure 1. Numbers of cadres, 1949–1980 (in millions). Based on the data from Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 208–209.

ited from the guerrilla-war era, according to which the state provided housing, food, and everyday necessities to party workers.[21] In the mid-1950s, however, a comprehensive system of cadre ranking came into existence, in which bureaucratically based privileges became formalized and generalized (see Table 1). For all state and party personnel, ranks were assigned from 1 to 30, with salaries varying from 560 yuan for grade 1 (state chairman and vice chairmen) to 18 yuan for the bottom grade of "miscellaneous service staff" *(qinza renyuan)*. Similar to those in state and party administration, cadres in courts and procurates were ranked into twenty-six classes. What was ironic about this system was that the wide income gap among different grades (the salary of the top grade was more than thirty times that of the bottom one) was markedly higher than the wage differential in the KMT system, in which the salary of the top grade was only fifteen times that of the bottom.[22]

The new system regulated the distribution of cadres' special privileges in meticulous detail. The prerogatives of each grade were precisely defined. An individual's standing in this elaborate hierarchy determined not only his or her salary but also the size of housing; whether one traveled by official car; whether one might be entitled to the services of a chef, domestic servants, or personal nurses; access to special medical facilities; schools one's children might attend; and access to foreign films and to books with

Table 1 Rank and monthly salary scale of party and government workers, 1955

Rank	Salary (yuan)	Position					
1	560	Chairman and vice chairmen	Prime minister, vice prime ministers, committee heads, and deputy committee heads				
2	500						
3	440						
4	380			Secretary general, committee members, directors and deputy directors of committees, ministers and deputy ministers			
5	340	Governors and deputy governors of provinces, mayors and deputy mayors					
6	300				Directors and deputy directors of offices	Directors and deputy directors of the State Council and secretarial department, directors and deputy directors, presidents and deputy presidents, heads and deputy heads of societies in bureaus directly under CCP	
7	260						
8	230		Directors and deputy directors, heads and deputy heads of administrative offices				Directors and deputy directors, commanding officers of all ministries and committees
9	200	Department heads and deputy heads, heads and deputy heads of groups of National People's Congress, department heads and deputy					

10	170	heads of all bureaus, offices, societies under the State Council		Assistant directors and deputy assistant directors, mayors and deputy mayors, administrative commissioners		
11	154		County heads and deputy heads		Section chiefs of bureaus, ministries, committees	
12	138					
13	133					
14	106					
15	96					Chiefs and deputy chiefs of all departments
16	86		District heads and deputy district heads			
17	77					
18	68			Section members		
19	62					
20	56					
21	50					
22	45				Office workers	
23	40					
24	35					
25	30					Miscellaneous service staff
26	26					
27	24					
28	22					
29	20					
30	18					

Source: Modified from Yang Kuisong, "Cong gongjizhi dao zhiwu dengji gongzizhi: Xinzhongguo jianguo qianhou dangzheng renyuan shouru fenpei zhidu de yanbian" [From free supply system to rank-differentiated wage hierarchy: Changes in the income distribution system for party and government officials before and after the founding of the PRC], *Lishi yanjiu* [Historical research], no. 4 (2007): 128.

restricted circulation. Amenities such as telephones and bathtubs were also dictated in accordance with one's official rank: only department chiefs and agency heads or higher could enjoy a phone and a bathtub at home, while others had to use public telephones and neighborhood bathhouses.[23] An example of this tiered system was a special regulation issued in Shanghai in 1956 that classified cadres' housing prerogatives into a dozen categories, each according to the exact rank of the incumbent. It stipulated that the highest rank, "Grade A of Special Rank" *(te jia ji),* might enjoy "a fine residence of 200 square meters and with a large garden"; the rank "Grade B of Special Rank" *(te yi ji)* might have "a fine residence of 190–195 square meters and with a large garden." Below these highest special ranks, the following all had their own respective entitlements:[24]

- Rank 1, "a fine residence of 180–185 square meters and with a large garden"
- Rank 2, "a fine private, modern-style apartment of 170–175 square meters"
- Rank 3, "a first-class apartment of 160–165 square meters"
- Rank 4, "an ordinary semiprivate apartment"
- Rank 5, "a modern-style apartment of 120–135 square meters"
- Rank 6, "an ordinary apartment of 100–115 square meters and with bathroom"
- Rank 7, "a traditional-style apartment of 80–95 square meters and with no bathroom"
- Ranks 8 and 9, "simple board-assembled houses"

Despite numerous divisions by official rank, social background, administrative specialty, and political faction, China's party and state elite were bound together in a centralized hierarchical organization set apart from the general populace. The development of bureaucratic authority and privileges was accompanied by the rise of a status-conscious political culture, particularly among school-age children of the new political elite. For example, at Beijing's August 1 School, a school exclusively for children of high-ranking party officials and People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers, "students often compared whose father was higher in rank, and whose father's car was nicer. Many believed that those students whose fathers were higher in official rank should be obeyed."[25] A Chinese scholar recalled his childhood experience in the status-sensitive milieu in Beijing: "If you lived in the governmental or military compound, or if you went to a school in which many students were children of cadres, you could sense status hierarchy everywhere. Even when we were very young, we knew exactly the rank of each one's dad, size of the house that a particular rank

could occupy, the kind of car he could use, at which rank a cadre was entitled to 'special-supply goods,' and so on. . . . Students from parents of different ranks normally did not mingle and were often divided into different social circles." During the Cultural Revolution, according to the same scholar, "few people explicitly denounced this hierarchical system. However, many of those 'revolutionary actions' against bureaucratism in fact expressed people's dissatisfactions with bureaucratic statuses and privileges."[26] Ge Yang, a veteran party member and journalist who was purged as a rightist in 1957, observed the irony of the growing social and political enclosure of the new party elite: "At that time, many Communist leaders moved into former royal quarters within the old imperial city. Before, they had lived among the ordinary peasants, and it was often said, 'Fish cannot live out of water.' But after the Revolution, if a peasant went into the city to look up a leader, he wouldn't be able to find him—the water could no longer find the fish! The fish were now inside the Imperial Palace."[27]

For most Chinese, the state and its cadredom were a central and ubiquitous presence in everyday life. The party and state bureaucrats as a collective body exercised authority over productive assets, economic processes, and sociopolitical life. In what often has been called China's "work-unit socialism," a vast system of work units *(danwei)* populated the country's social landscape. Labor was effectively owned by the work unit, which provided lifelong employment and extensive socioeconomic welfare—a significant feature of socialism and a historic right won through the Chinese Revolution. As the key pillar of the state's paternalist labor regime, *danwei* also operated as the institution of discipline and sociopolitical control. Although the permanence of employment often engendered considerable political leverage for the workers vis-à-vis an enterprise's cadres (because workers could not simply be terminated), the immobility of labor also left them dependent, both politically and socioeconomically, on the work units and their cadres.[28] Cadres enjoyed a great deal of latitude in making decisions pertaining to rewards and sanctions, and challenges to them were often viewed as challenges to the party as a whole. Despite the party's "mass-line" policy, the absence of effective popular oversight produced many familiar pathologies characteristic of China's state-socialist regime.

The CCP leadership had long been aware of the unwholesome problems associated with the process of socialist state formation. The consolidation and expansion of party and state bureaucracies, as Deng Xiaoping—then the CCP's general secretary—pointed out in several reports in the mid-1950s, had created numerous problems, such as bureaucratism, authoritarianism, commandism, and conceit and complacency.[29] Among the manifold antagonisms newly emerging in socialist China, Mao was particularly concerned

with the bureaucratization of the party and its cadres. Clearly, one of Mao's most important reasons for unleashing attacks on the bureaucracy during the Cultural Revolution was the corruption and abuses of power he felt it produced. The fact that part of China's leadership was acutely concerned with such problems alerts us to the conceptual pitfall of treating the state or the ruling party as a monolithic body. It is suggestive of the contradictory character of the Chinese state—and perhaps the state in general—as an arena wherein social groups and their agents contend with one another, and the very nature and boundaries of what is understood as the political field are in dispute: its practices, agenda, and participants. Thus in the Chinese case, as Richard Kraus noted, "Maoists were also to wage cultural revolution from within the state, as these renegade bureaucrats appealed to non-cadre classes in an effort to depress the evolution of bureaucratic consciousness of their fellow officials."[30]

The party's efforts to curb growing bureaucratism and cadre abuses of power continued throughout the Mao era.[31] One of the pivotal moments occurred in 1957 when Chinese leaders became increasingly impatient with the established system's inability to deal with its own problems. Their concerns did not emerge in isolation but were related to important developments in the international arena. The Soviet de-Stalinization of 1956 raised grave questions about the Soviet-style socialist system that China was emulating; and the uprisings in Eastern Europe made the Chinese leadership apprehensive about the crisis that its regime could face. Mao's concern was clearly reflected in his disapproving remarks about the Stalinist style of government, and he cited Hungary as a lesson: "You forbid people to strike, to petition or to make unfavorable comments, you simply resort to repression in every case, until one day you become a Rakosi."[32] The leadership's anxiety was indicated by the new party constitution adopted in 1956, which called for "maximal effort in every party organization . . . to combat any bureaucratic phenomena that estrange the party from the masses."[33] In a speech delivered in November 1956, an evidently frustrated Mao made the extraordinary suggestion that drastic measures—ones reminiscent of the "great democracy" *(da minzhu)* or essentially uninhibited mass politics associated with the Cultural Revolution a decade later—might be necessary if the CCP was to "learn a lesson:"

> If great democracy is now to be practiced again, I am for it. You are afraid of the masses taking to the streets, I am not, not even if hundreds of thousands should do so. . . . If some people grow tired of life and so become bureaucratic, if, when meeting the masses, they have not a single kind word for them but only take them to task, and if they don't bother to solve any of the problems the masses may have, they are destined to be overthrown. Now this

> danger does exist. If you alienate yourself from the masses and fail to solve their problems, the peasants will wield their carrying-poles, the workers will demonstrate in the streets and the students will create disturbances. Whenever such things happen, they must in the first place be taken as good things, and that is how I look at the matter.
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> . . . Now there are people who seem to think that, as state power has been won, they can sleep soundly without any worry and play the tyrant at will. The masses will oppose such persons, throw stones at them and strike at them with their hoes, which will, I think, serve them right and will please me immensely. Moreover, sometimes to fight is the only way to solve a problem. The Communist Party needs to learn a lesson. Whenever students and workers take to the streets, you comrades should regard it as a good thing. . . . The workers should be allowed to go on strike and the masses to hold demonstrations. Processions and demonstrations are provided for in our Constitution. In the future when the Constitution is revised, I suggest that the freedom to strike be added, so that the workers shall be allowed to go on strike. . . . The masses will have good reason to remove from office whoever practices bureaucracy. . . . I say it is fine to remove such fellows, and they ought to be removed.[34]

In a speech five months later, Mao reiterated that people "stirring up disturbances" *(nao shi)* should not be feared, and that labor strikes, student boycotts of classes, petitions, and protest rallies should all be considered "good things" useful for the "readjustment of the social order." Only Ah Q (the idiotic and self-deluding protagonist in Lu Xun's literary masterpiece *The True Story of Ah Q*), said Mao, would be afraid of popular criticism.[35]

In his speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," delivered a few months later, Mao stated that the completion of China's socialist transformation would not lead to the disappearance of social contradictions. For Mao, contradictions were of two kinds—antagonistic and nonantagonistic. "Contradictions among the people" were nonantagonistic, whereas those between the enemy and the people developed on the basis of fundamentally antagonistic interests. Among the former, Mao placed special emphasis on the contradictions between "government and the people," or between "leaders and the led," a crucial assertion that, according to MacFarquhar, appeared "for the first time in Marxist-Leninist theorizing."[36] With a keen sense of the central role and collective identity of bureaucrats, Mao then ominously warned that these contradictions could metamorphose into antagonistic ones—namely, into confrontation between the people and their enemy—unless they were properly handled and resolved.[37] These concerns culminated in the Hundred Flowers movement, launched on Mao's personal initiative. "Only once has a Communist ruler invited his subjects to criticise his regime," wrote MacFarquhar; "this was in 1957 when Mao Tse-tung, to use his own phrase, called for a hundred flowers to bloom."[38]

Contrary to the view held by many leaders that the campaign should be limited to intraparty ideological education and administrative discipline, Mao believed that it would be necessary to mobilize the CCP's populist tradition by "opening up widely" *(fang)* to all those keen on helping the party be more responsive to mass demands.[39]

The resulting movement in the late spring of 1957 was conducted in the form of heated debates and discussions. The invitation to nonparty critics signaled that the party did not necessarily monopolize correct political ideas and thus might be challenged both from below and from without. The critics exposed a wide range of problems in Chinese society, such as cadre privileges and political inequality, overreliance on the Soviet model, ideological orthodoxy, and growing urban-rural inequality. Not surprisingly, a major focus of criticism was bureaucratic abuses and lack of democracy. Many accused the party of having become dogmatic, authoritarian, and oppressive. Once unleashed, however, some critics went beyond the boundary of political discussions and demanded more than the party (and Mao) was willing to tolerate. In one instance, Liu Binyan, a young journalist and party member, was reported as saying that high-ranking cadres had become a "privileged class" *(tequan jieji)*.[40] In another case, a graduate student named Zhou Dajue, later denounced as an "extreme rightist," wrote an essay titled "On the Development of Classes." Descending from a poor peasant family, Zhou claimed that he had dreamed everyday that there would be a day when he would "enjoy democracy and freedom." "But the experience of the past seven years has proved that it is not so pretty. . . . Following the destruction of the old classes, a new class has emerged, which is different from the old ones, but has characteristics of its own. . . . The party, government, and army people represent a small percentage of the people, but they collectively own the means of production and call it 'common ownership by the people.' "[41] And Lin Xiling, a twenty-two-year-old female journalism student and former PLA soldier, made a rousing speech at Beijing University in late May 1957, arguing that "genuine socialism should be democratic, but the society we have here is undemocratic. I consider this . . . to be an aberrant form of socialism." "All ruling classes in history," Lin contended, "have one thing in common—their democracy is limited. The democracy of the Communist Party also has its own limits. [The Communists] were bonded with the people during the revolutionary storm. But after the victory of the revolution, they ascended to the ruling position . . . and suppress the people and adopt policies to deceive the people."[42]

Low-level party workers voiced some of the harshest criticisms. In an essay titled "Two Kinds of Wages," a staff member of the CCP Central Committee named Wang criticized the privileges enjoyed by senior party offi-

cials, pointing out that in addition to wage on paper *(mingyi gongzi)* they also enjoyed various forms of real wage *(shiji gongzi)* or perks, such as private, villa-like residences, domestic servants and private chefs, private cars, and so on. These extrawage forms of remuneration, Wang noted, "add up to two or three times one's wage." "Wages are divided into numerous grades, and so are the prerogatives."[43] In another case, a Communist Youth League organizer scathingly criticized the Leninist party's role in the political life of the country:

> [The party] boasts that it is always "great, glorious, and infallible" and places itself above the country and the people, as if "the party equals the country, and the country equals the party."
>
> During these years, there has been no genuine socialist democracy, not even sham democracy of the capitalist countries. The Constitution is an empty piece of paper only, which the Party can simply disregard.
>
> The party is like the imperial overlord [*taishanghuang*]. It is almighty and sacrosanct, with one hand holding the bible of Marxism-Leninism, and the other wielding the sword of state power. Anyone who has the courage to dissent would be either accused of being "anti-Marxist" or jailed for having committed some fictitious crime.
>
> The election is in reality appointment from above. . . . Who is really in charge of state affairs? According to the Constitution it should be the People's Congress, but in actual fact the Congress is merely the useless Buddha statue made from mud. The party controls all the power.[44]

The criticism movement of 1957, however, was halted abruptly. Only a few weeks into the movement, Mao and the CCP leadership became alarmed that criticisms might be going too far. On June 8, the *People's Daily* warned that "a small number of rightists are challenging the leadership position of the Communist Party and the working class." In an internal directive issued on the same day, Mao declared, "This is a major battle; if we don't win this, we won't succeed in building socialism, and there even will be the risk of a 'Hungarian Incident' emerging [in China]."[45] Within days, the short-lived criticism drive was reversed. In the Anti-Rightist Campaign that followed, the infallible and unified leadership of the party was vigorously reasserted, and hundreds of thousands were denounced as "bourgeois rightists."[46] Although the campaign initially attacked those who had voiced dissent during the Hundred Flowers period, it soon expanded to target offenses apparently unrelated to "antiparty" and "antisocialist" speeches.[47]

Why did Mao break his solemn pledge not to retaliate? One popular explanation is that Mao was attempting to trap unsuspecting critics so that enemies could be exposed. A less Machiavellian and more convincing explanation is that Mao's enthusiasm for inviting criticism from below was not

shared by other party leaders, and that when the full extent of popular dissatisfactions became known, Mao was pressured to "disavow his original intention and to concur in the anti-rightist campaign."[48] The repression that ended the movement, so to speak, might not have been preplanned but rather might have been a hastily improvised emergent measure to cut short an unforeseen development. Mao's role in this episode was certainly contradictory. Facing growing popular criticisms, Mao vacillated and eventually quashed the very movement he had called into being. The 1957 episode witnessed the beginning of Mao's attempt to mobilize nonparty forces in a movement significantly free of bureaucratic control, an attempt that, in the words of Lowell Dittmer, "was thwarted but never given up."[49] A similar development was to be repeated during the Cultural Revolution a decade later, when the antibureaucratic themes of 1956–1957 would explode into a cataclysmic mass movement, again initiated by Mao.

Socialist Bureaucracy and Ruling-Class Formation

Among the multitude of issues at stake in the Cultural Revolution, none had more momentous implications than the problems of class and class analysis. A number of China scholars have argued that a specifically Chinese version of an antibureaucratic or what may be called a "new-class" critique of socialism was developed in late Maoism and practiced during the Cultural Revolution. Richard Kraus, for instance, has pointed out that from the late 1950s Mao increasingly traced the roots of social conflict to the new socialist state: "In this view, socialist classes were based ultimately upon power relationships in a highly bureaucratized society."[50] Indeed, Mao appears to be one of the few political minds who had developed a class analysis of socialist bureaucracy. The Cultural Revolution may be seen as a bold experiment to forestall the bureaucratization that had plagued socialist revolutions, and Mao's view has been compared to that of Milovan Djilas, the Yugoslav critic best known for his critique of the Communist elite as a new ruling class, or that of Leon Trotsky, who criticized the Stalinist elite as a bureaucratic stratum.[51] Although criticism of the degeneration of the revolutionary party is by no means a new theme in Marxist theory, Mao, as Kraus put it, "was perhaps the first communist leader in power" to be deeply concerned with such issues. "Trotsky and Djilas . . . developed their critiques only after they had been removed from power."[52] Maurice Meisner argued very energetically for this view and deserves to be quoted at length:

> The ideology of the Cultural Revolution set forth the thesis that China's post-revolutionary order had created a new bureaucratic ruling class, a functional "bourgeoisie" that was exploiting the masses of workers and peasants by virtue of its political power. . . . [Mao] warned that the new socialist society was producing "new bourgeois elements" and a new bureaucratic class. He attributed the origins of this new "bourgeoisie" to the inequalities generated by Communist China's political system, a Stalinist hierarchy of bureaucratic ranks and status.
>
> In conceiving the Cultural Revolution, Mao had arrived at a conclusion that no other Communist in power had been willing to entertain. . . . Mao came to believe that a socialist society, if left to its own devices, would generate a new exploiting class. The new ruling class would be fashioned not from the remnants of the old bourgeoisie that had been destroyed by the revolution but rather from the bureaucrats of the Communist present. . . . Mao sometimes bluntly referred to them as "the bureaucratic class," whose members, he charged, were becoming "bourgeois elements sucking the blood of the workers."[53]

For Meisner, what is crucial is not Mao's view that socialism could produce a new ruling class, which was neither unique nor theoretically developed, but rather the fact that it was produced by the leader of a Communist state who put his ideas into concrete practice. "It had not happened before," wrote Meisner, "and it is not likely to happen again."[54]

China scholars with diverse political views have highlighted the populist and antibureaucratic thrust of late Maoism. John King Fairbank, for example, wondered why Mao in launching the Cultural Revolution "should practically destroy the party he had built up and so endanger the whole revolution." Mao, he wrote, "became concerned about the seemingly inevitable buildup of the institutions of the central government and its many levels of officials and cadres. . . . Given the modern necessity for expert management, and the irrepressible tendency toward personal privilege and corruption among China's new ruling class, it would be hard to prove him wrong."[55] Similarly, Hong Yung Lee argued that the Cultural Revolution concerned "how to deal with the bureaucratization of the Party" and "how to cope with the widening gap between the elite and the masses in a socialist China."[56] For Harry Harding, the Cultural Revolution was "the most radical period in the history of the People's Republic . . . [and] involved proposals for the destruction of bureaucracy and its replacement with loosely structured, highly participatory administrative organizations patterned after the Paris Commune."[57] According to Stuart Schram, in launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao was bent on "nothing less than smashing the entire party organization as it now exists, and building it up again from the bottom." Mao's aim was "to create a party organization of

a new type, with built-in safeguards against 'bureaucracy.'"[58] Similarly, Roderick MacFarquhar contended that the Polish and Hungarian uprisings of 1956 convinced Mao that "the underlying issue was the relationship of party and people."[59] Once Mao realized that the Communist Party in power was a fundamental cause of bureaucratic degeneration, MacFarquhar noted, he would be led to the perfectly logical but explosive conclusion that the very political system in which the party held its power must be radically transformed. "In 1957 Mao did not go as far as that," MacFarquhar wrote, "but nine years later Mao was to strike at the position of the party in power."[60]

This prevalent view that an antibureaucratic or new-class critique of socialism formed the distinctive hallmark of late Maoism, I argue, at least needs to be qualified by several caveats. First, schematically, Mao's notion of the "new bourgeoisie" *(xinsheng zichan jieji)* was fraught with ambiguities and incoherence. Graham Young, for example, has suggested that the doctrine of continuous revolution and its underlying theory of class formation in fact contained several interconnected but markedly different interpretations. They ranged from analyses that stressed the remnant influence of prerevolutionary elites to views that highlighted newly emerging socioeconomic inequalities in the socialist society and finally to a focus on the possible emergence of a new bureaucratic class.[61] Each of these interpretations differed significantly in its understanding of the class dynamics of Chinese socialism, the loci of class antagonisms, and the goals of the continuous revolution. Enacted during the Cultural Revolution, such recurrent categorical ambiguities would be subject to improvisational play by way of reinterpretation and recombination. Young therefore cautioned against the tendency to read a single, unified meaning into the Maoist ideology of class, arguing that it would be necessary to resist the temptation to aggregate different interpretive strands "into a more coherent whole."[62]

Second, its attention to bureaucratized political power notwithstanding, the Maoist theory of class focused largely on the distributional correlates or manifestations of power—such as bureaucratic privileges and the wage-grade system—rather than on the political structure and institutions that gave rise to such power. Martin Whyte has made this point clear: "The distinctiveness of Chinese egalitarianism is to be found not so much in its reduction or elimination of differences in income, power and educational skills, although some of this has occurred, but in its attempt to mute the consequences, in terms of matters like life styles, consumption patterns and interpersonal deference, of the inequalities that do exist."[63] For example, one of Mao's persistent preoccupations in his last years, the critique of "bourgeois right," stressed the necessity of actively reducing all manifestations of socio-

economic inequality resulting from differentials in income and status in socialist society.[64]

Third, the notion of "new bourgeois elements" mostly referred to ideologically deviant individuals or factions within the Chinese Communist Party. After the late 1950s, Mao increasingly turned to political attitude or conduct as a criterion for defining social class. The key concept here was the inherently vague and unstable notion of the "line" or "road" *(luxian),* which referred to the leadership's ideological orientation. Despite his bleak view that Thermidorian or counterrevolutionary forces exist in the revolutionary ranks, Mao in fact had a rather sanguine estimate regarding the political efficacy of such deviant tendencies. Except for a minority of diehard "capitalist roaders," the majority of cadres, according to this view, could be ideologically rehabilitated. In the Sixteen Points, issued by the CCP Central Committee in August 1966 arguably as the program of the Cultural Revolution, important distinctions were made among four types of cadres: (1) good, (2) relatively good, (3) those who had made serious mistakes, and (4) a small number of antiparty rightists. "In ordinary situations," it states, "the first two categories (good and relatively good) are the great majority."[65]

Fourth, the Maoist notion of the "new bourgeois elements" was considerably broader and more heterogeneous than what has commonly been understood by those who interpret late Maoism as a form of new-class theory. In addition to the "privileged stratum" (cadres and their offspring who inherited the privileges), this category also included a motley collection of other politically suspicious elements, such as "speculators," "embezzlers," "bourgeois academic authorities," "vested interest groups," and various "black categories," that is, the remnants of the prerevolutionary elites. The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 with Mao mobilizing the populace to attack the "bourgeois intellectuals" and the so-called "freaks and demons." The movement quickly expanded to target the "capitalist roaders" or "new bourgeois elements" in the Communist Party, who were understood as intimately linked—either directly or through ideological ties—with the remnants of the old elites overthrown by the Communist Revolution.[66] Mao stressed the political and ideological influences of the remnants of the old elites when he raised the issue of class struggle for the first time in 1962: "Our revolution is perhaps the most thorough and complete. Yet in some places a significant number of bad people or counterrevolutionary elements have wormed into [*hunru*] the government or leadership. . . . Among our party members there are many petit bourgeoisie, some rich peasants and their descendants, some intellectuals, and some bad people—they have not yet been remolded and are not at all Communists. These

people are Communist Party members only in appearance; but they are actually Guomindang."[67] In this view, the new and old class enemies became interchangeable, and the deviant political tendencies were viewed as originating from without—from the prerevolutionary elites who "wormed into" the Communist Party. The nomination of the "capitalist roaders in the party" as the principal target of the Cultural Revolution reflected precisely this logic and would have a fateful impact on the dynamics of the Cultural Revolution.

Last, although Mao often warned that cadres might become a new privileged stratum, he in fact had never portrayed this group as an emerging ruling class. Mao was careful to define the targets of the Cultural Revolution as elements in the party that had taken the capitalist road. In one oft-cited passage in support of a new-class interpretation of late Maoism, Mao is quoted as remarking in 1965, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, "The bureaucratic class [*guanliao zhuyizhe jieji*] is sharply opposed to the working class and the poor and lower-middle peasants. These people have become or are becoming bourgeois elements sucking the blood of the workers."[68] These words, however, need to be interpreted with caution. Rather than referring to the bureaucrats as forming a class, Mao meant instead those cadres who were ideologically vulnerable and infected with bureaucratic style. Mao's stress that the rest might be politically reliable demonstrates that the focus here is only a segment of the bureaucracy. Over a year later, in 1966, this point was accentuated in the Sixteen Points, which included the "revolutionary cadres" among the "main force of the Cultural Revolution."[69] Clearly, what was central for late Maoist theory was not the radical negation of bureaucracy, but rather fashioning a ruling apparatus more responsive to mass input from below.

Class as Classification

In the previous section, I argued that although late Maoism contained within itself a significant dose of what may be considered a new-class critique, its criticism of the socialist bureaucracy was fraught with ambiguities. Here I will further suggest that the political and ideological effects of these fragmentary ideas, insofar as the Cultural Revolution was concerned, must be understood in terms of the concrete historical circumstances in which they were pragmatically enacted and received. Ideology does not form a self-contained system, and to go beyond an undue emphasis on the Maoist ideology as disembodied texts, we must examine the wider social space of institutions and communication that complicate the seeming liter-

ality of meanings. The Cultural Revolution did not play out in a historical vacuum simply according to the Great Leader's master plan. Instead, its events were crucially mediated by existing social practices, institutional arrangements, and categories of political understanding.

Late Maoism's emphasis on the "new bourgeoisie" must be situated in the crucial historical context of a massive institutional and discursive apparatus that classified, monitored, and acted on the class status of every Chinese. The story of China's ubiquitous class-status *(chengfen)* system is a familiar one. Throughout the Mao era, all Chinese families were assigned a label based on the class status of the male family head, which corresponded with where he stood in the party's taxonomy of class. This practice of class classification originated as a useful instrument of organizing peasant revolution. During the land reform, class status referred to the position of each household on a socioeconomic scale that included landless laborers, poor and middle peasants, rich peasants, and landlords. Before landed assets were redistributed, party workers were sent out to inquire about the occupations, property holdings, and family backgrounds of the villagers. As part of the investigation that preceded land redistribution, each family was assigned a class designation or label. Finally came the class-struggle movement, in which the poor peasants were encouraged to settle accounts with landlords who had imposed excessive rent payments, charged usurious interest rates, and abused tenants and farm laborers. Confiscation of the property of landlords and rich peasants shattered the prerevolutionary agrarian hierarchy, and through class identification and labeling, the former landed elites were reduced to social pariahs.[70]

After the Communist victory in 1949, the practice of class labeling, once a part of the concrete process of mobilizing popular struggles, became generalized into a rigid bureaucratic system of political control through naming and classifying social identities. During the early years of the PRC, an elaborate system of over forty class categories was developed and applied to the entire Chinese populace. These categories ranged from stigmatized ones, such as capitalists and landlords, to workers and peasants, in whose name the revolution was carried out (see Table 2).

As the Communist Revolution was largely based in the countryside, rural class labeling was far more elaborate.[71] It was commonly understood, according to a speech Liu Shaoqi delivered in 1950, that landlords or rich peasants made up as much as 10 percent of the rural population.[72] In comparison, the determination of urban class identities was less systematic and combined both official investigation and self-reporting about autobiographical history. By the mid-1950s, urban residents in most walks of life had been classified as worker, urban poor, or capitalist, among other categories.

Table 2 The system of class labels

Main class designations	Subdesignations
Noneconomic	Military officer for an illegitimate authority
	Counterrevolutionary
	KMT special agent
	Bad element
	Rightist
	Capitalist roader
	Dependent of revolutionary martyr
	Revolutionary soldier
	Revolutionary cadre
Urban	Capitalist
	Comprador capitalist
	Commercial capitalist
	Industrial capitalist
	Petty bourgeois
	Liberal professional
	Office staff
	Small factory owner
	Small shopowner
	Peddler
	Urban pauper
	Idler
	Worker
	Pedicab worker
	Sailor
	Handicraft worker
	Transport worker
	Enterprise worker
Rural	Landlord
	Despotic landlord
	Bankrupt landlord
	Sublandlord
	Hidden landlord
	Managerial landlord
	Landlord who is an industrialist or merchant
	Overseas Chinese landlord
	Enlightened landlord
	Small land lessor
	Rich peasant
	Middle peasant
	Well-to-do middle peasant
	New middle peasant
	Old middle peasant
	Poor peasant
	Hired agricultural laborer

Source: Modified from Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), appendix, 185–187.

Segments of urban society suspended between proletarian and bourgeois categories included petty shop owners and street peddlers, as well as the amorphous category of white-collar workers ("staff" or *zhiyuan*). In addition to categories based on one's socioeconomic position, other categories were defined through explicitly political criteria—one's relationship to the party and the state, a clear anomaly in strict Marxist terms. The proletarian categories, for instance, included "revolutionary cadre," "revolutionary soldier," and "family member of revolutionary martyr." On the opposite side of the political spectrum, categories such as "counterrevolutionary," "bad element," and "family member of counterrevolutionary" were applied to individuals deemed unworthy of socialist citizenship. The term "counterrevolutionary," for example, was never precisely defined and was used for either alleged opposition to the party or past association with the KMT regime, while the omnibus category "bad elements" referred to those who had committed petty crimes, such as theft or sex-related offenses. Although the basic categories had been defined for the most part by the mid-1950s, new ones were added whenever necessary and as dictated by political circumstances during the incessant political campaigns characteristic of the Mao era.[73]

The immediate political purpose of the class-status system was to determine the social basis of the revolution and the enemies of the new state. Membership in "the people" was reserved for the proletarian categories, whereas those labeled bourgeois were noncitizens (or less than citizens).[74] Stripped of political (and often socioeconomic) rights, individuals in undesirable categories were placed under the watchful eyes of the police, the militia, cadres, and ordinary citizens, whereby the watchful eye of the state was turned into the gaze of the many. The new state became established through the imposition of new boundaries and categories of configuration on previously uncategorized peoples and spaces. The enumeration of class-based identities made society—as James Scott has put it—"readable" to the state by way of reducing an extraordinarily complex and unwieldy "social hieroglyph" to a "legible and administratively more convenient format," thereby facilitating state intervention in an opaque or even inaccessible terrain.[75] By dividing China's population into distinct status groups, the class-status system served important functions, such as population policing and control, as well as redistribution and social leveling, or, as Gordon White has suggested, served as a form of "revolutionary egalitarianism."[76] Although the system was imposed through the agency of state power, it enjoyed considerable support during the early years of the PRC among rank-and-file party activists and significant segments of the populace, when memories of the violent civil-war decades were still fresh and popular desires for revolutionary vengeance remained strong.

The new system of organized inequality initially was not expected to play a long-lasting role in the political life of the new nation. The Chinese population in the mid-twentieth century was in constant flux as decades of war and revolutionary turmoil profoundly altered the social landscape. Although the system corresponded to ideas of popular justice that the time had come for the formerly subordinated to reverse the relationships of inequality, it was viewed as only a temporary measure that would soon fade away. According to policies issued in the early 1950s, expropriated landlords could change their class labels in five years if they took part in physical labor and obeyed the law, and rich peasants could be reclassified after three years.[77] The essentially declassing impact of revolutionary upheaval was not lost on the CCP leaders. In a speech delivered in 1956, Deng Xiaoping spoke of the fluidity of China's new social relationships and admitted that the classification of classes "has lost or is losing its original significance":

> In recent years . . . the situation has fundamentally changed. The difference between workers and office employees [*zhiyuan*] is now only a matter of division of labor within the same class. Coolies and farm labourers have disappeared. Poor and middle peasants have all become members of agricultural producers' co-operatives, and before long the distinction between them will become merely a matter of historical interest. . . . The vast majority of intellectuals have now come over politically to the side of the working class, and a rapid change is taking place in their family background. The conditions under which the urban poor and professional people existed as independent social strata have virtually been eliminated. Every year large numbers of peasants and students become workers, large numbers of workers, peasants and their sons and daughters join the ranks of intellectuals and office workers, large numbers of peasants, students, workers and office workers join the army and become revolutionary soldiers, while large numbers of revolutionary soldiers return to civilian life as peasants, students, workers or office workers. What is the point then of classifying these strata into two different categories? Even if we were to try to devise a classification, how could we make it clear and unambiguous?[78]

The leadership consensus about the diminishing importance of class classification was expressed by none other than Mao himself, who, in arguing that "class contradictions within our country have already been *basically* resolved,"[79] offered the similar view that new types of social contradictions were supplanting old ones, and that the old political language and analysis had to be adapted to new circumstances.

But during the Mao era, the attenuation of the system of fixed class identities did not take place as once envisaged; instead, the system increasingly hardened. The complex historical circumstances in which the rhetoric and practice of class warfare intensified remain to be more fully under-

stood. Evidently, the party's continuous anxiety about its former enemies was a major factor, and its concerns were exacerbated by both the domestic socioeconomic crisis in the wake of the Great Leap Forward and growing Cold War antagonisms. Notably, the system and practice of class labeling proved useful for disciplining social and political deviancies that proliferated in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[80] The heightening of class-war rhetoric and the consolidation of the system of class classification occurred at the same time as the construction of China's ubiquitous *hukou* (household registration) system, the much-detested internal passport system that tied every citizen to a particular location.[81] Together, these formed part and parcel of a more general process in the emergence of a disciplinary regime of population administration, political mobilization, and socioeconomic management, and class, among other critical indexes, became a strategic site of societal policing and reordering.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing until the end of the Mao era, the codification of class was integrated into a wide-ranging network of party control, social mobilization, and political campaign. With the aim of promoting the status of historically underprivileged classes while restricting the opportunities of prerevolutionary elites, an elaborate set of "class-line" *(jieji luxian)* policies was implemented. Many Chinese institutions practiced some degree of class discrimination, giving preference to individuals of proletarian statuses and origins and disadvantaging people of politically undesirable categories. Schools, for example, had class-based admission procedures, as did the party and youth organizations. The judicial system often operated according to the principles of class justice, treating bourgeois defendants more harshly than their proletarian counterparts.[82] Frequently as a result of local initiatives as well as central instructions, the practice of categorizing individuals and its associated discriminatory policies had a direct impact on one's position in the society and on one's offspring's opportunities for social and political advancement.

A good example was the area of higher education in which class-based discriminatory policies were justified in the name of egalitarian social leveling. Beginning in the 1950s, college admission was based on a combination of academic and political criteria, the latter including both political behavior and class origin. In post-1949 China, academic fields were classified into three categories: open or nonrestricted *(yiban),* restricted or secret *(jimi),* and highly restricted or top secret *(juemi).* On the basis of political conduct, class origin, and social/familial networks *(shehui guanxi),* an applicant's political reliability was evaluated on a three-point scale: (1) eligible for restricted fields of study, (2) eligible for nonsensitive fields, or (3) unsuitable for admission. In 1964, according to official statistics, 19.06

percent of all college applicants in Shanghai were eligible for top-secret fields, 24.66 percent for secret fields, and 45.93 percent for nonrestricted fields, and 10.35 percent were deemed inadmissible.[83] Specifying the criteria of a political background check *(zhengzhi shencha)*, a guideline issued in 1958 by the Ministry of Education named a dozen categories of students as inadmissible to any field of study, including the following:

- Those with "complicated political history" that had not yet been fully investigated or cleared
- Those with direct family members who either had been executed or had committed suicide for fear of punishment
- Those with direct family members who had been sentenced to jail or labor reform or were engaging in counterrevolutionary activities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, or capitalist countries
- Those with direct family members who were counterrevolutionaries or antiparty, antisocialist elements
- Those who had close family relatives and friends *(qinmi shehui guanxi)* who had been either executed or jailed or were engaging in counterrevolutionary activities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, or capitalist countries
- Those from exploiting-class family backgrounds, such as landlords, rich peasants, and reactionary KMT officials[84]

Class-based restrictions were progressively tightened. In the 1950s, belonging to the category of capitalists was not considered a disqualifying factor, but the policy adopted in 1962 barred students from both capitalist and rightist families from being admitted to restricted fields. In 1963, political requirements were raised, and fields such as foreign languages, law, statistics, international trade, nuclear physics, and geophysics were classified as secret or top secret, meaning that students from insufficiently proletarian, revolutionary, or "red" families would not be eligible. In the mid-1960s, admission standards were again tightened. This time, even those whose grandparents had been sentenced to punishments were subject to restrictions.[85] As a result of such class-based admission policies, the proportion of college students from undesirable class backgrounds decreased, and those from politically desirable or "good" class backgrounds significantly increased, reaching over 70 percent of the total college enrollment in 1965.[86]

Chinese society during the Mao era had numerous social aliens. The city of Wuhan in central China is a good example. As a "peacefully liberated" *(heping jiefang)* city, where the local KMT forces surrendered during the Communist takeover, Wuhan had a sizable population of politically prob-

lematic individuals. It was estimated that 22,000 KMT officers and soldiers, 32,000 militiamen, 6,200 policemen, and 10,000 civilian functionaries remained in the city. During the so-called democratic reform of industrial enterprises (1951–1954), about 8,000 to 10,000 were labeled "reactionary feudal elements." In addition, there were 40,000 "capitalists." During the early 1950s, several thousand people were convicted as counterrevolutionaries. The Loyalty and Honesty Campaign (1951) found that 2,464 cadres had politically problematic histories. The Elimination of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign (1955–1956) again identified 6,652 people as counterrevolutionaries and "bad elements." The Anti-Rightist Campaign labeled 6,261 individuals "rightists" and 945 "bad elements." Meanwhile, 1,928 individuals were internally classified *(nei ding)* as "medium rightists" *(zhong you),* which meant that their labels were recorded in the dossier but not made public.[87]

Although Mao repeatedly stated that class enemies made up about 5 percent of the total Chinese population,[88] the actual proportion targeted or implicated was much higher because if one person was so labeled, then not only that person's immediate family but also other relatives could become stigmatized. It is worth noting that although the whole household was considered bad class when it was headed by a bad class element, young people from such homes were not always considered enemies, and many might enjoy some political rights. Here some additional clarifications are in order. In the Mao era, there were two basic class-related indicators, which in theory should be distinguished from each other: class origin *(jiating chushen)* in terms of one's family class background and class status *(geren chengfen)* in terms of current social (and occupational) position. This distinction pertains especially to the underage offspring of undesirable elements, who were not supposed to be assigned a class status.[89] This, however, does not mean that class identification was not relevant in such cases. Although one's class status was recorded separately for each adult aged eighteen years or older, class origin or class background as derived from the class status of the male family head was applicable to all household members, regardless of age and gender. Despite the fact that these two indicators were supposed to be kept separate according to the party's policy book, there were no clear guidelines about the relative importance of the two criteria. Confusion over these terms found recurring expression in Chinese political life in the Mao era, and Red Guard polemics during the Cultural Revolution focused a great deal on the ambiguities of the two.

In the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution, class status and class origin gradually became conflated, and what may be called a genealogical

understanding of class became predominant. As I will detail in Chapter 3, class as defined by the family's "bloodline" *(xuetong)* was inherited patrilineally like a surname and often turned the children of social outcasts into pariahs. The stigma of an undesirable class label was virtually impossible to cast off either by statements of loyalty or repudiation of one's parents (or even grandparents). Often considered branded because of their parents' class status, children of class aliens might find it hard to obtain higher education, to join the party, to land desirable jobs, or even to get employment. They often had difficulty in finding mates. Those with favorable class status tended to marry within their own rank, whereas those at the opposite end of the social circle were compelled to intermarry because of their pariah status.[90] Young people of undesirable class origins often worked hard in order to alleviate the damaging effects of their birthmarks, but their efforts were often suspected of being opportunistic. Although the official rhetoric held that offspring of politically undesirable or "bad" class elements should be treated as capable of political rehabilitation, the state implicitly (or explicitly) endorsed the view that political positions were more likely to be determined by family background and upbringing. "Actually you should be more on guard against the landlord's son," remarked a village cadre, "the old landlord himself is already just a useless old stick."[91]

How the Old Bottle Spoiled New Wine

The enormous political importance attached to class labeling notwithstanding, class turned out to be a highly ambiguous category. People's socioeconomic positions often change as a result of revolutionary upheaval. Large segments of society were neither unmistakably proletarian nor bourgeois, but they nevertheless had to be given exact class locations. Because class identities were often unclear, many invented their identities by creatively interpreting biographical data. Individuals might be associated with two or more identities depending on which segment of life history was foregrounded. As a result, state policies of class identification gave rise to widespread practices of selective presentation or even evasion. The proliferation of class categories necessary to capture the entire population also led to all sorts of difficult cases, such as offspring of landlords who had joined the Red Army, or sons of a revolutionary martyr accused of being rightists. In these cases, the local cadres' decision often was crucial. Because determination of class identities tended to be haphazard and informal, the outcomes left much room for contestation, particularly during the Cultural Revolution.

Indeed, class took on a role in Mao's China that no Marxist founding fathers could have imagined. Until the class-status or *chengfen* system was abolished in the late 1970s, the reified category of class essentially defined one's relationship to the state and significantly determined the life chances of numerous individuals. Class identity was recorded in the ubiquitous *hukou* registers and dossier files stored in personnel departments and police stations. These files included the basic coordinates of personal identity, such as age, gender, birthplace, class origin, social status, and nationality, as well as any personal confessions or political charges produced by informants. The immense importance attached to these bureaucratically constructed identities was evidenced by the massive system of producing and maintaining documents that contained citizens' biographical histories. Data were painstakingly assembled and analyzed, and reinvestigation to catch "fish that escaped the net" *(louwang zhiyu)* could occur years or even decades later.[92] In such makeup campaigns, punishments were often meted out to those who had misrepresented undesirable class origins or political history.

In Mao's China, it was considered revolutionary justice to treat classes as stratified layers in a hierarchical structure and to classify individuals in accordance with fixed criteria, such as family origins. The partition of society into class-specific specimens frozen in time was made possible by a Manichean language that divided the world into the good and the evil and by an elaborate symbolic system of binary oppositions (red/black, new/old, revealed/concealed, pure/polluted, and so on) that metaphorically reproduced the two worlds belonging to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, respectively.[93] The political import of such a fossilized system cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, it was really through this system of class reification and essentialization—with all its symbolic trappings—that the concept of class acquired special concreteness. Reinforced by the vast array of institutional and ritual-symbolic forms of class struggle, the classification of class provided the palpable discursive and material basis for the cognitive consensus both within the party and among the Chinese populace regarding the political meaning of class. Within this scheme, remnants of the old elites were reduced to pathetic and totally powerless figures. But this did not really matter; what mattered was that their repeated scapegoating, however artificially staged, gave real, recognizable human faces to an abstract discourse based more on imagination than on political reality.

In qualifying his stress on the importance of the notion of the new class in late Maoism, which took on explosive political significance during the Cultural Revolution, Stuart Schram—the doyen of Western scholarship on Mao and Maoism—once argued: "Whatever our conclusion regarding

the nature of the 'new class' and its place in Mao's scheme of things, the 'class status' of the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the Chinese People's Republic would necessarily continue to be determined by their family origins. . . . Beyond any doubt, Mao was fully responsible for the use of inherited class status, or *chengfen,* as the basis for something not far short of a caste system, governing the lives and prospects of all Chinese citizens."[94] Schram was correct on this, but he did not go far enough. What is important here, I suggest, is not merely that the two different views of class—based on old and new criteria, respectively—ran parallel to each other, but rather how they coalesced within a common political framework.

The key point here is that the Maoist critique of the socialist bureaucracy or the new class took on political meaning from the imaginary universe of the old class—the bureaucratically codified class enemies defined mainly in terms of prerevolutionary social positions. In this congested symbolic space, all social aliens, real or imagined, were lumped together into the single category of class enemies, ultimately standing for all that was evil in prerevolutionary Chinese society. China's traditional folkloric demonological paradigms contributed considerably to the cultural idioms of political discourse in Mao's China. For example, "cow monsters and snake demons" *(niugui sheshen)* became the recurrent metaphor to represent those identified as class enemies.[95] Invoking the traditional religious language of demonic invasion and the image of an ominous underworld populated by malevolent spirits, discourses about old and new class adversaries—each with distinct historical trajectories and structures of antagonism—became fused or confused. In this marvelous world in which distinct discourses of class became interchangeable, the chain of class aliens could expand endlessly by simple extension and incorporation as dictated by shifting political exigencies, with each newly added element partaking of the same symbolic essence that reflected the imagined evils of the ancien régime. For example, from the "black four categories" *(hei si lei)* that lumped together counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, landlords, and rich peasants, it was only a small step to the "black five categories" *(hei wu lei)* by adding the newly invented category of rightists. The "black seven categories" *(hei qi lei)* added the former bourgeoisie and the capitalist roaders. During the Cultural Revolution, "traitors," "agents," and "bourgeois intellectuals" were added to this ever-expanding chain to form the "stinking number-nine" *(chou laojiu),* thereby completing the list, if only metaphorically, until such widely unpopular practices were discontinued in the late 1970s.

Targeting the "new bourgeois elements" in the party, the Maoist attacks on the bureaucratization of the party-state reflected precisely this symbolic logic of incorporation, fusion, interpenetration, and reciprocal transforma-

tion. The Socialist Education or Four Cleanups Campaign, which began in 1963 with the aim of rectifying cadre abuses of power in rural areas, quickly turned to attacking former landlords and rich peasants. A party directive issued in 1964 asserted that "leadership in some places has been placed in the hand of degenerate elements; and in other places controlled by counterrevolutionaries, landlords, rich peasants, and bad elements" and, in a rhetoric anticipating that of the Cultural Revolution, called for "power seizures" *(duo quan)* to regain control.[96] Similarly, during the Cultural Revolution, one of the chief ideological justifications of continuing the class struggle was that a significant number of veteran revolutionaries and party cadres had been controlled or possessed by alien class forces and had degenerated into representatives of the bourgeoisie. According to this view, a hodgepodge of historically designated class enemies—bourgeoisie, landlords, KMT functionaries, and imperialist agents—"had wormed into the party." These capitalist roaders not only represented the bourgeoisie and landlords but also were often hidden enemies to begin with. For example, Liu Shaoqi—the primary target of the Cultural Revolution—was officially accused not only of being a capitalist power holder but also a traitor and even a secret agent of the KMT. These wildly flimsy accusations were nevertheless governed by a discernible ideological logic, according to which the most sinister danger to the revolution was posed by disguised enemies who had infiltrated from without. "The enemy in daylight look like men, in darkness devils," an official statement proclaimed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. "To your face, they speak human language, behind your back the language of devils. They are wolves clad in skins of sheep, man-eating smiling tigers."[97]

Indeed, the ubiquitous stress during the Cultural Revolution on the class enemy invoked a political vocabulary of demonic threat that centered on surviving residues, concealed aliens, and their metamorphosing powers. Although the majority of class enemies were little more than sociological fossils, this did not make the scheme any less real or powerful. Its real effects lay in the fact that the millions of people branded with tainted class labels supplied recognizable human faces that made tangible the abstract discourse as well as the popular understanding of class. Instead of giving rise to a conception of class adequate to Chinese socialism, the reification of class and compression of class analyses centering on old and new—or prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary—social relationships ended up creating a hopelessly incoherent ideological space in which sharply different politics of class interpenetrated and fused, and in which new types of social conflict were depicted as a continuation of the titanic battles of the past between the revolutionary forces and the agents of the ancien régime.

The assimilation of the new-class calculus into the objectifying old-class discourse had far-reaching consequences for the Cultural Revolution. The mass movement of the Cultural Revolution began in August 1966 with Mao's call to rebel against degenerate officials and to attack bourgeois figures and ideas. As I will discuss later in the book, the movement quickly developed into a violent assault by the Red Guards from proletarian class origins on people with impure class affiliations. While the movement escalated into rebel attacks against party officials and offices, the absence of clearly defined objectives and targets resulted in the degeneration of the movement into pervasive factional conflicts. Demobilization and restoration of order were achieved by political recentralization and deploying the army. In the last great campaign of the Cultural Revolution in 1968–1969, the prelude to the full restoration of the party, the movement of "purifying the class ranks" investigated the class identity and history of millions and targeted the undesirable ones. The Cultural Revolution reached one new height of political intensity after another in such circles of reciprocal symbolic transformation of the old and new class enemies and in fiercely battling with the numerous alleged contemporary agents of the ancien régime. It is profoundly ironic that after Mao's death in 1976, the defeat of the Maoist clique—the infamous Gang of Four—was once again represented as a life-and-death struggle between the proletariat and an amorphous bourgeoisie.[98] Zhang Chunqiao, Mao's most trusted theoretician, was depicted as a CCP renegade and KMT special agent; Yao Wenyuan, as an offspring of a reactionary landlord; and Wang Hongwen, the Shanghai rebel leader handpicked by Mao to become the vice chairman of the CCP, as a new bourgeois element and a representative of the old bourgeoisie. The Gang of Four episode of the late 1970s was the last gasp of the language and discourse of class that dominated the Cultural Revolution decade, the dissolution of which effectively marked the closure of the Mao era.

In this chapter, I have argued that the prevailing discourse and practice of class before the Cultural Revolution was fraught with ambiguities that would have fateful consequences for the mass politics of the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution began with a call to attack party cadres but ended with a campaign stressing old-class identities. This marked a profound shift on the issue of defining class in socialist China. But the political significance of the equivalency between the new and old classes was rather contradictory, to say the least. On the one hand, this relationship made it possible to frame abuses of powerless old-class tar-

gets as acts of major political significance; on the other hand, it made possible an understanding of attacks on party-state authorities as class struggle. "The dialogue of class struggle," as Fredric Jameson pointed out, "is one in which opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code."[99] Similarly, as the rest of this book will show, the Cultural Revolution's dominant language and ideology of class could be subject to interpretations of quite different kinds, sometimes with profoundly unsettling political implications.

The Cultural Revolution began for the most part as a revolution from above, or as "mass participation in bureaucratic politics," as Andrew Walder has put it.[100] But as the movement continued, many long-standing social and political issues resurfaced in a new circumstance in which public order had virtually collapsed. More than a decade and half after the victory of the Communist-led revolution, popular resentment of bureaucratic privileges and cadre abuses of power was widespread, and many citizens were only too eager to take advantage of the newly proclaimed right to rebel against established authorities. The mass political activism characteristic of the Cultural Revolution, however, was not necessarily the direct expression of preexisting social discontent and grievances. Rather, this activism was often the result of novel forms of political language and action in a turbulent process that few participants fully comprehended. In espousing explosive slogans such as "Bombard the headquarters" and "Rebellion is justified," Mao—China's party chief turned rebel leader—set in motion new dynamics that radically disrupted the existing arrangements of politics. With the abrupt separation of Mao's charismatic authority from the party apparatus, superior political understanding was no longer the monopoly of the party. Indeed, the basic rationale of the mass politics characteristic of the Cultural Revolution was that Mao's Thought could be grasped directly by the general populace, unmediated by the party. Although everyone was speaking in the name of Mao, Mao's fragmentary ideas were variously interpreted in fluid circumstances and were appropriated for diverse purposes—to rationalize interpersonal conflicts and factional rivalries, to articulate popular grievances, or to justify attacks on political authorities. And, not surprisingly, the principle of "free mobilization of the masses" could not be confined merely to abusing the familiar categories of class enemies, imagined or real. Giving new meanings to a myriad of antagonisms that had hitherto remained latent, the events of the Cultural Revolution had a logic and dynamic of their own, and in ways that neither the Supreme Leader nor any determinate political programs could fully control or even foresee. In Chapters 3 to 5, I will examine several

important instances of emergence and transformation that resulted from the fierce and inherently unstable mass politics of the Cultural Revolution by offering an account of some of the political forces that transgressed the Maoist ideology and policies, their developmental trajectories, and their specific local historical contexts.