MAO TSE-TUNG

ANALYSIS OF THE CLASSES IN CHINESE SOCIETY
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present English translation of Mao Tse-tung's Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society has been made from the Chinese text given in the second edition of the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Volume I, published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, in July 1952. The translator has added several foot-notes to the original.

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This article was written in 1926 to combat two deviations then existing in the Party—Right opportunism represented by Ch'en Tu-hsiu and "Left" opportunism represented by Chang Kuo-t'ao. One paid attention only to the Kuomintang-Communist co-operation and the other only to the labour movement, but both forgot the peasants. Although both brands of opportunists were keenly aware of the insufficiency of the revolutionary forces, neither knew where to look for reinforcements and for broad masses of allies. Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out that the Chinese proletariat had in the peasantry its staunchest and most numerous ally, and thus solved the problem concerning the chief ally in the Chinese revolution. At the same time he foresaw that the national bourgeoisie, as a wavering class, would split up during a revolutionary upsurge, with its right wing going over to the imperialist camp. The events of 1927 confirmed his judgment.

Commission on the Publication of the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party
First Edition  February 1950

This article was written in 1950 to convey the
revolutionary change in the Party's official oppo-
nosition to the United Nations and the KMT
opposition, in contrast to the KMT staunch oppo-
position. The new position of the Communist Party
means that the Party is adapting to the new cir-
cumstances and the new situation of the revolution.

The Communist Party of China, known as the Chiba
Communist Party, is the leading force in the
work of the Chinese people to achieve national
liberation and social revolution. It is the vanguard
class of the Chinese working class, the advanced com-
ponent of the Chinese working class, the theoretic
base of the Chinese revolution, and the core of
the Chinese revolution. The Communist Party of
China is the vanguard of the Chinese working class,
the leading force in the revolutionary movement of
the Chinese people, and the core of the Chinese
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Chinese revolutionary movement. It is the vanguard
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and the core of the Chinese revolutionary move-
ment.
WHO are our enemies, and who are our friends?

This question is one of primary importance in the revolution. All past revolutionary struggles in China achieved very little, basically because the revolutionaries were unable to unite their real friends to attack their real enemies. A revolutionary party is the guide of the masses, and no revolution ever succeeds when the revolutionary party leads it astray. To make sure that we will not lead our revolution astray but will achieve positive success, we must pay attention to uniting our real friends to attack our real enemies. To distinguish real friends from real enemies, we must make a general analysis of the economic status of the various classes in Chinese society and of their respective attitudes towards the revolution.

What are the conditions of the various classes in Chinese society?

The landlord and comprador classes. In economically backward and semi-colonial China the landlords and compradors are completely the vassals of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their existence and development. These classes represent the most backward and the most reactionary
relations of production in China and hinder the
development of her productive forces. Their existence
is incompatible with the objectives of the Chinese
revolution. This is especially true of the big land-
lords and big compradors who always side with
imperialism and form the extreme counter-revolution-
ary group. They are politically represented by the
Estatices\(^1\) and the right wing of the Kuomintang.

*The middle class.* This class represents China’s
capitalist relations of production in town and country.
The middle class, by which is chiefly meant the national
bourgeoisie, is contradictory in its attitudes towards
the Chinese revolution: when it suffers from the
blows of foreign capital and the oppression of the
warlords, it feels the need of a revolution and favours
the revolutionary movement against imperialism and
the warlords; but when the proletariat at home takes
a militant part in the revolution and the international
proletariat abroad gives its active support, so that it
senses the threat to the realisation of its desire to
develop as a class into the status of the big bourgeoisie,
it becomes sceptical about the revolution. Politically
it stands for the establishment of a state under the
rule of a single class, the national bourgeoisie. A
self-styled “true disciple” of Tai Chi-t’ao\(^2\) wrote in the
*Chen Pao,\(^3\)* Peking: “Raise your left fist to knock
down imperialism and your right fist to knock down
the Communist Party.” This remark depicts the
dilemma and quandary of this class. This class
objects to the Kuomintang’s Principle of the People’s
Welfare being interpreted according to the theory of the class struggle, and objects to the Kuomintang's alliance with Russia and inclusion of Communists and left-wingers. But its aim of establishing a state under its own rule is impracticable, because the present world situation is one in which the two big forces, revolution and counter-revolution, are engaged in the final struggle. Two huge banners have been raised by these two huge forces: One is the red banner of revolution which the Third International holds aloft, rallying all the oppressed classes of the world, and the other is the white banner of counter-revolution which the League of Nations hold aloft, rallying all the counter-revolutionary elements of the world. The intermediate class will beyond doubt rapidly fall apart, some sections turning left and joining the ranks of the revolution and others turning right and joining the ranks of the counter-revolution; there is no room for any to remain "independent." Therefore the idea cherished by the Chinese middle class of an "independent" revolution in which it would play the leading role is a mere illusion.

The petty bourgeoisie. Owner-peasants, master handicraftsmen and the petty intellectuals—students, primary and middle school teachers, lower government functionaries, office clerks, small lawyers, and petty traders—all belong to this category. On account of its size and its class character, this class deserves great attention. The owner-peasants and the master handicraftsmen are both engaged in small-scale
production. Although the various strata of this class have the same petty-bourgeois economic status, they nevertheless fall into three different groups.

The first group consists of those who have some surplus money and grain, i.e. people who, by their manual or mental labour, have an annual surplus over and above what they need for their own support. Such people are very eager about getting rich and worship Marshal Chao most devotedly; though without any illusions about amassing a great fortune, they constantly desire to climb up to the position of the middle class. At the sight of small capitalists who command people’s respect their mouths water copiously. They are timid, afraid of government officials, and also a bit afraid of the revolution. Since their economic status is quite close to that of the middle class, they more or less believe in the latter’s propaganda and adopt a sceptical attitude towards the revolution. This group is a minority among the petty bourgeoisie and constitutes its right wing.

The second group consists of those who in the main are economically self-supporting. People of this group differ greatly from the people of the first group in that, though they also want to become rich, Marshal Chao never allows them to, and moreover in recent years, victimised by the oppression and exploitation of the imperialists, the warlords, the feudal landlords and the big comprador bourgeoisie, they feel that the world now is no longer what it was. They feel that if they put in now only the same amount of labour as
before, they will be unable to maintain their standard of living. They can maintain their standard of living only by increasing their working hours, getting up earlier and finishing work later, and redoubling their efforts at their jobs. They begin to be somewhat abusive, calling the foreigners "foreign devils," the warlords "money-grabbing commanders," and the local bullies and bad gentry "the heartless rich." Merely feeling uncertain of the success of the movement against the imperialists and the warlords (the reason being that the foreigners and the warlords have so much power behind them), they refuse to join it rashly and remain neutral, but they never oppose the revolution. This group is very numerous, making up about one half of the petty bourgeoisie.

The third group consists of those whose standard of living is being reduced. Many of this group, who belonged on the whole to the so-called prosperous families in the past, are going through a gradual change in their condition—from that of being barely able to hold on to their wealth to that of living in more and more reduced circumstances. At the end of each year, on settling their accounts, they are horrified, exclaiming, "What! Another deficit!" Because such people have seen better days and are now going downhill with every passing year, their debts mounting and their life becoming more and more miserable, they "shudder as if with cold at the thought of the future." Spiritually they suffer very much because they have in mind the contrast between the past and the present.
Such people are quite important in the revolutionary movement, constitute a mass following of no small number and form the left wing of the petty bourgeoisie. In normal times the three above-mentioned groups of the petty bourgeoisie differ in their attitude towards the revolution; but in times of war, that is, in a revolutionary upsurge when the dawn of victory is discernible, not only the left wing but the middle group of this class may also join the revolution—and even its right wing, swept along by the great revolutionary tide of the proletariat and the left wing of the petty bourgeoisie, cannot but attach itself to the revolution. From the experience of the May 30 Movement\(^7\) in 1925 and the peasant movement in various places, we can see that this judgment is correct.

**The semi-proletariat.** What is called the semi-proletariat here consists of five categories: (1) the overwhelming majority of the semi-tenant peasants,\(^8\) (2) poor peasants, (3) handicraftsmen, (4) shop assistants,\(^9\) and (5) pedlars. The overwhelming majority of the semi-tenant peasants, together with the poor peasants, constitute a very large section of the masses in the countryside. The “peasant problem” is essentially their problem. The semi-tenant peasants, the poor peasants and the handicraftsmen are all engaged in production on yet a smaller scale than the petty bourgeoisie. Although both the overwhelming majority of the semi-tenant peasants and the poor peasants belong to the semi-proletariat, yet according
to their economic conditions they can be further divided into three grades, upper, middle and lower. The life of the semi-tenant peasants is harder than that of the owner-peasants because every year they are short of about half the food they need, and must rent land from others, sell part of their labour power, or engage in petty trading to make up the shortage. Between spring and summer, before the green corn grows and after the white crop is consumed, they borrow money at exorbitant interest and buy grain at high prices; compared with the lot of the owner-peasants who need no help from others, theirs is of course harder, though still better than that of the poor peasants. For the poor peasants own no land, and, for their year's ploughing and sowing, receive only half the harvest or even less, while the semi-tenant peasants, though they receive only half or less than half of the harvest of the land rented from others, can nevertheless keep the entire crop from the land owned by themselves. The revolutionary qualities of the semi-tenant peasants are therefore superior to those of the owner-peasants, but inferior to those of the poor peasants.

The poor peasants are tenant-peasants in the countryside, exploited by the landlords. According to their economic status, they can again be divided into two sections. One section of the poor peasants own comparatively adequate farm implements and a proportional amount of funds. Such peasants can get half the product of their year's toil; to make up the
deficit they can cultivate side-crops, catch fish and crayfish, raise chickens and pigs, or sell part of their labour power, thus eking out a living and hoping to tide over the year amid want and hardships. Therefore their life is harder than that of the semi-tenant peasants, but better than that of the other section of the poor peasants. Their revolutionary qualities are superior to those of the semi-tenant peasants, but inferior to those of the other section of the poor peasants. As to the other section of the poor peasants, they possess neither adequate farm implements nor funds; they have not enough manure, reap but a poor harvest from their land, and, with little left after the payment of the land rent, have even greater need to sell part of their labour power. During lean seasons and hard times they appeal to relatives and friends, borrowing a few tou or sheng\(^10\) of grain to tide over three or five days, and their debts pile up like the load on the backs of draught-oxen. They are among the most hard-pressed of the peasants, and very receptive to revolutionary agitation.

The handicraftsmen are classed with the semi-proletariat because, though they possess some simple means of production and moreover follow a sort of liberal profession, they are often forced to sell part of their labour power and are somewhat similar in economic status to the poor peasants in the countryside. As a result of their heavy family burdens and the disparity between their earnings and the cost of living, they also on the whole resemble the poor peas-
ants in constantly feeling the pressure of poverty and threat of unemployment.

Shop assistants are employees in commercial establishments, who have to defray their family expenses with their meagre pay; while prices rise with every passing year, their pay is raised usually once in several years, and any casual conversation with them is an occasion for them to ventilate their endless grievances. They are not much different in status from the poor peasants and handicraftsmen and are very receptive to revolutionary agitation.

The pedlars, whether carrying their wares around on a pole or setting up stalls along the street, have but small capital, make but a meagre profit, and do not earn enough to feed and clothe themselves. They are not much different in status from the poor peasants and likewise need a revolution that will change the existing state of affairs.

The proletariat. The modern industrial proletariat in China numbers about two million. As China is economically backward the number of her modern industrial proletariat is not large. The majority of the approximately two million industrial workers are engaged in five industries—railways, mining, maritime transport, textiles, and ship-building—and are enslaved in large numbers in enterprises owned by foreign capital. The industrial proletariat, though small in number, is nevertheless the representative of China’s new productive forces and the most progressive class in modern China, and has
become the leading force in the revolutionary movement. If we look at the strength it showed in the strike movements of the last four years, such as the seamen's strike, the railway strike, the strikes in the Kailan and Tsiaotso coal mines, the Shameen strike, and the general strikes in Shanghai and Hongkong after the May 30 Movement, we can immediately realise the importance of the position of the industrial proletariat in the Chinese revolution. The first reason why the industrial workers can hold such a position is their concentration. No other section of the people is so concentrated. The second reason is their low economic status. They are particularly able to fight because, deprived of all means of production and left with nothing but their hands, they have despaired of ever becoming rich and are subjected to the most ruthless treatment by the imperialists, the warlords and the bourgeoisie. The strength of the city coolies is also well worth attention. They are mostly stevedores and rickshawmen, but with them belong also sewage carters and street cleaners. Having nothing but their hands, they are similar in economic status to the industrial workers, but they are less concentrated and play a less important role in production. There is as yet little modern capitalist farming in China. What is called the rural proletariat consists of farm labourers hired by the year, the month or the day. Having neither land nor farm implements, nor even the least amount of funds, they can only sell their labour power to make a living.
Compared with other workers, they work the longest hours, on the lowest pay, and under the worst conditions, and with the least security of employment. Such people find themselves the most hard-pressed in the villages, and hold a position in the peasant movement as important as the poor peasants.

In addition to these, there is a fairly large number of lumpen-proletarians, that is, peasants who have lost their land and handicraftsmen who have lost all opportunity of employment. They lead the most precarious kind of life. They have formed secret societies in various places—for instance, the Triune Society in Fukien and Kwangtung; the Society of Brothers in Hunan, Hupeh, Kweichow, and Szechwan; the Society of Big Swords in Anhwei, Honan, and Shantung; the Society of Rational Life in Chihli and the three North-eastern provinces;¹⁶ and the Blue Band in Shanghai and elsewhere¹⁷—all these have been their mutual-aid organisations in political and economic struggle. To assign these people to their proper role is one of China's difficult problems. Able to fight very bravely but apt to be destructive, they can become a revolutionary force when properly guided.

From the above it can be seen that all those in league with imperialism—the warlords, the bureaucrats, the compradors, the big landlords, and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia dependent on them—are our enemies. The industrial proletariat is the leading force in our revolution. All sections of the semi-proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie are our
closest friends. As to the vacillating middle class, its right wing may become our enemy and its left wing may become our friend, but we must be constantly on our guard towards the latter and not allow it to create confusion in our front.

March 1926
NOTES

1 A group of unscrupulous fascist-minded politicians who formed the Chinese *Etatiste* Youth League, later renamed the Chinese Youth Party. Subsidised by the imperialists and the reactionary cliques in power, these counter-revolutionaries made a career out of opposing the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. *Etatism* is used to translate "Kuochia-ism" to distinguish it from the usual English rendering of Kuomintang which is the *Nationalist* Party. In theory the Chinese *Etatistes* also laid more emphasis on the state than on the people.

2 As a veteran member of the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek's partner in commodity speculation in Shanghai, Tai carried on an anti-Communist agitation after Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925 and prepared the ground ideologically for Chiang Kai-shek's *coup d'état* in 1927. For years he served as Chiang's faithful jackal in counter-revolutionary activities. Driven to despair by the imminent doom of Chiang's régime, he committed suicide in February 1949.

3 Organ of the Association for the Study of Constitutional Government, a political group then supporting the warlords of the Northern clique.

4 With the help of the Chinese Communist Party, Sun Yat-sen decided in 1923 to reorganise the Kuomintang, bring about co-operation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, and admit the Communists into his party. Furthermore, in January 1924, he convened the Kuomintang's First National Congress in Canton, and laid down the three cardinal policies of alliance with Russia, co-operation with the Communists, and assistance to the peasants and workers.
Comrades Mao Tse-tung, Li Ta-chao, Lin Po-ch’u and Ch’u Ch’iu-pai attended the Congress and played a great role in launching the Kuomintang on the revolutionary path. They were elected regular or alternate members of the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang.

5 Here Comrade Mao refers to the middle peasants as later defined in “How to Analyse the Classes in the Rural Areas.” See p. 139, the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. I.

6 The God of Wealth in Chinese folklore.

7 This refers to the national anti-imperialist movement in protest against the massacre of Chinese people by the British police in Shanghai on May 30, 1925. In May 1925, strikes broke out in the Japanese-owned textile mills in Tsingtao and Shanghai and spread on a gigantic scale. The Japanese imperialists and their jackals, the warlords of the Northern clique, proceeded to suppress them. On May 15 the management of a Japanese mill in Shanghai shot and killed a worker named Ku Cheng-hung and wounded more than ten others. In Tsingtao, eight workers were butchered by the reactionary government on May 28. Thereupon two thousand students in Shanghai started a movement in the foreign concessions on May 30, appealing to the public to support the workers and agitating for the abolition of the concessions. They succeeded in rallying more than ten thousand people in front of the police headquarters of the British concession, shouting the slogans “Down with imperialism!” and “People of China, unite!” The British police instantly opened fire on the crowd, killing and wounding many students. This was the notorious May 30 Massacre, which immediately aroused the people’s indignation throughout the country and led to widespread demonstrations and strikes of workers, students and shopkeepers, culminating in an anti-imperialist movement of enormous dimensions.

8 By the overwhelming majority of the semi-tenant peasants, Comrade Mao here refers to the poor peasants who work
partly on their own land and partly on land they rent from others.

9 Shop assistants in China belong to different strata. Here Comrade Mao refers to the largest stratum. Another stratum, whose economic status is even lower, leads the life of the proletariat.

10 Tou, a Chinese measure of capacity. A standard (market) tou is equivalent to 0.285 bushel; a sheng is 1/10 of a tou.

11 In early 1922, seamen at Hongkong and the crews of the Yangtze river steamships went on strike. The seamen held out stubbornly for eight weeks. After a bitter struggle in which much blood was shed, the British imperialist authorities in Hongkong were forced to agree to increase wages, lift the ban on the seamen’s union, release the strikers under arrest, and indemnify the families of the martyrs. Shortly afterwards the crews of the Yangtze river steamships began a strike, which lasted two weeks and also ended in victory.

12 Immediately after its founding in 1921 the Chinese Communist Party set about organising the railway workers. In 1922-3 strikes took place under the Party’s leadership on all the main lines. The best known is the great strike on the Peking-Hankow railway which began on February 4, 1923 and was a fight for the right to organise a general union for the whole line. On February 7 Wu P’ei-fu and Hsiao Yao-nan, warlords of the Northern clique supported by British imperialism, carried out a ruthless slaughter of the strikers. This is known as the February 7 Massacre.

13 The Kailan strike took place in October 1922. The “Kailan coal mines,” an inclusive name for the Kaiping and Lwan-chow (Lanchow) coalfields in Hopeh province, form a large, contiguous coal-mining area where over fifty thousand workers were employed at that time. During the Boxer Movement of 1900 the British imperialists wrested the Kaiping mines from China, and the Chinese subsequently organised the
Lwanchow Coal Mining Company. Later, when the British secured control of both coalfields, they formed the Kailan Mining Administration by consolidating the two companies.

The Tsiaotso miners struck from July 1 to August 9, 1925. The well-known coal mines of Tsiaotso are in the north-western section of Honan province.

Shameen, a section of the city of Canton, was held on lease by the British imperialists. In July 1924 the British imperialist authorities there issued a police decree requiring all Chinese to present passes bearing their photos on leaving or entering the area, while foreigners could move in and out freely. The workers in Shameen struck in protest on July 15 and the British were forced to annul the decree.

The general strikes broke out on June 1, 1925 in Shanghai and on June 19 in Hongkong. More than 200,000 workers took part in Shanghai and 250,000 in Hongkong. With the support of the people throughout the country the Hongkong strikers held out for sixteen months and staged the longest strike in the history of the world labour movement.

Chihli was the name of the present Hopeh province. The then three North-eastern provinces, Fengtien, Kirin and Heilungkiang, now form China's North-east.

These secret societies were backward, primitive forms of organisation found among the people. Their members were mainly bankrupt peasants, unemployed handicraftsmen, and lumpen-proletarians, who under the feudal conditions of China drew together on the common ground of some religion and superstition and formed numerous organisations of a patriarchal pattern and of different names. Some of these organisations even possessed arms. Through these the lumpen-proletarians sought to help each other in social and economic life and on occasions fought the bureaucrats and landlords who oppressed them. Obviously such backward organisations could not provide a way out from their predicament for the peasants and handicraftsmen. Furthermore, they often degenerated
into the tools of the landlords and bureaucrats and, because of this and of their wanton destructiveness, some turned into reactionary forces. In his counter-revolutionary *coup d'état* of 1927, Chiang Kai-shek utilised them to disrupt the unity of the toiling masses and to destroy the revolution. Since the rise of the powerful modern proletariat, however, the peasants, under the leadership of the working class, have formed organisations of an entirely new type, and those primitive, backward societies have consequently lost the justification for their existence.
The general strikes broke out on June 3, 1925, in Shanghai and on June 10 in Hongkong. More than 200,000 workers took part in Shanghai and 250,000 in Hongkong. With the support of the people throughout the country, the Hongkong strikers held out for sixteen months and staged the longest series of the history of the world labour movement.

"Cathay" was the name of the present Hopeh province. The three North-eastern provinces, Fengtien, Kirin and Huilungkiang, now form China's North-east.

These secret societies were backward, primitive forms of organization found among the people. Their members were mainly bankrupt peasants, unemployed handicraftsmen, and tenant-farmers, who, under the feudal conditions of China, drew together on the common ground of some religion and superstition and formed numerous organizations of a sectarian nature and of different names. Some of these organizations were powerless and weak. Though there the tenant-farmers sought to help each other in social and economic matters, the absentee landlords or the bureaucratic landlords who oppressed them obviously made backward organizations could not provide a ray of light for the peasants and handicraftsmen. Furthermore, they often degenerated.