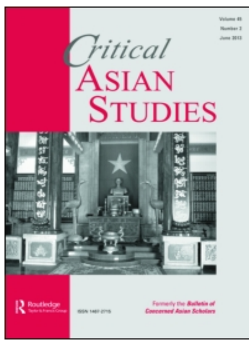

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The Dialectic in China: Maoist and Daoist

By J. W. Freiberg

The purpose of this essay is to investigate in detail the notion of "**dialectic**," and more particularly to do so by looking at the origins and operational logic of Mao Ze-dong's military strategy. We are all aware of the Western dialectical tradition in philosophy; Hegel in *The Logic*[1] traces this tradition from Parmenides, Socrates and Plato to Immanuel Kant. More recently, the French sociologist Lucien Goldmann has illuminated later moments in this line of thought, placing Racine and especially Blaise Pascal before Kant, and analyzing the theoretical contributions of Marx and Georg Lukacs.[2] What many of us might well not realize, however, is that our Western dialectical tradition is paralleled by dialectical traditions in other civilizations.

The appearance of independent dialectical traditions can be readily understood if one views a society as a complexly mediated system of class relations, which is at once an operating everyday social order, and a self-destructive system generating its own contradictions. Insofar as there is a "logic" to the awareness of (and reliance on) the pervasiveness of social order, one sees the presence of a *positive logic* which deeply influences the way people think. In a similar fashion, where there is awareness and expression of the inescapably temporal nature of everything social, one sees the presence of a negative or *dialectical logic* which also acts to influence the worldview.

One thing particularly interesting about Mao is the dual heritage of the dialectical logic present in his strategies, policies, and philosophies. Others have recognized this; Vsevolod Holubnychy for example, writes that ". . . Mao Ze-dong's materialist dialectics has a definite place in the realm of the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist Philosophy . . . In addition, it is also somewhat related to the dialectics of classical Chinese philosophy."[3] Holubnychy goes on to perform a content analysis of the entirety of Mao's references, quotes and citations in the four volumes of his *Collected Works.* He presents the findings given in Chart 1.

Interestingly, the total of the Chinese references (47%) is almost precisely equal to the total of Marxist references (46%). One might, of course, argue that the Chinese references are largely part of a nationalistic effort on Mao's part to sinocize Marxism by giving it the sanctity of consistency with Chinese traditions. In part this view is probably true, yet I hope to demonstrate the limitations of this argument later by showing how thoroughly Mao's military strategies are dependent on the 2500 year old Chinese traditions of guerrilla warfare.

Chart 1

References to or Quotations from:	Percentage of References in all 4 vols.
Confucian & Neo-Confucian Writings	22
Daoist [Taoist] & Mohist Writings	12
Folklore, legends, belles lettres	13
Other Chinese & Foreign writers, unclassified	7
Marx & Engels	4
Lenin	18
Stalin	24
	100

The remainder of this essay will fall into four parts. I would first like to discuss dialectical logic in general, contrasting it to positive logic.[5] Chang tung-sen and Holubnychy have presented analyses of this distinction in the Chinese sphere, and Lenin made a major effort to be specific about the operations of a dialectical logic in his discussion of "The Elements of Dialectics." Then the discussion will try to provide a picture of the traditional Chinese dialectic as it is codified and presented in the corpus of China's age old heterodoxy, Daoism [Taoism].[6] Next I want to consider the dual origins of Mao's dialectic, looking on one hand at the introduction of Western Marxism to Mao through the early Chinese Marxist, Li Da-zhao, and at Mao's reading of the Chinese tradition on the other. Finally, the essay attempts an analysis of the military dialectics of Maoist guerrilla strategy; although one can in part trace the derivation of these strategies in the Western dialectical tradition, it becomes clear that there is also a major influence from the 2500 year-old Daoist text, Sun Zi's *The Art of War.*

Positive and Dialectical Logic

In his article "A Chinese Philosopher's Theory of Knowledge," Chang tung-sun produces an interesting three-way distinction of positive and dialectical logic. Chang argues that Western logic is largely derived from the Aristotelian concern with the law of identity (A is equal to A). He argues that this

fixation with identity is in part a function of Western languages where the verb "to be" is equivalent to the verb "to exist." In contrast to this system of "identity logic," as he terms it, Chang poses the example of Chinese thought which is not centered on the question of positive equality (identity) or positive exclusiveness (either something *is* the case, or it *is not* the case), but instead ". . . emphasizes the relational quality between good and evil, something and nothing . . ." He points out that the equivalent of the Western verbs "to be" in Chinese languages, the colloquial *Shi*, contains no notion of "existence." Furthermore, the literary verb *wei* actually contains a notion of "becoming," which is of course contradictory in identity logic to "to be." He calls such Chinese logic a "logic of correlative duality," but goes on to write that, "Should we wish to adopt a terminology much in vogue, we might call this way of thinking an illustration of 'dialectical logic.' "[7]

Chang proceeds to analyze a third logic, that of Marxism, which he sees as fundamentally opposed to the law of identity since it claims that social phenomena produce their own negation. He sees Marxism as advocating a general law of opposition, which stresses not only logical contradiction, but also social contradiction in the form of class struggle. At this point Chang distinguishes Marxist logic, which he calls a "logic of opposition" from the traditional Chinese "logic of correlative duality," since the former emphasizes the overcoming of contradiction, while the latter emphasizes the continued coexistence of contradictory elements.

Chang's argument, while interesting, is ahistorical. A historical perspective locates the dual existence throughout Western civilization of both a formal or positive "identity logic" and a dialectical "logic of opposition." Aristotelian formal logic was not the only logic of Greek civilization; Plato and Socrates expressed themselves by using the dialectic. Hegel writes about the Greek origins of the Western dialectical tradition:

> [*Socrates*] *used to turn his dialectic, first against ordinary consciousness, and then especially against the Sophists. In his conversations . . . he drew on those with whom he conversed to the opposite of what their first impressions had pronounced correct. . . . In his more strictly scientific dialogues Plato employs the dialectical method to show the finitude of all hard and fast terms of understanding . . . In this grand style did Plato treat Dialectic.*[8]

Philosophical systems based on positive and dialectical logic have co-existed throughout Western history, but dialectical philosophies have become increasingly important during the last two centuries. Perhaps the development of formal symbolic logic in the last century is in some sense a response to the enormous development of dialectical logic after its philosophical exposition in Hegel, and especially its subsequent sociological reinterpretation by Marx. Hegel demonstrated, if only in a mythical history of mankind, the power of dialectical logic to explain the rise and fall of World Historical Civilizations.[9] Marx, in turn, demonstrated how the social and political dynamics of a particular society could be understood by translating Hegel's dialectic from the abstract notions of master and slave to the empirical reality of ruling class and working class.

What I am arguing is that a fully developed epistemology involves both positive and dialectical logics. All that is social which we experience in our everyday lives must be seen as contingent and not necessary; it could be otherwise. For this we need a dialectical logic. On the other hand, we must react to the existing conjunctures of our life-experience, even when the object of our action is to challenge the social processes which act to define and administer everyday life. At such times we utilize a positive logic. This is why dialectics cannot be reduced to an absolute negation. When the dialectic is taken to imply the instant and total negation of all that is positively presented, it is reduced to mere scepticism. As Hegel put it:

> *But when the Dialectical principle is employed by the understanding separately and independently, especially as seen in its application to philosophical themes, Dialectic becomes Scepticism, in which the result that ensues from its action is presented as a mere negation.*[10]

If it is true that the epistemology of Western civilization, whether in Greek or modern times, has historically involved both positive and dialectical logic, we might want to think twice about Chang's analysis of Chinese epistemology as essentially one of "correlative identity," or non-antagonistic dialectic. Indeed one can demonstrate the importance of dialectical logic in both ancient and modern China, but it seems necessary to view the Chinese world-view as being as much a product of a positive as of a dialectical logic. In the case of ancient China one can analyze the conflict between the orthodox and heterodox world-views partly in terms of the conflict of the essentially positive world-view of the former, and the equally dialectical world-view of the latter. Max Weber, for example, in his *Confucianism and Taoism* relies heavily on an analysis of these two religions as world-views; his investigation as to why modern "rationality," and hence capitalism, never developed in China finds that the Confucian view was too positive (doctrinal), and the Daoist view was too negative (uninvolved).[11]

It is the analysis of Mao's applied dialectic which may ultimately contribute to the discussion of Mao as a dialectical philosopher . . . If Mao is right, his best understanding of dialectics ought to be found in that sphere of expression closest to his own practice, which was clearly more that of a commander of armies than as a professional philosopher.

Similarly, one can argue that modern China under Mao was as dependent on positive as on dialectical elements in its state-sanctioned world-view, even under institutionalized Marxism-Leninism. I know of no better example than "the little Red Book," *The Quotations from Chairman Mao.* What could possibly constitute a more positive, even almost total presence than the appearance in 1966 of this little book which everyone was to some extent required to read, study and cite? The positivism of 2500 years of memorized, quoted Confucian classics was transferred overnight into Mao's quotations. And yet the content of the book is far from being exactly positive; it is merely made up of short citations from Mao's principal writings, which, many agree, have made important contributions to dialectical thought. Thus one quote reads:

Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society. If there were no contradictions in the Party and no ideological struggles to resolve them, the Party's life would come to an end.[12]

Perhaps this brief sketch of the dual presence of positive and dialectical logic in the Chinese world-view can be summarized in Chart 2.

Chart 2
Dual Logics of the Chinese World-view

Positive Logic	Dialectical Logic
Ancient China:	
Confucian presentation of political, familial and moral relations as fixed and immutable	Daoist presentation of political, familial and moral relations as contingent and arbitrary
Modern China:	
Presentation of Mao as omniscient and identical with the Revolution, the state, and correct thought	Mao's concepts and political policies of permanent revolution, continued existence of contradictions under socialism, and criticism-self criticism

The Dialectic in the Western Tradition

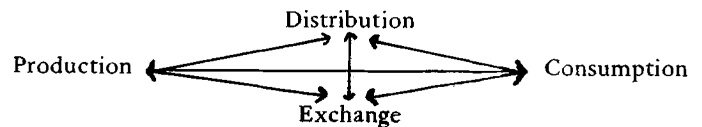
Vesvolod Holubnychy presents a concise summary of dialectical logic, which he sees as consisting of four principal postulates:[13]

1. The law of development through contradictions
2. The law of mutual interconnection
3. The law of the transformation of opposites into their own opposites when brought to an extreme
4. The law of the spiral form of the development of things

In many discussions of dialectical logic, the "law of the development through contradictions" is called the law of the "negation of the negation." "Development" refers to the gradual nature of the increasing manifestation of the internal negation by which that which exists comes apart. As Hegel put it, ". . . the finite, being radically self-contradictory, involves its own self-suppression." [14]

The "law of the mutual interconnection" refers to the complementarity of opposites. Whereas in positive logic, contradiction is taken to be absolute, in dialectical logic it is not. Absolute contradiction gives us the law of the excluded middle in positive logic: A *or* non-A. Either capitalism exists or it does not exist. Dialectical logic allows one to investigate both the absolute and relative aspects of contradiction. As such it searches to grasp the necessary (absolute) if temporary (relative) coexistence of contradictory elements in all phenomena: A *and* non-A. Seldom is this notion of the complementarity of opposites more carefully spelled out than in an unfinished rough draft of Marx.[15] There he undertook an analysis of material production by observing the web of complementary oppositions that bind together the social processes by which a society produces itself: production, consumption, distribution and exchange. Let me put this graphically in Chart 3.

Chart 3
Marx's Notion of the Production System as a Whole



("←→" means between complementary opposites)

Marx's analysis takes the form of demonstrating the positive link (complementarity) and the negative link (opposition) between each pair or dialectical couple. For example, production is argued to be both positive and negative vis-a-vis consumption:

—Production needs Consumption: production necessitates consumption of raw materials and labor
—Production diminishes Consumption: production reduces what is available for consumption
—Consumption needs Production: production produces the objects, mode and sometimes the needs of consumption
—Consumption diminishes Production: individual consumption reduces what is available for productive consumption

Marx proceeds to outline similar analyses of the other dialectical couples diagrammed above. He summarizes his effort as follows:

The conclusion which follows from this is, not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they are links of a single whole, different aspects of one unit. Production is the decisive phase . . . Production in the narrow sense, *however, is in its turn also determined by the other aspects . . . There is an interaction between the various aspects. Such interaction takes place in any organic entity.*[16]

The "law of transformation of opposites into their own opposites when brought to an extreme" is often referred to as the transformation of quantitative change into qualitative change. The presence of this piece of logic as one of the presuppositions of dialectical thought is often ignored. Those who claim that Marxist social science can account only for sudden but not gradual social change, and that in the Marxist world-view social change is seen as necessarily revolutionary and not evolutionary overlook this principle. Marxism cannot be exclusively a theory of revolutionary social change and still be dialectical; Marxist analysis of social change is based on the dialectic, that is, the complementary opposition of social-evolution and social-revolution.

Holubnychy's fourth notion, that of the "spiral form of the development of things" refers to the dialectical conception of the synthesis as an advance on the thesis and antithesis; it contains all they offered, and more. Hegel's notion of dialectical progress is that since nothing essential is left behind, there is development. Lenin, interpreting for himself Hegel's statement that "the first is thus essentially *contained* and *preserved* in the other," wrote:

Not empty negation, not futile negation, *not skeptical negation . . . but negation as a moment of connection, as a moment of development, retaining the positive . . .*[17]

One can gain further insight into an analysis of dialectical logic by looking in detail at the above quoted text of Lenin that was never meant for publication. What one finds in the *Philosophical Notebooks* are his study notes from his rereading of Hegel in 1914-1915. Lenin lists sixteen "Elements of Dialectics," as he calls them, and they extend the considerations mentioned above.[18] The following list rearranges the twelve of the sixteen Elements which are subsumed under the four dialectical principles already considered. (Emphases are Lenin's)

1. Negation of the Negation (development through contradiction):
"The apparent return to the old (negation of the negation)."

2. Complementarity of Opposites:
"The internally contradictory *tendencies* in this thing."
"The thing as the sum and *unity of opposites.*" "The *struggle,* respectively unfolding, of these opposites, contradictory strivings."

3. Interplay of Quantitative and Qualitative Change:
"Not only the unity of opposites, but the *transitions* of *every* determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every* other (into its opposites?)."
"The struggle of content with form and conversely. The throwing off of the form, the transformations of the content."
"The transition of quantity into quality and *vice versa.*"

4. The Spiral Form of the Development of Things (and knowledge):
"The *development* of this thing."
"The endless process of the discovery of *new* sides, relations."
"The endless process of the deepening of man's knowledge of the thing, . . . from appearance to essence and from less profound to more profound essence."
"From co-existence to causality and from one form of connection and reciprocal dependence to another, deeper, more general form."
"The repetition at a higher stage of certain features, properties, etc. of the lower."

This leaves four more of Lenin's "elements" which seem to me to add three new propositions to our consideration of dialectical logic.

5. Specificity of the Thing Considered:
"the *objectivity* of specific consideration."

6. The Perspective of Totality:
"The entire totality of the manifold *relations* of this thing to others."
"The universal relations of the thing with *every other* thing."

7. The Union of Analysis and Synthesis
"The union of analysis and synthesis—the break-down of the separate parts and the totality, the summation of these parts."

These seven major elements of the Hegelian-Marxist-Leninist dialectical logic give some idea of what direction a more detailed study might take; here they provide only a sketch. Perhaps it is worthwhile to contrast positive and dialectical logic on these seven points; see Chart 4.

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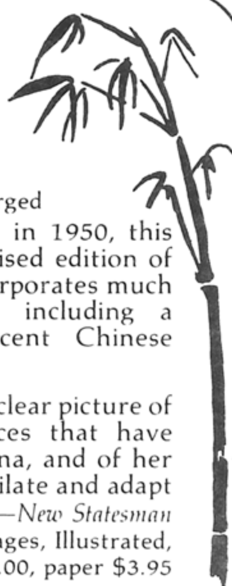

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Chart 4
A Contrast of Positive and Dialectical Logics

Dialectical Logic	Positive Logic
1. Negation of the negation	Additive development.
2. Complementarity of opposites	Laws of identity and excluded middle
3. Interplay of quantitative and qualitative change	Consideration of evolution and development apart from sudden, revolutionary change
4. Spiral form of development	Linear development
5. Specificity of all considerations	Specificity, but also abstract generalizations, "laws" (natural science model)
6. Perspective of Totality	Reification of the individual thing, person or event *in isolation*
7. Unity of analysis and synthesis	Analysis favored over synthetic study

The Dialectic in Chinese Tradition

Confucianism and Daoism [Taoism]

Over 2300 years ago the principle themes of Chinese orthodox and heterodox philosophy had been spelled out, the former in the Confucian classics, the latter in the Daoist texts. Through two millenia these two perspectives not only presented thoroughly opposed world-views, but also criticized and directly attacked each other in their philosophy, liturgy and political ideology. In the second century A.D. during the Han dynasty, Confucianism became the religion of state, which to varying degrees it remained until 1949. Confucianism was a world-view more than a religion in the Western sense; it had neither clergy nor church. Its liturgy and ritual were presented as the accepted and sanctified procedures of everyday life. It was what C. K. Yang calls a "diffuse" religion as it denied any distance whatsoever between the sacred and the secular. Herbert Fingarette stresses the importance of this in his *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred.*[19] It is difficult to imagine a more effective form of orthodox ratification of the social *status quo* than in this Confucian way in which everyday secular social processes were made sacred. Yang recognizes this:

> *The feeling of awe toward the established ways had the effect of stabilizing and strengthening social institutions . . . The well-known quality of conservatism and stability of Chinese society may be partly attributed to the broad development of diffused religion in all major Chinese social institutions.*[20]

One of the most direct spheres of the Chinese state's effort to structure the Chinese worldview with what I am calling a "positive logic" was in the realm of education. Primary education consisted of having small children learn to read only the Confucian *Three Character Classic,* while slightly older children read simple Confucian texts, such as *The Book of Filial Piety.* These classics were memorized and read back. One chapter from the latter goes as follows:

> *To threaten the sovereign with force is an act which shows that the wrongdoer does not know the duty of an inferior to a superior; to say anything against the government founded by the wise men of many generations gone by is an act which shows that the speaker does not know what law is . . .*[21]

Advanced education, throughout Chinese history, was synonomous with the memorization of the state-sanctified Confucian classics.

In the examination system all members of the Mandarinate (highest level bureaucrats) were tested on these Confucian texts and the state-chosen interpretative commentaries which accompanied them. These texts use a positive logic to present social institutions as given, natural and immutable. The *Li Ji* or *Book of Rites* for example, comprises thousands of pages of prescriptions and proscriptions about what one must do or must not do in specific circumstances. The degree of detail is pushed to the extreme in this codification of behavior acceptable to Confucianism, and therefore to the state.

For example:

Splitting words so as to break (the force of) the laws; confounding names so as to change what had been definitely settled; practicing corrupt ways so as to throw government into confusion: all guilty of these things were put to death.

When sitting by a person of rank, if he began to yawn and stretch himself, to turn round his tablet, to play with the head of his sword, to move his shoes about, or to ask about the time of day, one might ask leave to retire.

And so (they instituted) ceremonies to direct men's aims aright; music to give harmony to their voices; laws to unify their conduct; and punishments to guard against their tendencies to evil. The end to which cermonies, music, punishments, and laws conduct is one; they are the instruments by which the minds of the people are assimilated, and good order in government is made to appear.[22]

If Confucianism presented with positive logic the world-view of orthodoxy throughout Chinese history, it was Daoism (and to a lesser extent Buddhism)[23] which presented the dialectical logic of heterodoxy. This expression of an alternate, and in large part directly opposed, world-view came under direct attack from the Confucians, as one might sociologically predict. Yang analyzes this:

Why was heterodoxy such an object of vehement rejection by Confucians and an object of intolerance by authority and law? During the late Zhou period, Confucians such as Mencius and Hsun Zi attacked competing schools of thought on philosophical grounds. But in subsequent times, Confucianism having been enshrined as the supreme orthodoxy of the state, the basic ground of discrimination against heterodoxy shifted from theoretical incompatibility to the practical political consideration of safeguarding the Confucian state.[24]

If Confucianism was the official world-view of the state bureaucracy, it was often not the only world-view of the bureaucrats. Chinese culture is deeply syncretist: the world-view of individuals and social groups was structured with elements of both Confucianism and Daoism, as well as with Buddhist ideas and numerous other influences, a point emphasized by the great French sinologist, Henri Maspero.[25] The Daoism of the great texts could, of course, only be read by the educated upper class, but the social importance of the Daoist world-view perhaps derived from its remarkable consistency with the folk perspective of everyday village life, as contrasted to the highly formal, ruling-class ritualism of Confucianism. The bureaucrats and upper class were themselves often closet-Daoists; their private life and especially their life after retirement was often more Daoist than Confucian. But the interplay between these two world-views is remarkably complex. Wing-tsit Chan reminds us that:

. . . there is consonance as well as dissonance among the main streams of Chinese thought. . . . The opposition between humanistic Confucianism and naturalistic Daoism is, at first sight, almost irreconcilable. But any complete distinction inevitably distorts the picture.[26]

Dialectics and Daoism

In an earlier paper in which I attempted to study the structure of consciousness of the Daoist world-view, I presented a list of a dozen and a half "elements" of this heterodoxy.[27] I tried to show that the importance of these elements of conscience was their pervasiveness; they appear over and again in the content, categories, and logic of the Daoist world-view. The elements appear in the *content* of the world-view as recurring and critically important themes and motifs. They appear in the *categories* of the world-view as major axes by which Daoism presents its definitions of reality, propriety, knowledge, and so on. Finally, the elements appear in the *logic* of the world-view as the basic premises of intellectual and practical operations by a practitioner. As *logic,* the elements code not only the acceptable principles of social action, but to a certain extent even determine what will occur as conceptions of possible action.

My idea is that these elements tell us very much indeed about the Daoist world-view, since they are the principal components not only of its recurrent themes, but also of the categories by which it interprets the natural and social world and even of the logic of action in the world. I would like to list these elements in Chart 5 under three categories:

Chart 5
Some Elements of the Daoist World-View

Elements of Daoism which directly code its dialectical logic	Elements of Daoism which make other important contributions to Mao's Military Dialectics	Elements of Daoism which are more particular to Daoism as a Monastical, Spiritual Practice
Unity	Concealment (Anonymity)	Magic
Opposition	Center	Naturalness
Becoming	Protraction	Emptiness
Circularity	Not-doing (In-action)	Quietude
Experiential Knowledge	Yielding	Qi (Ch'i)
Relativity	Initiative	
	Indirectness	
	Correctness	

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What I want to do now is investigate the dialectical logic of Daoism by looking closely at the six elements of the Daoist world-view which I have claimed contain such a logic. I am not arguing that this Chinese dialectic logically is identical to the Western dialectic; I think there are some interesting differences, although the overlap is fairly clear. Later in the paper I want to refer back to other elements of Daoism important in the construction of Mao's world-view.

First, a summary. The Daoist world-view is one of a unified world which is made manifest to humans in paired opposites. It is a world of constant change, although *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* because the change is cyclical. Human understanding in the world is seen as relative to the perspective of the viewer; the view therefore eschews absolute judgements. Understanding is achieved by empirical investigation of specific circumstances; only this allows one to take appropriate action based on the specific situation in which one finds oneself. But this needs to be considered in greater detail.

If Confucianism presented with positive logic the world-view of orthodoxy throughout Chinese history, it was Daoism ... which presented the dialectical logic of heterodoxy.

The Daoist world-view presents the world as unified, although this was in many ways the Chinese view in general. Needham writes that "... the organicist view in which every phenomenon was connected with every other according to hierarchical order was universal among Chinese thinkers."[28] The Chinese never separated spirit and matter and therefore produced no theories as to which is more primary, mind or body. Needham notes the particular importance of this view of unity, "If there was one idea which the Daoist philosophers stressed more than any other it was the unity of Nature. . . ."[29]

This notion of unity is widespread in Chinese culture in general, and never absent in Daoist thought. Perhaps this is the logic that preserved most Chinese thought[30] from doing fruitless analyses in terms of substantive polarities (subject opposed to object, superstructure to base) which seem to form the eternal questions in the history of Western philosophy. When the Chinese made analytical distinctions in a given area—*yin* and *yang* or earth-air-fire-water-metal—it was only to better arrive at understanding the operating processes of the totality as a relation between these phases.[31]

Secondly, unity also meant that the principles of the microcosm (everyday-life) were necessarily the same as the general principles of the macrocosm; to understand the workings of the former was therefore to gain insight into the latter. Throughout the Daoist literature working-class individuals (butchers, wheelwrights, even thieves) learn these principles through mastery of their crafts. Thirdly, the Daoist element of unity proposes an original unity, from which the manifold world has been derived. Metaphysically this led to Daoist efforts to regain the primitive unity through meditation techniques and rejection of the "world of ten-thousand things," while politically it led to Daoist efforts to debunk the Confucian support of the divisions of social hierarchy. The Daoist utopia is of a unified society; Needham quotes the Huai-Nan Zi:

> *The world was an undifferentiated unity, the pure collectivity had not been broken up and dispersed, the different sorts of people formed a oneness, and all creation flourished exceedingly.*[32]

We are all familiar with the notion of opposition in Chinese culture as it is expressed in the concept of *yin-yang*. J. C. Cooper brings out several major points:

> *The* yin-yang *symbolizes all paired existence, the complementary poles of nature, but the two are not to be taken as substances or entities, but as qualities inherent in all things. Between them there is perpetual and reciprocal action and reaction, interdependence and mutation, a fusion of so-called opposites.*[33]

In this Daoist logic of paired opposites, nothing is to be seen as *yin*, nothing as *yang*. Everything has its *yin* aspects and its *yang* aspects. In what seems most *yin* one finds a trace of *yang*, and vice-versa. This logical insistence on the complementarity of opposites is pervasive in the Daoist world-view, as Raymond van Over points out:

> *. . . it is certain that virtually all Daoist practice—logic, philosophical, quietist and mystical—was based on experiencing the reconciliation of opposites, on conscious unification of the seemingly disparate and multiple, on direct perception of the identity of being and non-being, action and non-action.*[34]

The notion of opposition in Daoism carries over directly into the logic of "becoming," of ceaseless change. Hellmut Wilhelm writes that "The opposite of change is neither rest nor standstill . . . [but] is regression. The world to the ancient Chinese was a world of motion, of constant flux; all things were constantly changing into their opposites, the *yin* into the *yang*, the small into the large."[35] We see this in the Daoist text *Zhuang Zi* (*Chuang Tzu*):

> *The years cannot be held off; time cannot be stopped. Decay, growth, fullness, and emptiness end and then begin again . . . The life of things is a gallop, a headlong dash—with every moment they alter, with every moment they shift.*[36]

Richard Wilhelm writes the following in his introduction to the *Yi Jing* [*I Ching*] (or *Book of Changes*), the ancient (c. 1150 B.C.) book of magical divination which later became a Confucian classic after Confucius (or his school) added an orthodox, moralistic, social commentary and reinterpretation:[37]

> *Here we have the fundamental concept of the* Book of Changes. *The eight trigrams are symbols standing for changing transitional states; they are images that are constantly undergoing change. Attention centers not on things in their state of being, as is chiefly the case in the Occident, but upon their movements in change. The eight trigrams therefore are not representations of things as such but of their tendencies in movement.*[38]

The element of "circularity" codes the Daoist notion that the logic of this constant change was ". . . not linear, but cyclic."[39] This notion of cyclical change is in an important

sense distinguishable from the nineteenth century Western dialectical concern with progressive change of a spiraling nature. As Hellmut Wilhelm puts it:

> *The movement of change thus conceived is never one-dimensional in direction. If we keep to an image, cyclic movement is the best term for it . . . The notion of progress, which we have incorporated in the area of cyclic movement by the image of a spiral is alien to the ancient concept of change.*[40]

Cooper also emphasizes that the "Daoist cosmology is cyclic, not evolutionary. . . ,"[41] and Needham notes what is perhaps the origin of this: "They were especially impressed by cyclical change, not only of the seasons and of birth and death, but as visible in all kinds of observable cosmic and biological phenomena."[42]

These four elements of the Daoist world-view—unity, opposition, becoming, and circularity—when taken together, present a dialectical ontology. This traditional Chinese dialectic parallels the Western dialectic in its concern with unity (totality), opposition (contradiction), and becoming (negation of the negation), while it is different in that its notion of cyclic change is opposed to the Western notion of spiral, or developmental change.

Note how these four principles are all visually represented in the well-known symbol known as *tai ji*, or Grand Ultimate. Its circularity represents unity, its division into the complementarity of *yin* and *yang* represents opposition. The appearance of *yin* within the *yang* and vice-versa represents the ceaseless change of one into the other, or becoming, as well as showing that contradiction is internal in origin. Yet the endless change of these opposites into each other in no way changes the unity of the symbol as a whole, representing the repetition of the whole process, its circularity.

I think it is also possible to argue that just as Daoism presents a dialectical ontology, so it also proposes a dialectical epistemology. This is particularly clear in its insistence on the experiential basis of knowledge, and its direct critique of Confucian education, which consisted of book-learning, as Chan points out:

> *The neo-Confucianists emphasized the importance and indispensability of learning in the effort to achieve sagehood. Thus they pointed out that Confucius and Mencius were not born sages; they acquired sagacity by devotion to study—or, as we should say today, by "book learning."*[43]

In the Daoist epistemology, however, it is stressed over and again that the wise man is not a scholar, but a master craftsman. Thus the element of experiential knowledge is contrasted with mere theoretical knowledge. For example, in the *Zhuang Zi* we are told of a wheelwright who had the audacity to tell the Emperor that since he could never have learned carpentry through reading, the Emperor should therefore put down the works of Confucius which he was reading, and go out to experience the realities of his empire.[44] As the *Zhuang Zi* makes perfectly clear, the Daoists are not proponents of anti-book learning, but they stress that only by correcting theoretical knowledge with empirical experience can knowledge be furthered.[45]

The second element of Daoist epistemology is the concern with relativity; all knowledge is seen as relative to the perspective of the viewer. Holmes Welch has called Daoism "a complete relativism,"[46] while Arthur Waley writes that "The first great principle of Daoism is the relativity of all attributes."[47] In the Confucian world-view, knowledge is absolute. The Daoists, in contrast, are constantly concerned with the interference of the observer's bias in his understanding of what he studies, as Needham notes:

> *Relativity was thus understood to be partly a question of the observer's standpoint. The Lu Shih Chhun Chhin says this in so many words: If a man climbs a mountain, the oxen below look like sheep and the sheep like hedgehogs. Yet their real shape is very different. It is a question of the observer's standpoint.*[48]

This element of relativity is also a proscription against making absolute judgments; only by appreciating the relative nature of all knowledge does one remain open to respond to changing situations. In the *Lie Zi* (*Lieh Tzu*) it is written that "In any case, nowhere is there a principle which is right in all circumstances, or an action that is wrong in all circumstances."[49]

These six elements of the Daoist world-view use a dialectical logic in constructing an ontology and an epistemology. There is much that is dialectical in the rest of the elements which, if brought out here, would only belabor the point. The claim is not that the dialectical logic of traditional China as found for instance in the Daoist world-view is identical with the Western tradition, but that the two logics seem to have the essentially equivalent elements listed in Chart 6:

Chart 6

Essentially Equivalent Elements

The Western Dialectic	The Chinese Dialectic
Complementarity of opposites	Opposition
Interplay of quantitative and qualitative change	Becoming
Specificity of all considerations	Relativity + empirical knowledge
The perspective of totality	Unity

However, for one element there is direct disagreement between the two dialectical logics,[50] while for two elements of the Western tradition listed in Chart 7 I can findno equivalents in the Chinese tradition.

Chart 7
Non-Equivalent Elements

The Western Dialectic	The Chinese Dialectic
Spiral form of development	Circularity: No Development
Negation of the Negation	–
Unity of Analysis and Synthesis	–

The Influences on Mao of These Two Dialectical Traditions

We can trace some of the influences of the Western dialectical tradition on Mao, despite much confusion in the turbulent revolutionary years in China in the first half of this century. Mao's activities prior to his introduction to Marxism were entirely consistent with his later attitude and actions. In 1911, a mere boy, he joined the Republican army which overthrew the Qing (Ch'ing or Manchu) dynasty, and set up the first Chinese Republic under Sun Yat-sen. Mao soon left the army to pursue his studies. In the next several years he read the works of many Western thinkers, including Adam Smith, Darwin, J. S. Mill, Rousseau and Montesquieu.[51] At about this period Mao also first read the newspaper *Xiang [Hsiang] River Daily News.* "Socialism was discussed in it, and in these columns I first learned the term."[52]

In 1915 *New Youth Magazine* was founded by Chen Du-xiu, who was later to play an important role in Mao's road to Marxism. Mao contributed some minor pieces under a pseudonym. In 1917 his activism began when he became one of the co-founders of a radical youth group, the New Peoples Study Society, about which Mao says, "My friends and I preferred to talk only of large matters–the nature of men, of human society, of China, the world, and the Universe!"[53] But it was in 1918 that Mao, having graduated at age twenty-five from a hard-earned career at the Hunan First Normal School, met the man who was greatly to influence him in matters of Marxism, Li Da-zhao.

Let me back up a few steps. The first Chinese reference to Marxism was in an essay in 1902 by Liang Qi-chao, the first prominent Chinese intellectual to make direct use of Marx.[54] At about the same time, translations of European socialist history began to appear in Japan. The first translation of Marxism into Chinese was not until 1908; it consisted of the first chapter of the *Communist Manifesto* and Engels' English introduction. It appeared in an anarchist journal published by radical Chinese students living in Japan. A subsequent issue included parts of Engels' *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.* By 1912, Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* was in Chinese, while the Japanese translations ran far ahead, by then including the *Poverty of Philosophy,* the Preface to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy,* and part of *Capital.*

In 1913 Li Da-zhao went to study in Japan where he remained until 1916. There he was fully exposed to the ideas of the West, as he read materials not only in Japanese, but also in English. He read Aristotle, Plato, Bacon, Hegel, Bergson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the last three of whom were to prove important in influencing Li's and in turn Mao's ideas.

In 1916 Cai [Ts'ai] Yuan-pei, a man greatly influenced by Western libertarian ideals, became Chancellor of Peking University. His libertarianism and respect for the university as a forum for new ideas was carried through in his appointment policies; in 1917 he appointed the rather controversial man, Chen Du-xiu (founder of the radical *New Youth Journal*), as Dean of the School of Letters. The next year Chen, in turn, appointed Li Da-zhao, newly returned from Japan, as Chief Librarian, professor of economics, and later, as professor of history. It was just at this time, in 1918, when young Mao arrived in Peking, as he writes in his autobiography:

> *Peking seemed very expensive to me. I had reached the capital by borrowing from friends, and when I arrived I had to look for work at once. Yang Chang-ji, my former ethics teacher at the normal school, had become a professor at Peking National University . . . he introduced me to the University librarian. He was Li Da-zhao . . . [He] gave me work as assistant librarian. . . .*[55]

Li and Chen set up an informal discussion group which the young impressionable Mao attended. As Mao says, "Under Li Da-zhao . . . I had rapidly developed toward Marxism, and Chen Du-xiu had been instrumental in my interests in that direction too."[56] The discussion group, which studied *Capital* among other topics, met in secret in Li's office, which became known as *"hong-lou,"* the Red Chamber.

The nationwide student demonstrations known later as the May 4th Movement broke out in 1919, and we know that on the eve of that day students came to Li's office to report on the demonstrations.[57] With these events, Marxism came out into the open in China. The entire nation was infuriated by the Versailles Treaty which gave Germany's former holdings in China to Japan, although China had itself declared war on Germany. The dissemination of Marxist theory grew rapidly; Li was made editor of a major weekly journal, which he turned into a platform for the popularization of Marxism. Besides his own articles, he published Marx's *Wage Labor and Capital.* By 1920 the complete *Communist Manifesto* was published in Shanghai, and Li was meeting in his office with a visiting Russian, Professor Gregori Voitinsky, on the subject of creating a Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Mao left the Library to organize the Hunan branch of the Socialist Youth Corps, but attended the first congress at Shanghai in 1921 at which the CCP was organized.

Li Da-zhao's influence on Mao was important, particularly in three spheres. First, in contrast to Chen's orthodox, economic determinist Marxism, Li's was voluntaristic and open to political intervention.[58] Secondly, Li transfered the class struggle from a class to a national basis, speaking of China as a proletarian nation. Thirdly, Li, unlike Li Li-san and most other Chinese Marxists, insisted that in China Marxist revolution must have a peasant, and not a proletarian base. He wrote:

> *In economically backward and semi-colonial China, the peasantry constitutes more than 70% of the population;*

among the whole population they occupy the principal position, and agriculture is still the basis of the national economy. Therefore, when we estimate the forces of the revolution, we must emphasize that the peasantry is the important part.[59]

By the time Mao returned to Hunan in 1925 to organize peasant support for the nationalist army, his ideas had become inseparable from those of Li and Chen in China, and from the Western Marxist tradition they imported. There were other routes by which Western dialectical thought made its way to China: Zhou En-lai, who was jailed five months for his part in the May Fourth events in 1919, spent three years in France (1920-23) where he organized the Communist Youth League. Zhou visited Moscow before returning to Canton.

The impact on Mao of traditional Chinese literature and particularly its dialectical world-view can also be traced to some extent. In his interview with Edgar Snow, one finds the following charming account:

I knew the [Confucian] Classics, but disliked them. What I enjoyed were the romances of Old China, and especially stories of rebellions. I read the Yo Fei Zhuan [Yo Fei Chronicles], Shui Hu Zhuan [Water Margin], Fan Tang [Revolt Against the T'ang], San Guo [Three Kingdoms] and Xi Yu Ji [Monkey] while still very young, and despite the vigilance of my old teacher, who hated these outlawed books and called them wicked. I used to read them in school, covering them up with a Classic when the teacher walked past.[60]

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Mao makes several direct claims that he in part founded his dialectical method on the traditional Chinese dialectic. "There are numerous examples of materialist dialectics in *Water Margin*," he writes.[61] In the philosophical essays *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* he refers to legends, short stories and novels, as well as historical and military treatises. In the latter he writes:

We Chinese often say, "Things that oppose each other also complement each other." That is, things opposed to each other have identity. This saying is dialectical and contrary to metaphysics. "Oppose each other" refers to the mutual exclusion or the struggle of two contradictory aspects. "Complement each other" means that in given conditions the two contradictory aspects unite and achieve identity. Yet struggle is inherent in identity and without struggle there can be no identity.[62]

The saying is by Pan Ku, a celebrated first century A.D. historian, and appeared in the *History of the Earlier Han Dynasty*. Mao takes an example from the traditional Chinese dialectic, and proceeds to an analysis of the complementarity of opposites directly in the tradition of Hegel and Lenin. He does this elsewhere as well; for example, in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People* he writes:

To sum up, we must learn to look at problems all-sidedly, seeing the reverse as well as the obverse side of things. In given circumstances, a bad thing can lead to good results and a good thing to bad results. More than 2000 years ago Lao Zi said: "Good fortune lieth within bad, bad fortune lurketh within good."[63]

Lao Zi, to whom Mao here refers, is the author of the principal Daoist text, the *Dao De Jing*. Mao's classical references are not only to philosophy, however, but also to traditional Chinese practices where the same dialectical world-view is at work. He often refers in his military writings to the Chinese board game, *Wei Qi*, which we know from its Japanese name as *Go*. Scott Boorman, in his clever, if CIA-oriented, book entitled *The Protracted Game: A Wei-Qi [Ch'i] Interpretation of Maoist Revolutionary Strategy*, has analyzed in detail how seriously one ought to take Mao's allusions to the game, which dates back to the former Han Dynasty, c. 200 B.C. Boorman writes that ". . . the Maoist system of revolution applied in China between 1927 and 1949 . . . Fused from both Chinese and Marxist-Leninist elements but strongly Chinese in underlying dynamics, . . . abounds in paradoxes."[64]

His point is that, since both "*wei-qi* and Chinese Communist strategy are products of the same strategic tradition," much can be learned about Maoism from a study of *wei-qi*. For example, he notes that:

In language familiar to the student of Maoist military dialectics, although the game may have its battles of quick decision, wei-qi is essentially a protracted war . . .

Wei-qi, he later writes:

is a branch of the art of the dialectic: the dialectic of discontinuous connections, concentrated dispersion, encircled counterencirclement, flexible inflexibility.[65]

Similarly Mao makes references to boxing, and no doubt one could learn much indeed about Maoist military strategy by studying in particular the dialectics of the ancient Chinese

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boxing practice known as *Tai ji chuan*, or "Grand Ultimate Boxing." This particular form of martial art was invented by Daoists, and uses the soft to overcome the hard, the slow to overcome the fast, *yin* to overcome *yang*. The thirteenth century *Tai Ji Chuan Classic*, for example, abounds in dialectical thought:

> *When advancing above you must not forget below; when striking to the left you must pay attention to the right; and when advancing you must have regard for retreating.*[66]

Clearly the single most important reference Mao makes to the classical tradition of Chinese dialectical thought, however, is to the military strategy of the ancient Daoist text, Sun Zi's *Art of War*. The last section of this essay examines this influence in detail. Mao was particularly interested in the historical use to which these dialectical strategies had been put over the years. He was especially drawn to study the great Taiping rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century, since its generals were specialists at employing the Daoist strategies of avoiding meeting the enemy's strength: flee before his strength and attack only his weakness.

Mao's Military Dialectics

Holubnychy has given us an insightful analysis of Mao's philosophical dialectic. He locates two particularly clear contributions of Mao:

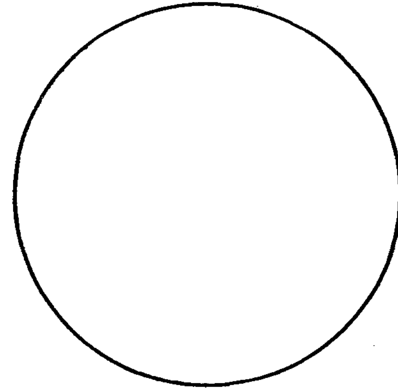
> *Mao Ze-dong's study of contradictions per se is also a novel contribution to materialist dialectics, while his particular postulate of the inequality of contradictions and of the unevenness and unbalanced state of the oppositions inside contradictions is especially novel for post-Engelsian as well as Chinese dialectics.*[67]

He also presents a summary of Mao's philosophical dialectical method, which seems worthwhile outlining in skeletal form in Chart 8 :

Chart 8

Mao's Method of Philosophical Dialectics

1. What one is studying contains one or more contradictions.
2. Grasped as a unity of complementary opposites, contradiction is therefore seen as residing inside a thing. Contradictions between things are not universal. They are present only when contradictory things are complementary to each other, and hence constitute a contradictory unity inside a third thing or phenomenon.
3. While contradictions in things are universal, each contradiction is in itself particular and concrete.
4. Study the process inside a contradiction; there will be unevenness, with one aspect of a contradiction being principal.
5. Discover the tendency of the development of the given contradiction.



Holubnychy also provides an extremely well done, if brief, analysis of Mao's contribution to Marxist-Leninist epistemological theory. He analyzes in detail why in the Chinese context, the principal question of epistemology has always concerned itself with the relation between thought and practice, in contrast to the classical Western concern with the relation between thought and material reality.

There is great debate as to the quality of Mao's philosophical writings, which total only slightly over one-hundred pages. Holubnychy claims that they are among the "masterpieces" of exposition in the dialectical tradition. At the opposite extreme, in *The Communism of Mao Ze-dung*, Arthur Cohen ridicules Mao's philosophical efforts, as well as his application of Marxist dialectics to concrete problems. Stuart Schram finds that Cohen goes to one extreme in finding Mao to have made no contribution, and Holubnychy to have gone to the other with his laudatory evaluation.[68]

What is sorely lacking, however, is analysis of Mao's military dialectics. Max Glaberman in his article "Mao As A Dialectician" makes a claim, the logic of which is inherent in all the above mentioned literature:

> *Mao's practical abilities as a revolutionary leader are widely recognized . . . His theories of guerilla warfare and his development of a theory of national revolution based on the peasantry and on a peasant army are two examples of this. But these have to be discussed in their own right and in another context, although an analysis of Mao as a dialectician may contribute to that discussion ultimately.*[69]

I think we must reverse Glaberman's last statement. It is the analysis of Mao's applied dialectic which may ultimately contribute to the discussion of Mao as a dialectical philosopher. Although there was much more to Mao than his military experience, his applied dialectic is quite visible in his military strategies, and therefore is well worth looking at. The following effort is only first probing of the dialectical logic which informs these strategies. Not only are these writings considerably more extensive than the philosophical essays, but they also are derived directly from his military practice during the Nationalist campaigns, the war against Japan, and the Chinese civil war. We ought to take Mao's epistemological theories seriously in a study of Mao; in *On Practice* he writes: "If you want to obtain knowledge you must participate in the

practice of changing reality." If Mao is right, his best understanding of dialectics ought to be found in that sphere of expression closest to his own practice, which was clearly more that of a commander of armies than as a professional philosopher.

Mao's military dialectics are based on both the Western and Chinese traditions, and the analytical efforts earlier in the paper to clarify some of the central elements of the two dialectical logics provide a method for an analysis of Mao's military strategies. It is clear that these dialectical elements make up much, but far from all, of Mao's logic. Curiously enough, what must be added to this consideration of the dialectical logic of the military strategy, if one is to understand it more deeply, are the other elements of the Daoist world-view listed above. Later I will very briefly point out why this is so.

We know that Mao derives the traditional Chinese military elements for these writings from the ancient Daoist text by Sun Zi, *The Art of War.* (Mao refers to Sun Zi as "The great military expert of ancient China" and makes a half-dozen references to this text throughout his military writings.[70] Mao's enthusiasm for Sun Zi is shared by General Liddel Hart, U.S. Army:

> *Sun Zi's essays on 'The Art of War' form the earliest of known treatises on the subject, but have never been surpassed in comprehensiveness and depth of understanding. They might well be termed the concentrated essence of wisdom on the conduct of war. Among all the military thinkers of the past, only Clauswitz is comparable, and even he is more 'dated' than Sun Zi . . . Sun Zi has clearer vision, more profound insight and eternal freshness.*[71]

I call the *Sun Zi,* which was written during the 4th century B.C. "Daoist" for three principal reasons. First, and most superficially, it was long ago incorporated into the Daoist Canon, the 1150 volume set of Daoist works. Second, Sun Zi, in listing the "factors of war," says that the first principle is to be in accord with the Dao; he thus writes that "Those skilled in war must cultivate the Tao and preserve the laws and are therefore able to formulate victorious policies.[72] But most importantly, the logic of the entire work is thoroughly consistent with the Daoist worldview, which was simultaneously being formalized by Lao Zi at the time this text was being written. Thus Sun Zi often sounds quite like Lao Zi.

From the *Sun Zi:*

> *Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness.*

From the *Lao Zi:*

> *Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water. Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better; It has no equal.*[73]

In looking at the dialectical elements present in Mao, the *Sun Zi* serves to allow us to distinguish rather directly what is Chinese and what is Western in origin, since Mao has relied very heavily on the *Sun Zi* indeed. For example, the element of unity (totality), is sparsely treated in *Sun Zi,* while Mao treats it extensively. Sun Zi's use of the concept is in no sense dialectical; he at no time directly addresses the question of the relation between parts of the army and the army as a whole. He merely sees that there must be an operational unity of the entire army if it is to be effective; "He whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious." He even stresses that this unity must not be broken by the Sovereign himself; "If the situation is one of victory but the sovereign has issued orders not to engage, the general may decide to fight" (and vice-versa).[74]

In contrast to this, Mao is clearly cognizant of the perspective of totality from the Western dialectical tradition, and emphasizes ". . . the importance of taking into account the situation as a whole." The impact of the Western tradition on Mao's consideration of this problem is particularly clear in his treatment of the unity of analysis and synthesis. He writes that "In all cases the decision was taken by correlating the partial situation with the situation as a whole." Specifically, he means that "The plan for the whole battle must be the prelude to, and an organic part of the plan for the whole campaign." Note in the following how only the perspective of totality provides an adequate standard for assessment of any given battle:

> *Without a good plan for the whole campaign it is absolutely impossible to fight a really good first battle. That is to say, even though victory is won in the first battle, if the battle harms rather than helps the campaign as a whole, such a victory can only be reckoned a defeat (as in the case of the battle of Hsunkou in the fifth campaign).*[75]

The concept of initiative is far more subtle in the Chinese than in the Western context. In the West one takes the initiative only on the offensive, whereas in the Chinese tradition one can also maintain the initiative on the defensive.

Sun Zi makes abundant use of "opposition" (complementarity of opposites) in his strategic logic. He speaks of the "mutual reproductivity" of dialectical couples: ". . . their interaction [is] as endless as that of interlocked rings. Who can determine where one ends and the other begins?" In the 2nd century A.D. Cao Cao [Ts'ao Ts'ao] said of Sun Zi, "He ponders the dangers inherent in the advantages, and the advantages inherent in the dangers." Sun Zi applies this opposition logic in many spheres; for example:

> *(18) Apparent confusion is a product of good order; apparent cowardice, of courage; apparent weakness of strength.*
>
> *(18) Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. (19) When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away that you are near . . .*[76]

Sun Zi writes that "In good order they await a disorderly enemy; in serenity, a clamorous one."[77] Mao makes a similar point, "But the Red Army, though weak, has conserved its strength and stored up its energy, and is waiting at its ease for the fatigued enemy."[78] Mao's analytical use of the "complementarity of opposites" is pervasive throughout his studies on war; he uses the technique as a method to insure that adequate attention is paid to all sides of an issue. In one

particularly extreme case in *Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* he considers "the distinction as well as the connection between" (that is, the dialectical relations) that hold between the "enemy and ourselves," "the parts and the whole," "the front and the rear," "the main attack and supplementary attacks," *and thirty-five other dialectical couples*, and then ends the paragraph with "etc., etc."[79]

In the half-dozen suppression campaigns by which Jiang Jieshi [Chiang K'ai-shek] attempted to destroy the Red Army, the major Nationalist strategy was to locate and encircle the Red Army units. Mao's response was to counter-encircle part of the encircling forces, thus allowing a route of escape. The surrounding Nationalist forces were far superior in number to the surrounded Red Army unit, but the counter-surrounding Red units were greater in number than the small segment of the Nationalist line they chose to counter-encircle. Mao sums up this critically important strategy:

> *This is what we call exterior-line operations within interior-line operations, encirclement and suppression within "encirclement and suppression," blockade within blockade, the offensive within the defensive, superiority within inferiority, strength within weakness, advantage within disadvantage, and initiative within passivity.*[80]

One fascinating dialectical couple mentioned by Sun Zi is that between the *zheng* forces (direct, normal) and the *qi* forces (extraordinary, surprise). He not only sets up the distinction, but very clearly employs the element of "becoming" to speak of their "mutual reproductivity." Griffith analyzes Sun Zi on this issue as follows:

> *The normal* (zheng) *force fixes or distracts the enemy; the extraordinary* (qi) *forces act when and where their blows are not anticipated. Should the enemy perceive and respond to a* qi *manoeuvre in such a manner as to neutralize it, the manoeuvre would automatically become* zheng.[81]

For Sun Zi, the relation between the elements of a dialectical couple is therefore not merely an analytical distinction, but an analysis of the constant interplay between the two opposed but complementary aspects. Mao uses the same logic, and is even more emphatic about its importance. He writes that "The two forms of fighting, offensive and defensive, are both employed . . . The special characteristic of China's civil war, however, is the repeated alternation of the two forms over a long period of time."[82] An even clearer use of this logic of the transformation of opposites into each other is found in *On Protracted War:*

> *Attack may be changed into defense and defense into attack; advance may be turned into retreat and retreat into advance; containing forces may be turned into assault forces, and assault forces into containing forces.*[83]

One extension of this logic of transition Mao uses is his insistence that it applies even to the soldiers themselves. With proper strategy the enemy soldiers can even be convinced to switch over to the Red Army. The Nationalist forces seldom benefited from this, since it was well known that they tortured and killed captured Red troops. The roots of Mao's insight are in the *Sun Zi:* "Treat the captives well, and care for them."[84] Mao writes:

> *The newly captured soldiers in particular feel that our army and the Guomindang army are worlds apart . . . The very soldiers who had no courage in the White Army yesterday are very brave in the Red Army today; such is the effect of democracy. The Red Army is like a furnace in which all captured soldiers are transmuted the moment they come over.*[85]

Slave uprising leader Liuhsia Chih denounces Confucius as an artful deceiver.

I find little use of the element of circularity in either Sun Zi or Mao, but Mao makes great use of the Western notion of "spiral development." His fascination with and intensive study of the anti-foreign Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), the populist and anti-foreign aspects of the Boxer Uprising (1900), the first Republican Revolution (1911) and the May 4th Movement (1919) were due to his conviction that China was a semi-colonial country which had first and foremost to divest itself of foreign influence. It is impossible to understand Mao's and the CCP's participation with the Guomindang against the Northern Warlords during the Nationalist Revolution (1923-1927) and during the anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) without realizing that Mao accepted the notion of progressive stages of social development. In the early essay, "The Struggle in the Jing Gang [Chingkang] Mountains" (1928) Mao writes:

> *We fully agree with the Communist International's resolution on China. There is no doubt that China is still at the stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The programme for a thorough democratic revolution in China comprises, externally, the overthrow of imperialism so as to achieve complete national liberation, and, internally, the elimination of the power and influence of the comprador*

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class in the cities, the completion of the agrarian revolution in order to abolish feudal relations in the villages, and the overthrow of the government of the warlords. We must go through such a democratic revolution before we can lay a real foundation for the transition to socialism.[86]

Mao also uses the notion of spiral, necessary development in his analysis of the Red struggles against the Guomindang (1927-1937 and 1946-1949). This plays a role in his analysis of the revolution as a historical certainty, and he develops the concept of "protracted war," which on the contrary is literally proscribed in the *Sun Zi*, in order to allow time for history, in the Hegelian sense, to bring forth the socialist revolution. Thus he writes in the well known essay, "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire," (1930):

> *But when I say that there will soon be a high tide of revolution in China, I am emphatically not speaking of something which in the words of some people "is possibly coming," something illusory, unattainable and devoid of significance for action. It is like a ship far out at sea whose mast-head can already be seen from the shore; it is like the morning sun in the east whose shimmering rays are visible from a high mountain top; it is like a child about to be born moving restlessly in its mother's womb.* [87]

When Mao says "The important thing is to be good at learning," he is making the epistemological point that there must be a constant interplay between theory and practice, since the spiral development of history continually produces "wholly new conditions and a wholly new situation." This continual development of new circumstances makes the point that we need open minds to assess novel developments, since "All the laws for directing war develop as history develops and as war develops; nothing is changeless."[88]

This epistemological demand of the ceaseless checking of plans and theories against the continually changing empirical circumstances, introduces the element of "relativity" (specificity). This element is very much part of Sun Zi, who stresses that ". . . one must respond to the changing circumstances." Just because tactics work in one situation, that does not imply they should be reused: ". . . when I have won a victory I do not repeat my tactics but respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways." It is perhaps more difficult to reanalyze successful tactics than unsuccessful ones. Sun Zi writes that "Thus, one able to gain the victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation may be said to be divine."[89]

This element of relativity is indivisible in the Chinese context from the Daoist element of correctness (*de*). By doing what is precisely appropriate for the situation, the outcome is not decided by the happenstances of the tactical interplay of the two armies; one has defeated the enemy before the battle by defeating his strategy. As Sun Zi phrases this, "Thus a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning." How does one learn of the changing circumstances? By concrete investigations. Sun Zi states that the keys to victory are ". . . not possible to discuss beforehand," to which the Sung dynasty commentator Mei yao-chen adds: "When confronted by the enemy, respond to changing circumstances and devise expedients. How can this be discussed beforehand?"[90]

Mao takes up the Daoist elements of relativity, correctness and experiential knowledge with full vigor. For

Mao, knowledge comes from experience; thus "Neither a beginner nor a person who fights only on paper can become a really able high-ranking commander; only one who has learned through actual fighting in war can do so." For Mao, to understand a revolutionary war involves the same learning process he proposed in general, which is ". . . not a matter of first learning and then doing, but of doing and then learning, for doing is itself learning."[91]

Specific military decisions must be made for concrete situations and cannot be made from the laws of war in general, although such laws are important and must be studied. "What is important and decisive should be determined not by general or abstract considerations, but according to concrete circumstances." Of course the circumstances may change even within the small framework of a single battle, so a constant process of reassessment is called for: "The plan is partially changed in almost every operation, and sometimes it is changed completely." Mao is influenced by the Western dialectical tradition in these matters; thus he writes: "Lenin said that the most essential thing in Marxism, the living soul of Marxism, is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions."[92] Yet the influence of Sun Zi and the general insistence in the Chinese tradition on relativity, experiential knowledge and appropriateness of response served to overdetermine Mao on this issue. To quote from Samuel B. Griffith, Brigadier General, ret., of the U.S. Marine Corps:

> *An almost uncanny ability to determine points of Nationalist weakness permitted them to exploit these qualities and led inevitably to an accelerating disintegration of the Nationalist position. Throughout the Civil War the Communists continually threw Sun Zi's book of war at the Generalissimo's dispirited commanders.*[93]

Finally, Mao makes use of the dialectical notion of "negation of the negation" in his concept of the necessity to invest in loss of territory. Sun Zi writes that "There are some roads not to follow, some troops not to strike, some cities not to assault, and some ground which should not be contested."[94] Mao, in direct contrast with other early leaders of the Red Army, emphasized that it is often necessary to lose in order to win: for example, to turn over an area or city previously captured at expense, since the further expense of defending it would be unbearable, and would force the Red Army to fight in a positional, defensive posture. He writes, "As for the loss of territory, it often happens that only by loss can loss be avoided; this is the principle of "Give in order to take." Giving up territory and populace to the Nationalist forces was negative, but it produced its own ultimate negation: it left the Nationalists with more territory to defend, thus spreading thin their forces and promoting their final defeat.

These considerations of the intermingling of traditional Chinese and Western dialectical logics have explained much but far from all about Mao's military strategy. Still more insights can be gained by introducing certain other elements of the Daoist world-view, for Mao borrows heavily from these. Where the Daoists stress "concealment"—Sun Zi writes that "War is based on deception"—Mao realizes that "It is often possible by adopting all kinds of measures of deception to drive the enemy into the plight of making erroneous judgments and taking erroneous decisions, thus depriving him of his superiority and initiative."[95] Where the Daoists stress the importance of "center," as opposed to over-extension, Mao traces the dialectic between centralized command and decentralized command.[96] The Daoists speak of not-doing (*wu-wei*), and Sun Zi writes "For to win one-hundred victories in one-hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." Mao stresses the importance of avoiding the use of brutal force in the confrontation with the enemy: "The heart of this plan was to avoid the enemy's main forces and strike at his weak spots."[97]

Sun Zi makes great use of the Daoist notion of "indirectness": ". . . march by an indirect route and divert the enemy by enticing him with a bait. So doing, you may set out after he does and arrive before him. One able to do this understands the strategy of the direct and the indirect." It is this same logic which informs Mao's strategic use of supplementary attacks, of circling around under pursuit, and of his "War of Jigsaw Pattern."[98]

Finally, the Daoist elements of "yielding" and "initiative" are centrally important in understanding Mao. In the Daoist world-view one must always yield to superior force, and Sun Zi makes a direct military interpretation of this. In the "art of using troops" he writes: when your ration of troops to you enemy's is 10:1, surround; 5:1, attack; 2:1, divide; 1:1, engage; 1:1+ withdraw and elude. Mao's military strategy directly embodied this principle. If one refuses all battles where one has even a possible military inferiority, and enters only those of assured superiority, then over the long run the enemy will be drained.[99] Another effect of yielding is that it entices the enemy to enter deeply into the guerrilla base area; Sun Zi notes that, "When the army has penetrated deep into hostile territory leaving far behind many enemy cities and towns, it is in serious ground." Mao made powerful use of this philosophy of yielding against the Nationalist forces:

> *In this situation the plan we first decided on was to move from Xingguo by way of Wanan, make a breakthrough at Futian, and then sweep from west to east across the enemy's rear communication lines, thus letting the enemy's main forces make a deep but useless penetration into our base area in southern Jiangxi . . . The heart of this plan was to avoid the enemy's main forces and strike at his weak spots.*[100]

The concept of initiative (*xian-shou*) is far more subtle in the Chinese than in the Western context.[101] In the West one takes the initiative only on the offensive, whereas in the Chinese tradition one can also maintain the initiative on the defensive. This lies at the heart of Mao's notion of "strategic retreat"; he notes that "A well timed retreat allows us to keep the initiative." He emphasizes the point that "The initiative is not something imaginary but is concrete and material"; it ". . . depends on making correct appraisal of the situation and correct military and political decisions." The initiative refers to an army's freedom of action as distinguished from an enforced loss of freedom as when one has no choice but to respond to the enemy's movements. "Every offensive operation must be organized on our initiative and not launched under compulsion." Sun Zi writes: "Those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform . . ."[102] It is very clear in the case of the Chinese Civil War that after the Long March the Red Army maintained the initiative at all times: it was they who decided when and where it was advantageous to join battle with the Guomindang, as for example when Jiang Jieshi's best divisions were lured up into northeast China [Manchuria] and virtually destroyed.[103]

Conclusion

I have proposed that in probably every society the operation of the orthodox world-view is coded into the positive logic with which it is presented, but that there is a simultaneous presence of a heterodox world-view based on a dialectical logic. At any rate, in modern Western civilization the rise of the dialectical world-view in the past two centuries has provided an alternate to the positive logic found in the discourse of the bourgeoisie, which constantly confounds reality with necessity. For almost two millenia of Chinese history, an orthodox, positive logic was socially imposed through the state-sanctioned Confucian domination of education and ritual. It was paralleled, however, by heterodox Daoism, which contained and presented an essentially dialectical logic. Daoism did not stop at merely posing an alternate world view however. On the contrary it directly attacked and ridiculed Confucius and Confucian moral and ideological support of the status quo. Furthermore it provided an ideological underpinning for dozens of political rebellions which arose throughout Chinese history to challenge the centralized powers Confucius so revered.

Maoist dialectics must be understood as a response to both the Western Hegelian-Marxian tradition and the Chinese dialectical tradition. As such it is important to trace out the specifics of these two independent dialectical logics, and to note historically their influence on Mao. It is clear that Mao incorporated both traditions in his military writings since at times he responded to elements of each tradition not present in the other.

Max Weber in his study on Chinese religion may have been correct in his analysis that the Daoist world-view played a role in preventing the emergence of the type of "rationality" necessary for the development of capitalism in China.[104] We might now go one step further and investigate whether Daoism might not have played a role in aiding in the emergence of the dialectical rationality necessary for the development of socialism in China. Weber equated rationality with positive logic, whereas a premise of the present essay is that social thought must be at once positive and dialectical in order adequately to account for the co-presence of order and movement in all that is social. Without a positive understanding of social and political processes we cannot come to understand the concrete, specific nature of the existing conjuncture in which we must act. Yet without a dialectical understanding we confuse the current reality with historical necessity and forget that the existing social order is a product of a social production system which itself can be challenged.

Notes

The drawing of Confucius is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan. Reprinted with permission.

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Logic.* I have the 1892 version of William Wallace's translation (second edition, revised and augmented, XXVI, 2, 439p), p. 149.
2. See Goldmann's remarkable dissertation, *Immanuel Kant,* his rococo study of Pascal and Racine, *The Hidden God,* or in French any of the numerous collections of his essays (especially *Recherches Dialectiques*). Deeply influenced by Lukacs' Marxism, Piaget's structuralism and World War II's horrors, his clear style goes far in demystifying the notion of dialectic.
3. Vsevolid Holubnychy, "Mao Ze-dong's Materialist Dialectics." *The China Quarterly.* No. 19, (July-September 1964) p. 3.
4. Ibid., p. 16.
5. I hope the reader will bear with me on the terminology of "positive" and "dialectical" logic. I am making only an analytical distinction between the two; who in the world would want to go through Diamat-Lysenko again?
6. I am not meaning to equate the traditional Chinese notion of "dialectic" with everything that is Daoist, or vice-versa. I simply think we can learn much about the former from a look at the latter.
7. Chang tung-sun, *The Yen Ching Journal of Social Studies,* I, No. 2, January 1939, pp. 164-171.
8. Hegel, *Logic.* p. 147.
9. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History.* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956).
10. Hegel, *Logic.* p. 147.
11. Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (New York: The Free Press, 1951). I have treated this topic in another essay, "The Dialectics of Confucianism and Daoism in Ancient China."
12. Mao Ze-dong, *Quotations From Chairman Mao Ze-dong.* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967). p. 260.
13. Holubnychy, op. cit., p. 7.
14. Hegel, *Logic.* p. 148.
15. Karl Marx, *A Contribution To The Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1970). p. 188-217.
16. Ibid., p. 204.
17. V. I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks* (Vol. 38 of the collected works). (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1963). p. 226.
18. Ibid., p. 221.
19. Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
20. C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). pp. 298, 299.
21. Ivan Chen, *The Book of Filial Piety.* (London: John Murray, 1908). p. 26.
22. James Legge, *Li Chi.* 2 vols (New York: University Press, 1967) Vol. 1, p. 237; Vol. 2, pp. 72, 93.
23. Buddhism has been in China almost two millenia; in many ways it has been even more important than native Daoism in Chinese history. Buddhism sinocized itself by adopting many Daoist patterns; Daoism modernized itself by the obverse. A study in greater length would want to look at the interplay of both with Confucianism, and with each other.
24. Yang, op. cit. p. 193.
25. Henri Masperso, *Le Taoism et les Religions Chinoises* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1971). p. 90.
26. Chang Wing-tsit. "The story of Chinese Philosophy." In Charles Moore (ed.), *The Chinese Mind* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967) p. 31.
27. J. W. Freiberg, "The Taoist Mind: A Case Study in a 'Structure of Consciousness'" in *Sociological Analysis.* Vol. 36, 4: pp. 304-322.
28. Joseph Needham, *The Grand Titration* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969) p. 21.
29. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Vol. 2) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). Although the second volume contains a proper chapter on Daoism, remarks are also made throughout the later volumes.
30. With the notable exception of the sophistry of the "Logicians."
31. The contrast between these "five phases" and the Greek "four elements" (fire, earth, air and water) codes exactly the point being made; the latter were seen as the actual building blocks of nature.
32. Needham, 1956. p. 107.
33. J. C. Cooper, *Taoism: The Way of the Mystic.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) p. 28.
34. Raymond Van Over, *Taoist Tales* (New York: Mentor, 1963), p. 114.
35. Hellmut Wilhelm, *Eight Lectures on the I Ching* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) p. 18.
36. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1968).

37. My idea is that the dialectic between the earlier King Wen edition of the ancient trigrams and the Confucian Great Commentary has much to tell us about class relations in ancient China.

38. Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching*. (New York: Bollinger Foundation, 1950) p. L.

39. Max Kaltenmark, *Lao Tzu and Taoism*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) p. 26.

40. Wilhelm, op. cit., p. 20.

41. J. C. Cooper, op. cit., p. 46.

42. Needham, 1956. p. 75

43. Chan Wing-tsit, op. cit., p. 62.

44. Needham, 1956. p. 122.

45. Watson, op. cit., p. 152.

46. Holmes Welch, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way* (Boston: Beacon, 1957) p. 23.

47. Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (New York: Grove Press, 1958) p. 51.

48. Needham, 1956. p. 82.

49. A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (New York: Paragon Books, 1960) p. 163.

50. These differing notions of whether society is essentially order or essentially movement are explainable in terms of the historical specificity of the development of the dialectical logics in the two cases: technical and political revolutions in ancient China led to little social change, in deep contrast to the European framework of the past two centuries.

51. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1938) p. 144.

52. Ibid., p. 142. On this, also see Fred Wakeman, *History and Will* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

53. Ibid., p. 147.

54. Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 52.

55. Snow, op. cit., p. 151.

56. Ibid., p. 157.

57. Meisner, op. cit., p. 101.

58. Ibid., p. 49.

59. Ibid., p. 139.

60. Snow, op. cit., p. 133.

61. Mao Ze-dong, *Collected Works* (4 Vols.) (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967 and 1969) p. 27.

62. Mao Ze-dong, *On Contradiction* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966) p. 68.

63. Mao Ze-dong, *Four Essays on Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1968).

64. Scott Boorman, *The Protracted Game: A Wei-Qi Interpretation of Maoist Revolutionary Strategy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 4.

65. Ibid., pp. 5, 23, 37.

66. T. T. Liang, *T'ai Chi Ch'uan* (Boston: Redwing Book Company, 1974) p. 11.

67. Holubnychy, op. cit., p. 30.

68. Arthur Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) And Sturat Schram, "Mao Tse-tung as Marxist Dialectician," *China Quarterly* Vol. 29 (January-March 1967) p. 159.

69. Martin Glaberman, "Mao As A Dialectician" in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 8 (March 1968) p. 95.

70. Mao Ze-dong, *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966) p. 187.

71. Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) p. v.

72. Ibid., pp. 63, 88.

73. Feng Gia-fu and Jane English, *Tao Te-Ching of Lao Tzu* (New York: Random House, 1972) Ch. 78.

74. Griffith, op. cit., pp. 83, 128.

75. Mao, 1966. pp. 82, 116, 130, 130.

76. Griffith, op. cit., pp. 92, 113, 92, 66.

77. Ibid., p. 108.

78. Mao, 1966. p. 115.

79. Ibid., p. 83.

80. Ibid., p. 133.

81. Griffith, op. cit., p. 91.

82. Mao, 1966. p. 99.

83. Mao Ze-dong, *On Protracted War* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1938) p. 102.

84. Griffith, op. cit., p. 76.

85. Mao, 1966. p. 31.

86. Ibid., p. 45. (my emphasis)

87. Ibid., p. 75.

88. Ibid., pp. 84, 122, 80.

89. Griffith, op. cit., pp. 141, 100.

90. Ibid., p. 70.

91. Mao, 1966. pp. 87, 88.

92. Ibid., pp. 78, 83, 87, 93.

93. Griffith, op. cit., p. 54.

94. Ibid., p. 111.

95. Ibid., p. 106 and Mao, 1966. pp. 239-245.

96. Mao, 1966. p. 83.

97. Griffith, op. cit., p. 77 and Mao, 1966. p. 127.

98. Griffith, op. cit., p. 102 and Mao, 1966. pp. 219ff.

99. Griffith, op. cit., p. 80 and Mao, 1966. p. 135.

100. Griffith, op. cit., 131 and Mao, 1966. p. 127.

101. See Boorman, op. cit., p. 31.

102. Mao, 1966. pp. 120, 132, 161, 164 and Griffith, op. cit., p. 93.

103. The military rout during the last several months of the Vietnamese War, in which there were no major battles, is a perfect example of the consequences of a total loss of initiative and the extreme tactical disorganization this can lead to even in a thoroughly modern army.

104. Weber, op. cit.