

The “Althusser-Mao” Problematic and the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism: Maoism, China and Althusser on Ideology

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**"The 'Althusser-Mao' Problematic and the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism: Maoism, China and Althusser on Ideology"**

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**Abstract:** In her article "The 'Althusser-Mao' Problematic and the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism: Maoism, China and Althusser on Ideology," Fang Yan analyses the "Althusser-Mao" problematic which was first brought up by Liu Kang, outlining how Mao's ideas contributed to the formation of Althusser's theory of ideology. The paper is divided into three parts: first, how Mao influenced Althusser's propositions of the primacy of relations of production and reciprocal action of the superstructure; secondly, how Mao influenced Althusser's notions of ideological practice, Ideological State Apparatuses and ideological class struggle; and finally, how Althusser drew on Mao in the formation of the concept of "mass ideological revolution." Yan argues that the "Althusser-Mao" problematic elevates ideology to such an extent that ideology or ideological struggle becomes synonymous with the search for "alternative modernity."

**Fang YAN**

### **The 'Althusser-Mao' Problematic and the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism: Maoism, China and Althusser on Ideology**

Among possible perspectives from which to interpret Althusser's theory of ideology, Althusser's "Chinese connections" (Liu, "Legacy" 236), namely, his connections to Maoism and China, are cannot be ignored. Liu Kang argues that Maoism is a critical resource in Althusser's inquiries into the problems of superstructural elements such as culture, ideology and politics, in his search for an alternative modernity. Hence the formation of the "Althusser-Mao" problematic (Kang, "The Problematic" 2), and the assertion that Maoism should be seen as a theory or a knowledge of an alternative modernity free from the constraints of its locality and temporality (Kang, "Maoism" 26). Drawing on Liu's insights, I contend that one of the major inspirations for Althusser's theory of ideology is none other than Maoism, and that the revolutionary dimension inherent in Althusser's theory of ideology should be reassessed through the prism of Maoism and China. The purpose of this paper is to unravel what specific concepts constitute the "Althusser-Mao" problematic by interrogating how Maoism and China were transformed and integrated into Althusser's endeavor of reconstructing the concepts and terms of the theory of ideology and historical materialism, in his reconstruction Marxist historical materialism.

Althusser's view of "refounding or reconstructing historical materialism" (Balibar x) suggests his loyalty to the fundamental law of Marxist historical materialism, that economic development is the "ultimate cause and great moving power" (Engels xviii-xix). It implies that no matter how he reset the terms of historical materialist tradition or reorganized their relative positions and mode of motion, Althusser always oriented his thoughts towards this law. Althusser repeatedly asserted that it is the base, the economic infrastructure, instead of the superstructure, that is "determinant in the last instance" (*Reproduction* 21, 54, 126, 130, 162, 201-2, 204, 237). That is to say, constructing valid mechanism for relations of production to act back on the productive forces and for the superstructure to act back on the base is essential for Althusser's "refounding" of historical materialism from the end of the superstructure to the end of the base. It was exactly in this conjuncture that Maoism and China become important in Althusser's theses of the "primacy of the relations of production" and the "reciprocal Action" of the superstructure.

The importance of the relations of production has already been stressed in Althusser's previous works, such that the relations of production were underlined as the "condition of existence" for the forces of production (Althusser, *For Marx* 205) and that the relations of production were highlighted as the "true subjects" of history (Althusser, *Reading Capital* 108). But a more elaborate discussion on this subject appears in his writing on the third thesis of the "four classical theses" of Marxist theory. Althusser argues that "on the basis of the existing productive forces and *within the limits they set, the relations of production play the determinant role*" (*Reproduction* 20-1). That is to say, he determines "the primacy of the relations of production over productive forces...on the basis of, and within the limits set by, the objectively existing forces of production" (*Reproduction* 217). Mao Zedong was immediately invoked after the thesis was proposed; as Althusser writes, "the whole of *Capital* and all of Lenin's and Mao's work comprise a commentary on this thesis" (*Reproduction* 21). It is not "all" of Mao's works that play a role in this thesis. Althusser refers to three of Mao's works in a booklist in "To My Readers": "On Practice," "On Contradiction" and "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" (4). "On Contradiction" is arguably the most plausible source of inspiration. Comparing "On Contradiction" to Althusser's comments mentioned above (Althusser, *Reproduction* 217), Mao's proposition that "in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role" (*Selected Works* 1:336) is clearly echoed in Althusser's text. The two texts have striking similarities in the major points of emphasis: First, in their qualifications, with Mao's "in certain conditions" and Althusser's "within the limits." Second, in stressing the determinant role of the relations of production: Mao declaring them to have "the principal and decisive role" and Althusser writing that they "play the determinant role." And third, in the insistence of the fundamental law of historical materialism: Mao arguing that "productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role" (Mao, *Selected Works* 1: 336) and Althusser insisting that the base is "determinant in the last instance." In this regard, Mao's "On Contradiction" should be considered one of the major resources for Althusser's thesis regarding the "primacy of relations of productions." In addition, China's practices and achievements undergird the validity of Althusser's thesis. Althusser took Mao as a theorist and practitioner (in "texts and acts") to "assign *primacy*" theoretically and politically to the relations of production instead of productive

forces (Althusser, *Reproduction* 214). Althusser believed that the miracle of building gigantic dams only with tools like "small baskets" and "shoulder poles" (24) was mainly due to the large-scale cooperation adopted by the Chinese People's Communes and the prioritization of the transformations in the relations of production, which was also the same reason behind the triumph of the Chinese 1949 revolution (215).

For Althusser, the base/superstructure is a distinction containing rather "reductionist and economic determinist tendencies inherent in classical Marxism" (Liu, "Problematic" 2). He tried to address this by emphasizing the so-called "reciprocal action" or the process in which one "reacts back on" the other in the relationship between the superstructure and the base (Althusser, *Reproduction* 54, 162-3, 238). The connections between Maoism, China and this Althusserian thesis can be unfolded along two dimensions. The first is the well-acknowledged connection between Althusser's "overdetermination" and Mao's "On Contradiction" (Bourg; Jameson "Periodizing"; Liu "Problematic," "Hegemony," "Poeticizing"; Montag; Robcis) which already entails the connection between Althusser's thoughts on the superstructure and Maoism. Althusser stated his thoughts regarding the superstructure's "relative autonomy" through the concept of "overdetermination" (Althusser, *For Marx* 111, 113), and Mao showed argued for it in his "On Contradiction." Mao believed that superstructural elements, such as politics and culture, play "the principal and decisive role" in certain conditions, which exemplifies his thoughts on the alteration of the principal/secondary contradictions (*Selected Works* 1: 336). In other words, Mao's endeavors to reconstruct dialectical materialism and historical materialism were synchronous, intersectional, and intertextual, similarly to Althusser (Balibar shows the overlapping of Althusser's two endeavors, see Balibar x). Mao's impact on Althusser's reconsideration of Marxist dialectical concepts thus inevitably involved his impact on Althusser's reconstruction of Marxist ideological concepts. Secondly, Althusser believed that Maoism and China concretized his theorization of the phrase "reacts back on" or "reciprocal action." In order to remold the "descriptive term 'reacts back on' or 'reciprocal action,'" Althusser suggested that the above terms should be re-examined according to the concept of "reproducing" and the effects of class struggle (*Reproduction* 163). Althusser insisted on adopting "the standpoint of reproduction" to understand the class struggle in the Ideological State Apparatuses, as he claimed that "the standpoint of reproduction" equates "the standpoint of the class struggle as an overall process" (*Reproduction* 220). Therefore, it can be deduced that, in the strictest sense, the Althusserian "reacts back on" or "reciprocal action" of the superstructure amounts to none other than the class struggle in the superstructure, or the mechanism that after class struggle is fostered and unleashed by the base (*Reproduction* 163) and transmitted to the superstructure, class struggle in the superstructure will then react back on the base. It was exactly in this respect that Althusser's understanding of Maoism and China intersected with his consideration of (ideological) class struggle, which will be further illustrated in the following pages.

It can be argued that the term "ideology," to Mao Zedong's understanding, is not equivalent to that of Althusser's. "Ideology" in Mao's sense mainly stands for "culture" (文化) or "ideas" (观念), as he states, "Any given culture (as an ideological form) is a reflection of the politics and economics of a given society" (*Selected Works* 2: 340). This is a typical Marxist expression following the Marxist formula of the relation between the superstructure and the base, though the word "culture" is highlighted instead of "ideology." Therefore, Mao's interpretation of ideology as "ideas" or "culture" seems to contradict Althusser's emphasis on the non-idea/non-spiritual feature or the materiality of ideology (*Reproduction* 156). However, it is no wonder that Althusser's "On the Cultural Revolution" (1966) essay is widely supposed to preconceive his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970) essay in many aspects (Robcis 61-2; Bourg 239), or that the latter text is regarded as the theorization of the former (Elliot 212). These are easily surmised from the fact that, first, Althusser dealt with Mao's works as a whole (early in the 1950s he had read *Mao's Selected Reading from the Works of Mao Tse-tung*, see Althusser, *Spectre* 247). And, second, that he initiatively immersed himself in the reality of China by constantly reading Chinese newsletters (Robcis 53). In fact, Althusser's whole project centered on ideology and reproduction during this period from which the then published "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970) was "the 'montage' of extracts" (Balibar xii) kept Maoism and China within sight all the time.

The "transformation of one relation to the lived world into a new relation by ideological struggle" or "ideological practice" is, as Ben Brewster argues, a concept that Althusser developed from Engels's and especially from Mao Zedong's elaborations. This validates ideological practice as the third practice beyond the economic and political ones (Althusser, *Reading* 316). It is difficult to pinpoint which specific work of Mao's is related to the concept of "ideological practice." However, Althusser's reading of Mao's "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" (Robcis 59), a text in which

Mao did elaborate on the significance of ideological struggle, underpins Brewster's observation. It is also noteworthy that according to the above-mentioned definition, the term "ideological practice" is to a large extent a synonym for "ideological struggle," suggesting a rather militant tendency inherent within this concept. This tendency becomes more apparent in its later evolution.

The "distinct," relatively autonomous ideological practice (Althusser, *Reading* 58) seems to expand its territory in the 1966 essay in which Althusser argues that "Just as ideology is present in all practices of a given society, the C.R. bears just as much on the forms of ideology that intervene in economic practices, political practices, pedagogical practices, etc." ("Cultural Revolution" 7). Althusser's insistence on the omnipresence of ideology, which was doubtlessly influenced by Freud (Althusser, *Reproduction* 176), has one important result. Althusser's observation on Chinese Cultural Revolution led him to the conclusion that cultural revolution, or in his own summarization, the "mass ideological revolution" or class struggle on the "ideological level" ("Cultural Revolution" 7, 12) is "present" within in all practices, not outside of them but universally *within* them. It is regretful that the English translation of "Sur la révolution culturelle" omits "scientific and technical practice" and "aesthetic practice" in Althusser's original wording ("révolution Culturelle" 7; "Cultural Revolution" 7). Althusser's reference to "aesthetic practice" should have attracted researchers in literary and theoretical studies to notice his consideration of the ideological struggle within artistic/literary/aesthetical practice.

By comparing ideology to "cement," Althusser reasserted ideology's permeation into all practices. Ideology "seeps" like cement into "individual's relation to all their practices" and in "their relation to economic practice and political practice" ("Cultural Revolution" 14-5). The analogy of "cement" epitomizes Althusser's insistence on the omnipresence of ideology, which would inevitably involve the omnipresence of ideological practice or ideological struggle due to the omnipresence of the "mass ideological revolution" as mentioned above. The functions of the "cement" or ideology, which "distinguishes and cements" (15) human beings, are exactly the same as those of the ideological practice/struggle. Therefore, Althusser's reaffirmation here of the penetration of ideology into every practice (especially including economic and political practices) logically equals the affirmation of the expansion or generalization of ideological struggle. That is to say, ideological practice is now considered more than a third, distinct, and relative autonomous practice but rather an *overall* (as Althusser's likes to put it) and encompassing practice within every other practice. No wonder Althusser's notion of ideological practice has been criticized for being "so wide as to collapse it into other kinds of practice" (Abercrombie et al. 171).

The above thus reveals how the concept of ideological practice and its evolution intersects with Althusser's understanding of Maoism and China, which logically leads to further discussions on Althusser's concept of the "Ideological State Apparatus." Althusser writes, "An ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (*Reproduction* 184). Here Althusser elucidates the equivalence of ideology as apparatus and ideology as practice (in each apparatus), since ideology's existence in each apparatus is precisely due to ideology's existence in the practice of each apparatus. In other words, ideological apparatus and ideological practice (in each apparatus) are two sides of the same coin. The "cement" analogy in the 1966 essay, seen as substantial progress towards his later configuration of the "Ideological State Apparatus" (Robcis 62, Bourq 239), also supports the above argument, since the "cement" is a physical material which simultaneously relates to (by "seeping" into) all practices, consistent with the feature of Ideological State Apparatus as material existence which simultaneously involves practices in each of them.

Therefore, we have two emphases of Althusser in his 1966 essay: first, on ideology's presence "in all practices," especially including political practices and aesthetic practice, and second on the omnipresence of ideological practice as discussed above. Both of these should be read in parallel with his emphasis in his 1970 ISA essay on the omnipresence of an Ideological State Apparatus that covers almost every domain of social life such as the political ISA, the cultural ISA, and so on (Althusser, *Reproduction* 243). In other words, the omnipresence of Ideological State Apparatus interacts with the omnipresence of ideology and ideological practice. In this regard, the concept of ideological practice discussed in Althusser's 1966 essay should be conceived as a crucial step towards the concept of "Ideological State Apparatus." And thus Maoism and China's involvement in the concept of "ideological practice" logically extends into the concept of "Ideological State Apparatus."

Althusser had in fact already dealt with one of the Ideological State Apparatuses in his 1966 essay, yet from a rather different and complementary perspective. In his 1970 essay and the whole project Althusser was working on during that period, his strategy was mainly to "reinforce and accentuate the 'totalitarian' image of bourgeois domination and the obscure power of the state" in order to overthrow it (Balibar xv). For instance, the teaching system, as the "number-one" Ideological State Apparatus, is especially underlined in the 1970 ISA essay as using "suitable methods of punishment, expulsion,

selection" for the purpose of disciplining both the teachers and students and ensuring their "*subjection to the ruling ideology*" (Althusser, *Reproduction* 237, 244, 250). No wonder the equation "system=power=ideology" was found on Althusser's index card on Mao, since "the mechanism of subjection responsible for the split but also for the construction of the subject was called ideology" (Robcis 60). The ISA essay epitomized Althusser's emphasis on the splitting and division of the subject by ideology and also the subjection of the subject to the state power. In parallel, the 1966 essay can arguably be understood as unravelling the "construction" of the subject within the Ideological State Apparatus. In Althusser's observation, "the teaching system in place for the education of the youth...was in China a bastion of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology," therefore it is vital to fill the ideological "void" of the youth or otherwise the "bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology" will fill the blank, and what is particularly noticeable is Althusser's belief in the youth's contribution to the transformation of the existing ideology and their own ideology by fighting against bourgeois ideology, thus undertaking a great revolutionary task (the English translation omits the phrase "mais en luttant contre l'idéologie bourgeoise." ( "révolution culturelle" 9, "Cultural Revolution" 9). Although in a very preliminary way, Althusser shed some light on the possibility of the youth's shift towards proletarian ideology and the (re)construction of their subjectivity through their struggle against bourgeois ideology *within* the "bastion" of the teaching system. Therefore, this provides a positive, supplementary angle from which to interpret Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus which in many cases is labeled as purely suppressive.

Ideological class struggle is another concept that reveals Althusser's thoughts on Maoism on many levels. Althusser's understanding of Maoism plays a rather significant role in his emphasis on "class struggle," while doubtlessly Althusser inherited Marxist-Leninist ideas on this subject. When expounding on the thesis that "the class struggle is the motor of history," both Marx and Lenin (the "absolute primacy of the class struggle") and Mao ("Never forget the class struggle") are quoted and underlined (Althusser, *Self-criticism* 50). Elliot thus suggested that Althusser's proposition of the class struggle as the motor of history was a "nominal" Marxist proposition with "certainly Maoist" inclination in it (Elliot 150). Indeed, Althusser's "class struggle" is to a great extent more directly related to the ideas of his contemporary Mao Zedong than to those of other Marxists. In Althusser's interpretation, Mao Zedong's "long-term class war" is an "accurate formula" and "excellent summary of Marx's and Lenin's theses" (Althusser, *Reproduction* 151).

Since "only from the point of view" of class struggle that "it is possible to explain the ideologies existing in a social formation" (Althusser *Reproduction* 271), the upper stage or the alternative form of "ideological practice" is logically none other than ideological class struggle. Althusser's thought on the ideological struggle also has its roots in his reading of Mao and China. Althusser saw the strategic importance of class struggle within the ideological apparatuses in China's 1949 Revolution: "It is no accident that all the major social revolutions...and the 1949 Chinese Revolution...were preceded by a *long class struggle* that unfolded not only *around* the Ideological State Apparatuses in place, but also *in* these ideological apparatuses" (*Reproduction* 159). According to Althusser, the 1949 Chinese Revolution is consistent with the two objects of "revolutionary class struggle": while the ultimate object of class struggle is the repressive apparatus as the "hard core of the state," class struggle in the ideological apparatuses should be conducted beforehand because it is "possible, serious and can go a very long way" (*Reproduction* 152-3).

Althusser's involvement with Maoism on the thesis of ideological class struggle culminated in his concerns about the long-termness of ideological class struggle even after the completion of social form transition. The long-termness of ideological class struggle is admittedly a lasting topic in Marxist tradition. Marx has already noticed that men become "conscious of this conflict and fight it out" in "ideological forms" (Marx 12). Lenin also emphasizes the continuity of class struggle in socialist countries with changed forms, and it is cultural revolution that can "make our country a complete socialist country" (Lenin 136-7, 210). What Mao Zedong contributes is his particular, constant concern with the long-termness and vital importance of ideological class struggle even within socialist countries. As he states, "the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the ideological field will still be protracted and tortuous and at times even very sharp. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is not really settled yet" (*Selected Works* 5:409). Accordingly, the wrestling between socialism and capitalism lies not only in the economic domain, but also probably primarily in the ideological domain. The affinities of Althusser's elaborations with Mao's are striking and by no means accidental, considering Althusser's acquaintance with Mao's works, especially "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People." He explicitly writes, "It is in the ideological class struggle that the fate...of a socialist country is played out" ("Cultural Revolution" 12). Althusser's above

elaboration could arguably be taken as a reduction and rewriting of Mao's thesis, albeit with obvious enhancement and radicalization in rhetoric to stress the thesis into its extreme. In another instance, Althusser writes, "In socialist countries,...a class struggle that is played out primarily elsewhere than in the economic sphere: in the political domain, and above all in the ideological domain," therefore, "*Not seeing that class struggle can unfold in its purest form [par excellence] in the ideological sphere* is to abandon the sphere of the ideological to bourgeois ideology" ("Cultural Revolution" 12-3). In terms of the emphasis on the class struggle playing out at the ideological level, and on the intenseness and the vital importance of the struggle between bourgeois ideology and proletarian ideology, Althusser's above statement could be viewed as a paraphrase of Mao's words, albeit in a refined, more theorized and militant way. All of these examples show how Althusser's understanding of Maoism got entangled with his concept of "ideological class struggle."

Mass ideological revolution, namely, the "third revolution" which is added "to the prior *political and economic* revolution," or a revolution "*in the ideology of the masses*" to "give the socialist infrastructure...a corresponding...*ideological* superstructure" is evidently a theorized summarization of Cultural Revolution by Althusser ("Cultural Revolution" 2, 6). Meanwhile, it is also a conceptual invention and a substantial development within the Marxist historical materialist tradition which thus goes beyond Chinese locality and temporality (Liu, "Maoism" 26) and touches upon Althusser's concerns about the universal impasses of Western workers' movements and Communist parties, involving inquiries concerning the very core of Marxist historical materialism, such as why is mass ideological revolution necessary, what are the masses, and why does ideological revolution matter?

The necessity of mass ideological revolution comes from what Althusser summarizes as the "two-roads" problem for socialist countries, namely, the revolutionary road "leading toward the consolidation and development of socialism and then toward the passage to communism" and the regressive road of "regression back toward capitalism" ("Cultural Revolution" 6). The central concern of the "two-roads" problem is "the possibility of 'regressing' from a socialist country towards capitalism," which directly refutes those "religious, evolutionist, economist interpretations" of Marxism, and confirms a non-evolutionist, non-economist historical materialism that "allows for lags, distortions, regressions without repetition, leaps, etc." ("Cultural Revolution" 10,11). Apart from its theoretical value, the "two-roads" problem should also be read as Althusser's implicit critique of Western communist parties and Stalinism in his era. According to Goshgarian, Althusser's "On the Cultural Revolution" essay expressed more than just its author's temporary enthusiasm; instead, it "crowned a shift in his assessment of the political situation" such as his realization that the union of Marxist theory and the worker's movement was breaking up, the French and Italian Communist Parties were regressing into Social-Democratic parties and had ceased to be revolutionary, and so forth (Goshgarian xxxvi-xxxvii). Therefore, the "two-roads" problem in Althusser's concern should be interpreted more as a metaphor which surpasses Chinese regionality and connects to the common plight of Western worker's movements and the universal crises of Western Communist parties. Since the "two-roads" problem is of universal importance in both theory and reality, Althusser's elaborations on the "mass ideological revolution" as the response to the "two-roads" problem is thus of universal importance in both theory and reality as well. Moreover, the "mass ideological revolution" in a larger context epitomizes Althusser's imaginary or even utopian solution for the political and theoretical dilemma of his times. Or, drawing on Liu's words, this conception typifies Althusser's pursuit of an Maoist alternative modernity through revolutions in ideological domain. ("Problematic" 2) In Althusser's own words, the consideration of Cultural Revolution "in light of Marxist principles" brings out "theoretical and philosophical lessons" that "belong to all communists" ("Cultural Revolution" 2, 18).

Then the crucial theoretical question for Althusser to elucidate is as follows: why is the mass ideological revolution capable of playing a role in changing the "road" or namely the social formation in either consolidating and developing socialism or preventing regression back towards capitalism? ("Cultural Revolution" 6). Althusser's previous works on the relative autonomy of the superstructure and ideology (*For Marx* 111) and the relative independence of "ideological time" in relation to the time of economic production (*Reading Capital* 101) surely have laid theoretical groundwork for the relative autonomy of ideological revolution. The vital response to the above question, however, entails a closer reading of the two keywords in the phrase "mass ideological revolution": what is the "masses" and why is ideological revolution capable of making an impact on social formation?

The masses are the very conductors of the mass ideological revolution, as the mass ideological revolution is "*a revolution of the masses*" and "made by the masses themselves" ("Cultural Revolution" 7). Then what constitutes the masses? The conception of "the masses" is connected with Althusser's Maoism as well. A clear piece of evidence lies in the term "people" in Althusser's vocabulary, which is to a great extent a synonym for the "masses" that closely relates to Mao Zedong's works. "People" as a

keyword is especially "prioritized" in Mao Zedong's thoughts and Chinese Marxism, which theoretically refers to "the congregation based on yet beyond class, the revolutionary unity that is constituted by numerous classes with far-ranging common interests" (Hu 6). At the same time, the emphasis on the "people" also points out the political importance of the question of what constitutes the congregation/unity of the "people" in concrete situations: "we must first be clear on what is meant by 'the people' and what is meant by 'the enemy.' The concept of 'the people' varies in content in different countries and in different periods of history in a given country" (*Selected Works* 5:384-5). Mao's emphasis on the distinction between "the people" and non-people and the variations of "the people" in concrete situations resonate in Althusser's thoughts. Drawing directly from Mao's above content, Althusser positioned the questions "what classes make up 'the people?'" as the "preliminary but absolute essential question for every political undertaking" (Althusser and Macciocchi 4-5). Similarly, the conception of "mass ideological revolution" self-evidently reveals that such a revolution is carried out by the "masses" instead of the non-masses. That is to say, it is exactly through the distinction of masses/non-masses that the masses as the conductors of the mass ideological revolution are highlighted, formulated, consolidated and united. Althusser's interpretation of Mao's "one divides into two" attests the above mentioned dialectics of division/unification. In his notes on Mao, Althusser said that "one divides into two" or "division" is "a good and not bad thing" for revolutionary causes, because "it helps to elevate man's ideological conscience" and "it reinforces the unity of revolutionaries" (Robcis 59-60).

It is exactly on the basis of the formulation and unification of the "masses" as discussed above that the "mass line," namely, "making the widest possible appeal and having the greatest confidence in the masses" and in "this 'mass line,'" is adopted as the main method of mass ideological revolution ("Cultural Revolution" 7-8). Althusser's endorsement of Mao's "mass line" is inevitably involved with one of his central considerations on historical materialism, that is, who can make the history? Elliot took Althusser, who argued that "A Communist Party must have a 'mass' revolutionary political line" and carry out "concrete analysis of ... 'the masses' who are, in the final analysis, the only ones who can make history," as an author who is "an Althusserian Maoist" (quoted by Elliot from Althusser's correspondence, see Elliot 216). The above argument clearly reveals how Althusser incorporates Mao's "mass line" into his own train of thought of "'the masses...can make history.'" Actually, Mao's "The people, and the people alone, are the motive force of world history" (*Selected Works* 3:257) and Althusser's "it is the masses which make history" (*Self-criticism* 46-7) are remarkably similar, despite their obvious different historical and philosophical contexts and Althusser's structuralist reading of Mao's texts. Robcis argues that Althusser regards Mao mainly as a structuralist and an antihumanist (Robcis 60-1), and Liu also points out Althusser's "oblivion" to Mao's emphasis on human agency ("Problematic" 4). What is still worth noticing is the momentum that Althusser invests in the concept of the "masses." He stresses Mao's "mass line" to its full effect and urges "all political leaders" to follow the mass line "with no hesitation and even with a certain audacity" ("Cultural Revolution" 8).

However, as emphatic as the above may be, the "masses" don't seem to be the "true subjects" of history due to Althusser's antihumanist tenacity, that men only "Träger" (support), men are "occupants" or "functionaries" instead of "true 'subjects'" (*Reading* 180; *Self-criticism* 129-130), and that history does not have a "Subject" (*Self-criticism* 99). This antihumanist/structuralist position is the very reason why Althusser suggested in his 1966 essay that "the masses can only act in mass organizations" ("Cultural Revolution" 8), although he embraces their ponderance as the conductor of ideological revolution at the same time. The antilogy between Althusser's fondness for the slogan "trust the masses" and his emphasis on the "mass organizations" has not escaped notice (Hamza 110). That is to say, in Althusser's view, the core mechanism of the "mass ideological revolution" lies primarily in the mechanism of ideology itself, or, in the ideology as "a structure essential to the historical life of societies" (*For Marx* 232) instead of in certain human agencies. Then, the remaining, pivotal theoretical conundrum is why ideological revolution is pertinent to the change of social formation and how Althusser's response to this question is related to his Maoism.

Althusser has provided the most audacious, yet still preliminary inferences from both negative and positive perspectives "in the light of Marxist theoretical principles (historical materialism, dialectical materialism)" ("Cultural Revolution" 3). From a negative perspective, Althusser claims that "in a socialist country, the process of 'regression' can begin with the ideological; it is through the ideological that the effect that will progressively touch the political, then the economic sphere, will pass" ("Cultural Revolution" 13). From the positive perspective, he argues that "it is by undertaking a revolution in the ideological sphere, in leading the class struggle in the ideological sphere that it becomes possible to impede or reverse this process and steer a socialist country in the other direction: the revolutionary road" ("Cultural Revolution" 13). It can be seen that no matter from which perspective, ideology in



Althusser's argument is always *the* initiator and motivator of the "Domino Effect," namely, the sequence from ideology to politics then to economics. Althusser's most dauntless statement lies in these sentences: "in a certain conjecture in the history of socialist countries, the *ideological* can become the strategic point at which everything gets decided. It is, then, in the ideological sphere that the crossroads is located. The future depends on the ideological. It is in the *ideological class struggle* that the fate (progress or regression) of a socialist country is played out" ("Cultural Revolution" 12). The above statements thus construct a direct causality from ideology to a certain social formation or a mechanism which shows how ideology "reacts back upon" or has "reciprocal actions" to the base and social formation, that is, a causal chain as ideology—>politics—>economics—>social formation. Accordingly, the progress or regression of certain social formation is determined above all by either a positive or negative role played by ideology, while ideology as the "strategic point" and mechanism stays invariable.

It must be admitted that Althusser's above theoretical work on the mass ideological revolution and the causal chain from ideology to the base remains rather cursory. Althusser's works that followed, especially his *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, elaborate on and refine these theses. As Goshgarian suggests, a considerable part of Althusser's work that followed after the 1966 essay provides a "theoretical foundation" for "what certain Chinese theses affirm[ed]" (Goshgarian xxxvii). Elliot also regards Althusser's ISA essay as a reconstruction of historical materialism with the "concerns and emphases of Maoism" (Elliot 212). The concepts and propositions discussed above are precisely the "theoretical foundation" provided by Althusser to reconstruct historical materialism with his Maoist inclination. Therefore, Althusser's 1966 essay, especially his concept of the "mass ideological revolution," ("Cultural Revolution" 7, 12)," should be regarded as both the *origin* and the *destination* of the above concepts and propositions. On the one hand, the purest and highest optimum of the "primacy of relations of productions (Althusser, *Reproduction* 20-1; 217)," the "reciprocal action" of superstructure (Althusser, *Reproduction* 54, 162-3, 238), the "ideological practice (Althusser *Reading* 58;316)" and "ideological class struggle" ("The Cultural Revolution" 12-3) is none other than the "mass ideological revolution." Without interpreting the "mass ideological revolution" as the vision or destination that those concepts and propositions are oriented towards, they may not be thoroughly understood. On the other hand, the above concepts and propositions materialize and concretize the causal chain from ideology to the base/social formation with various perspectives. For instance, along with ideology as the "strategic point," ("Cultural Revolution" 12) the "the primacy of relations of productions" and the "reciprocal action" of superstructure respectively formulate bi-directional "channels" or dynamics from the base/social formation to the ideology and vice versa, from the productive forces to the relations of production and vice versa, and from the base to the superstructure and vice versa (by means of ideological class struggle within the Ideological State Apparatuses).

The "mass ideological revolution" is also the cross point where Althusser reconstructs historical materialism as it meets with his reconstructed dialectical materialism. Althusser regards Cultural Revolution and other instances of Chinese revolution as the "only *historically existing* (left) 'critique'" against Stalinism that "can help us to test our hypotheses" (*Self-criticism* 92-3). The hypotheses are exactly the theories that Althusser "had advanced in 1965" (Elliot 176), namely, his "overdetermination" from *For Marx*. Althusser immediately drew from Mao's "the reversal of primary and secondary contradictions and aspects" to endorse his thesis of ideology as the "strategic point at which everything gets decided" and "the possibility of a *dominant* role for the ideological" ("Cultural Revolution" 12-3). His thesis which takes ideology as the "strategic point" is then not so much an abrupt turn as an inevitable outcome of "overdetermination," or conversely speaking, it is Althusser's belief that the mass ideological revolution is the very realization of the alterations of dominance/dominant structure that is predicted by his "overdetermination," hence the convergence of his historical materialism and dialectical materialism, both of which intriguingly reveal signs of his Maoism.

The "Althusser-Mao" problematic consists of Althusser's invention and incorporation of Maoism into contemporary Western knowledge production. It is a product of Althusser's imagination of the Cultural Revolution, as is the case of the works of Western Leftists (Liu, "Poeticizing" 630), as well as his misreading of Mao Zedong's thoughts from his antihumanist/structuralist perspective. In this paper, I try to show how such a problematic unfolds itself in the complicated entanglement of Althusser's concepts and propositions with those of Mao, or, more precisely, Althusser's own interpretation or invention of Mao's concepts.

The "Althusser-Mao" problematic inherits either Marxist traditions or the Western Critical Theory tradition. It connects ideology and ideological struggle with the reconstruction of historical materialism and thus inevitably involves the construction of alternative modernity, considering the overlapping between dogmatized historical materialism (such as economism and historicism) and capitalist

modernity. I would like to go further and contend that it elevates ideology to such an extent that ideology or ideological struggle becomes synonymous with the search for "alternative modernity" (Liu, "Poeticizing" 2). This theory of ideology thus fundamentally differentiates itself from previous theories on ideology. One distinctive feature of the problematic is its emphasis on the "reciprocal actions" of ideology, superstructure and relations of production towards the economic base or infrastructure. Evidently under Mao's influence, Althusser devised a series of theoretical mechanisms for these "reciprocal actions," such as emphasizing ideology as practice and struggle, taking the Ideological State Apparatuses as "sites" of ideological struggle, and so forth. In this way, the problematic establishes direct relations between ideology and the transformations of social infrastructure or even social forms, and between ideology and the critique of Western capitalist modernity or the pursuit of alternative modernity.

The "Althusser-Mao" problematic has had enormous influence on contemporary critical theory. One of the main outcomes of this problematic is none other than Cultural Studies in the West. While Althusser's influences are well-recognized, Mao's contribution has remained obscure all along, and the "Chinese connection" is forgotten by "today's practitioners of cultural studies in Western academia" (Liu, "Hegemony" 70). However, it is the "Althusser-Mao" problematic that precisely symbolizes the "place held by Chinese theories and practice within the genealogy of cultural studies" (Liu, "Hegemony" 78) and materializes the way through which Mao Zedong's thoughts intertwined with Western theory. In other words, the problematic presented Maoism as "a revolutionary form of universalism" with "an enduring impact on the Western Left." (Liu, "(Meta)commentary" 337) To be specific, the "Althusser-Mao" problematic intervenes in the theories of the Birmingham School in many aspects. For instance, Hall regards Althusser's 1970 ISA essay as quite important because "its definition of ideologies" embraces "wider ways" to define culture, and his emphasis on ideology as "practices" instead of as "ideas" is also connected to Althusser's thoughts (Hall 94-5). Arguably indebted to the "Althusser-Mao" problematic, cultural studies broadens its range into almost every social practice and every social institution by reexamining ideology as "practices" and "sites" of struggle. In consideration of the fact that ideology (in Althusser's "wider" definition as Hall indicates) and the problems of culture and cultural revolution have dominated poststructuralism, postmodernism and other currents of Western thought (Liu, "Legacy" 237), this paper's exploration of the "Althusser-Mao" problematic and its incarnations in Western contemporary theory is far from exhaustive.

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