

*The following text was originally published in  
PROSPECTS: the quarterly review of comparative education  
(Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. 24, no. 1/2, 1994, p. 93–106.  
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# MAO ZEDONG

(1893–1976)

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## The educational doctrine of Mao Zedong

Besides being a key figure of Marxism, and a great protagonist, strategist and theoretician of the proletarian revolution in China, Mao Zedong an important educator of the proletariat. With his extensive writings on education and his considerable practical experience of teaching, he paved the way to a specifically Chinese form of socialist education. The Chinese sum up his contribution to education in the phrase: ‘the educational doctrine of Mao Zedong’.

Mao Zedong gradually developed and refined his educational doctrine on the basis of three main building blocks: his personal experience of teaching, Marxism, and the very rich cultural heritage of the Chinese nation.

Mao Zedong was born on 26 December 1893. He died on 9 September 1976. Between 1914 and 1918 he received systematic teacher training at the First Provincial Normal School of Hunan province. While studying, he divided his time between revolutionary thinking and educational activities. Throughout his lifetime he would continue to accumulate valuable experiences as an educational practitioner and theorist.

During the period of 1917–27, he began many educational innovations. In 1917, he founded a night school for workers, where he taught history. In August 1918, he organized the departure of fellow Chinese students to France who were travelling on a combined work and study scheme. He was also appointed assistant librarian at the University of Beijing in autumn of that year. In June 1919, the Hunan student association was formatted under his dynamic guidance. In June 1920, he was appointed administrator (i.e. head teacher) and Chinese-language teacher of the primary school attached to the First Provincial Normal School of Hunan. He founded the Open University of Hunan in August 1921. In December, he became secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Committee of Hunan province and a member of the secretariat of the worker’s movement in the province. In addition, he established a night school for workers in Changsha. In 1925, he carried out an investigation in the Hunan countryside; and by the end of the following year, peasant associations had been set up in over half the province’s 75 districts and more than 20 night schools for rural dwellers had opened on his initiative. In May 1926, he became the principal of the Canton Peasant Movement Training Institute, where he taught three courses on the peasant question in China, education in the countryside and geography. In March 1927, he left to head the Central Peasant Movement Training Institute in Wuchang.

The agrarian revolutionary struggle (1929–37) was an opportunity for the Chinese Communist Party to gain useful experience in the autonomous organization of education. During this period, Mao Zedong was personally involved in teaching at the Red Army Academy and organized the political, military and cultural training of officers and soldiers. He was also Director of the Soviet University where many cadres were trained to meet an urgent need in the

soviet region.

During the war of resistance and liberation against Japan (1937-1949), Mao Zedong, already extremely busy leading the revolutionary struggle and carrying out many other tasks, nevertheless continued to supervise revolutionary education directly by chairing the Pedagogical Committee of the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College. He made a significant personal contribution by holding classes and developing teaching aids. Education made rigid strides in all the revolutionary bases. In the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border region, for instance, there were originally only three secondary schools and 120 primary schools. In 1946, the number of primary schools rose to 2 990, there were seven secondary schools, and all sorts of other institutions had been opened, including the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College, the North Shaanxi Public School, the Central Party School, the Marx-Lenin Institute, the Women's University, the Yan'an University, the Lu Xun Art Institute, the Young Cadres Training Institute, the Norman Bethune School of Medicine, the Institute of Natural Sciences and the School of Administration. Mao Zedong lectured in many of them.

Following the founding of the New China, Mao Zedong not only produced a prompt definition of a policy to establish and develop mass education, but he also inspected the schools himself, made friends with educators and read and approved important documents on education. Under his guidance, teaching flourished and broke new ground.

It is therefore clear that his extensive teaching experience was a strong influence in shaping his educational doctrine, since it provided him with a practical basis. All of these activities took place at a time when history was being made, through the fight for victory in the revolution and the construction of a new society.

The educational doctrine of Mao Zedong is thus broadly based on both aspects of his revolutionary experience.

## The theoretical foundations

At the beginning of his active life, Mao Zedong strongly opposed the feudal warlords and the imperialists, but his political ideas were still imbued with liberalism, democratic reformism and Utopian socialism. Very soon, however, his revolutionary activities, especially at the time of the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement, led him to discover new ideas. In particular, he frequented the Marxist research circle founded by the precursor of Communism in China, Li Dazhao, where his political thought gradually took shape. In 1920, Mao Zedong read *The Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, from which he drew the initial premises of his stance and his method. These works, he said, 'built up in me a faith in Marxism from which, once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history, I did not afterwards waver'.<sup>2</sup> He also declared that 'by the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist'.<sup>3</sup> From then on his activities were inextricably linked to the growth of the Chinese Communist Party and its subsequent development in the face of many complications and difficulties.

Besides Marx, Lenin also exerted a relatively strong influence on the formation of the correct political thought of Mao Zedong. By 1926, Zedong had read some passages of *the state and revolution* for himself and had become acquainted with it through quotations or digests by other writers. In addition to *The state and revolution*, the works of Lenin which he would read the most assiduously during his lifetime included *Two tactics of social-democracy*, '*left wing*' *Communism: an infantile disorder, imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* and, the *Philosophical notebooks* when they were published. He was looking for theoretical guidance in Lenin's works on how to lead the democratic revolution in China, and then progress to the stage of socialist revolution. He immersed himself in Marxist philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

It must be emphasized that it was Marxism, and more particularly Marxist philosophy,

which constituted the theoretical foundation of the educational doctrine of Mao Zedong.

## China's cultural heritage

Mao Zedong highly valued the outstanding cultural heritage of China. He believed that during the course of several millennia the Chinese people had created a magnificent civilization which they should both appreciate, from Confucius to Sun Yatsen, and take further, in a spirit of critical awareness, retaining its best features and rejecting the dross.<sup>5</sup> He was against 'wholesale Westernization'. These were the principles that informed his educational activities from that early stage. For example, when he founded the Open University of Hunan, he sought to emulate both traditional Chinese schools and modern institutions. Cai Yuanpei, a famous educationist of the time, praised the university which, he said, 'combined the traditions of Chinese schools and Western research institutes', and should serve as a 'model for the new universities in every province'.<sup>6</sup> It was thus the spiritual wealth of the outstanding civilization of the Chinese nation which found expression in the basic tenets of Mao Zedong's considerable contribution to education.

## Writings and ideas prior to 1949

This period can be divided into two parts—before and after 1927.

Before Mao Zedong discovered Marxism, his main writings on education included: 'A study of physical education', an article published in April 1917 in volume 3, No. 2 of *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), 'Appeal to register at the night school for workers' in November 1917, the manifesto written to launch the journal *Xianjiang pinglun* (The Hunan Review), 'The great alliance of the popular masses', an article published on 21 July 1919 in the second issue of the journal, and 'Students' work' of December 1919. These writings are completely typical of the broadsides delivered by Mao against the old teaching methods which destroyed the personality, against their authoritarianism and the cultural aggression of imperialism and feudal education, and expression of his belief that it was essentially through education that society could be transformed. In 'a study of physical education', he commented: 'In the school system of our country, the syllabuses are as thick as the hairs on a cow. Even an adult, with a strong body, would be unable to bear them allhow much less an adolescent with a weak constitution?' In the statement he wrote for the first issue of *Xianjiang pinglun*, he showed how the authoritarian nature of education, a bastion of bureaucrats who exercised a fierce monopoly over it, meant that ordinary people did not have the opportunity to educate themselves, and he called for a campaign to recognize the right of the masses to education. In 'Students' work', he stated that in order to transform society, new communities should be built on a triple basis—new family, new school, new society. In this Utopian vision of a Mao who had yet to embrace Marxist doctrine, the educational point of view tends to be the only yardstick of his thought, so that education's function as a tool is overestimated.

After his espousal of Marxism in 1920, his writing on education consists of a letter to Xiao Xudong, Xiao (Cai) Linbin and all his friends in France, the 'Manifesto on the occasion of the founding of the Open University of Hunan' and the section of his 'Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan' relating to the movement's cultural achievements and experience. His writing of this period prompts two observations. Firstly, Mao Zedong's concept of the social function of education had clearly evolved. In the above-mentioned letter, he states clearly 'We acknowledge honestly that education is the instrument of the revolution, but do not draw any practical conclusion from that. We must follow the path of the Russian revolution'.<sup>7</sup> In the 'Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan', he analyses relations

between culture and power, in the belief that there will be no genuine peasant culture until those in power have been overthrown, and criticizes the reformists who claimed to be able to save the country through education. This is what he wrote:

In China, culture has always been the exclusive possession of the landowners, and the peasants had no access to it ... With the downfall of the power of the landowners in the rural areas, the peasants' cultural movement has begun ... Before long there will be tens of thousands of schools sprouting up in the rural areas throughout the whole province, and that will be something quite different from the futile clamour of the intelligentsia and so-called 'educators' for 'popular education', which for all their hullabaloo has remained an idle phrase.

Secondly, Mao Zedong began to set up a system of mass education adapted to Chinese conditions. In his 'Manifesto on the occasion of the founding of the Open University of Hunan', he makes a down-to-earth analysis of Eastern and Western culture and of traditional and modern schools, and using these as starting-points describes a 'new system.' No special qualifications were needed to register at the Open University. The abolition of that unjustified restriction and the elimination or reduction of registration fees in order to break the monopoly of the wealthy, to democratize knowledge, to free people from the domination of the 'education clique' and to unite manual workers and intellectuals, show that Mao Zedong was already committed to popular education.<sup>8</sup> The 'Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan' states as a principle the need to adopt a practical approach in peasant education. 'The teaching materials used in the rural primary schools all dealt with city matters and were in no way adapted to the needs of the rural areas. Besides, the primary-school teachers behaved badly towards the peasants, who, far from finding them helpful, grew to dislike them.' He praises the schools set up by the peasants which, he says, are the only ones they regard 'as their own'.<sup>9</sup>

After 1927, the Chinese Communist Party created an independent revolutionary base and a democratic workers' and peasants' regime; its practical work for the revolution (in particular, education) went considerably further than in the preceding period. Mao Zedong had an opportunity, particularly following his appointment to lead the Party and the Army, at the Zunyi Conference (1935), to put his educational ideas into practice on a larger scale, ideas which were gradually becoming more structured and mature.

The writings of this period in which Mao Zedong deals with education include the following: 'Resolution drafted for the Ninth Conference of the Party Organization for the Fourth Corps of the Red Army', 'Report of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the Chinese Soviet Republic to the Second All-China Soviet Congress', 'On New Democracy', 'The Orientation of the Youth Movement', 'Directives of the Council of Military Affairs of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the question of the reorganization of the Anti-Japanese College', 'Draw in Large Numbers of Intellectuals', 'Reform Our Study', 'Rectify the Party's Style in Work', 'Oppose the Party "Eight-Legged Essay"', 'In Memory of Norman Bethune' and 'Serve the People'. Mao Zedong's two great philosophical works, 'On Practice' and 'On Contradiction', as well as, for instance, his 'Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature' are also important pieces of writing for the study of his educational doctrine. At this time, the main points of the doctrine were as follows:

(1) *At this stage in history, education should be a matter for the new democracy:*

Before the May 4 Movement, the struggle on China's cultural front was a struggle between the new culture of the bourgeoisie and the old culture of the feudal class. Before the May 4 Movement, the struggles between the modern school system and the imperial competitive examination system, between new learning and old learning, and between Western learning and Chinese learning, all partook of this character [...] Since the May 4 Movement, [the new culture of China] has become a culture of the new-democratic character and a part of the socialist cultural revolution of the world proletariat.<sup>10</sup>

(2) *Education is tied to politics and to the economy:* 'Any given culture (culture as an ideological form) is a reflection of the politics and economy of a given society, while it has in

turn a tremendous influence and effect upon the politics and economy of the given society; economy is the basis, and politics is the concentrated expression of economy.’<sup>11</sup> During the revolutionary war years, he stressed, education must be subordinate to, and part of, the war effort.

(3) *Elaboration of guidelines on education.* In the ‘Report of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the Chinese Soviet Republic to the Second All-China Soviet Congress’, he states that education in the Soviet zone must generally be aimed at educating the toiling masses in a Communist spirit, harnessing popular education to the revolutionary war and the class struggle, linking study and work, and ensuring that every individual in the teeming Chinese masses has access to the joys of culture.<sup>12</sup> Continuing the introduction of the guiding principles of popular education for the new democracy, he writes:

So far as national culture is concerned, the guiding role is fulfilled by Communist ideology, and efforts should be made to disseminate socialism and communism among the working class and to educate, properly and methodically, the peasantry and other sections of the masses in socialism. But national culture as a whole is at present not yet socialist’.

The culture of the new democracy ‘is the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal culture...of the people’; it is national, it is scientific and it belongs to the people.<sup>13</sup>

(4) *Vigorous confirmation of the principle of the link between theory and practice.* In ‘Reform our study’, he emphasizes the need to abide by that principle and he severely criticizes subjectivist attitudes cut off from practice. ‘In schools and in the spare-time education of cadres, teachers of philosophy do not guide the students to study the logic of the Chinese revolution; teachers of economics do not guide them to study the characteristic features of Chinese economy; teachers of political science do not guide them to study the tactics of the Chinese revolution; teachers of military science do not guide them to study the strategy and tactics fit for China’s special conditions, and so on and so forth. The result is that errors are disseminated to the great harm of the people.’ He adds: ‘As to the spare-time education for cadres and cadres’ training schools, we should make it our central task to study the practical problems of the Chinese revolution’. In ‘Rectify the Party’s Style in Work’, he wrote: ‘They proceed from a primary school of that sort to a university of that sort, they take a diploma, and are regarded as stocked with knowledge. But all that they have is knowledge of books, and they have not yet taken part in any practical activities, nor have they applied, in any branch of social life, the knowledge they have acquired...their knowledge is not yet complete. What, then, is comparatively complete knowledge? All comparatively complete knowledge is acquired through two stages: first the stage of perceptual knowledge and second the stage of rational knowledge, the latter being the development of the former to a higher plane’. Furthermore, ‘the most important thing is [to] be well versed in applying such knowledge in life and in practice’.

(5) *Recommendation that education and production should go hand in hand.* He called on the schools to launch a large-scale movement for production and to encourage young people to unite with the workers and peasants.

He wrote:

Public bodies, schools and army units should make great efforts to grow vegetables and breed pigs, collect firewood, make charcoal, develop handicrafts and raise a part of the grain they need. Apart from the development of collective production in all the big and small units, all individuals (except those in the army) should at the same time be encouraged to devote their spare time to minor agricultural or handicraft production’.<sup>14</sup>

Work, production and study must go together.

(6) *With regard to young people, priority to be given to the acquisition of a solid and correct political stance.* Mao Zedong personally addressed the following recommendation to the Anti-Japanese College: ‘A firm and correct political stance, hard work and strategy and tactics that are readily adaptable - these should be the main themes of teaching in the schools’.<sup>15</sup> He also asked the students to be ‘ready at any moment to sacrifice everything they own in the cause of the people’s liberation’.<sup>16</sup>

(7) *Unqualified confirmation of the role of the intellectuals.* He often returns to this theme: at the time of the democratic revolutionary movement in China, the intellectuals had been the first to become politically aware. ‘[...] the great masses of China’s revolutionary intellectuals [...] serve as a spearhead or a bridge. No success can be achieved in organizing the revolutionary forces and carrying on revolutionary work without the participation of the revolutionary intellectuals’.<sup>17</sup> In the text entitled ‘Draw in large numbers of intellectuals’ he writes that adopting a correct policy towards the intellectuals is one of the keys to the victory of the revolution. And elsewhere: ‘Our Party should ... adopt a careful attitude towards students, teachers, professors, scientific workers, art workers and ordinary intellectuals. We should unite with them, educate them and give them posts according to the merits of each case’.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Mao Zedong stresses repeatedly that it is absolutely vital for the intellectuals to ally themselves with the workers and peasants, the better to fulfil their mission and gain the acceptance of the masses.

(8) *Educational activities must, of necessity, follow the line of the masses.* He constantly recalls the two principles that popular education should observe: ‘first, what the masses actually need rather than what we fancy they need; and second, what the masses are willing and determined to do rather than what we are determined to do on their behalf’.<sup>19</sup> Hence, Mao Zedong always recommended that methods of running schools should be diversified, the education system reformed and school curricula redesigned to adapt them to the needs of the masses, who should be mobilized and organized on a wide scale so as to become involved in the management of education.

These were the main features of education for a new democracy as Mao Zedong envisioned it at the time. The doctrine played a major historical role during that period and even now is central to education policy.

## **The evolution of his educational doctrine**

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Mao Zedong, who was now leading the socialist revolution and the building of socialism, took education for the new democracy as his starting point in order to actively explore ways of establishing socialist education adapted to the distinctive characteristics of China. His plan was composed of three stages: reform of the old education system, establishment and development of a new socialist education system and ‘cultural revolution’. Among the documents of Mao Zedong on education and the texts and documents written by him or endorsed by him, which considerably influenced education during this period, the following deserve particular mention: the ‘Common Programme adopted by the People’s Political Consultative Conference’, ‘Letter to Ma Xulun on the need to ensure the good health of school pupils and students’, ‘In its work, the Communist Youth League must take into consideration the characteristics of young people’, ‘Notes on the growth of socialism in the Chinese countryside’, ‘On the Ten Major Relationships’, ‘On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People’, ‘Interviews with Chairman Mao and the heads of

departments and bureaux of seven provinces and towns', 'Speech to the National Conference of the Chinese Communist Party on propaganda work', 'Directives on the educational activities of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Affairs Council', 'Letter on the Jiangxi University of Communist Workers', 'Draft provisional working regulations of the Ministry of Education concerning higher educational institutions', approved by the Party's Central Committee, 'Draft provisional working regulations for full-time primary schools' and 'Draft provisional working regulations for full-time secondary schools' decreed by the Central Committee, 'Speech to the Spring Festival Symposium' and 'Speech to the Hangzhou Conference'. At this time, the educational doctrine of Mao Zedong experienced a new phase of development whose principal aspects were as follows:

1. *Education must be put to work to build socialism.* On the eve of the founding of the People's Republic of China, in his opening address to the first plenary session of the People's Political Consultative Conference, Mao Zedong said: 'Cultural change will follow economic change with the same forward impetus'. He therefore attached great importance to education. On the very day of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the 'Common Programme', which laid down the political measures to be taken by the people's government, and which had been adopted by the Consultative Conference and announced by Mao, set out a raft of measures on education and confirmed the need for properly planned reform of the old education system, and the need to develop all forms of teaching systematically so as to meet the vast range of needs engendered by revolutionary activities and nation-building. In 1955, when the movement to create socialist co-operatives in the countryside was in full swing, Mao Zedong, observed the striking contradiction between the backward nature of the education system and the will to build socialism. He stressed the need to solve the problem of introducing universal education in such circumstances by making the co-operatives work for education, and the need to clarify the connection between education and reform of the socio-economic system. In all his subsequent writings directives on education, training objectives, texts on the scope and pace of development and on the form and content of education - this desire to contribute to the building of socialism was apparent.
2. *The purpose was to develop socialist action comprehensively.* In 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', Mao Zedong indicated this clearly: every beneficiary of education must be enabled 'to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a cultured, socialist-minded worker'. He repeatedly emphasized that young school pupils must in the first place acquire firm and correct political views, striving to be both 'Red and expert'. He also set great store by intellectual training. He insisted that school pupils must take an active and dynamic part in their education. He said repeatedly that courses should be made less burdensome, examinations reformed, pupils no longer treated as enemies and brutally attacked, teaching methods reviewed and a suitable pedagogical approach adopted. For example, on 10 May 1964, he replied in these terms to a letter sent to him the previous month by the Principal of Beijing Railway Secondary School N<sup>o</sup> 2, Wei Lianyi: 'Today, classes are overcrowded and the pupils subjected to too much pressure. The teaching also leaves much to be desired. Examinations are approached as if the pupils were enemies who must be attacked by surprise. All this discourages young people from energetically taking charge of their own moral, intellectual and physical education'.<sup>20</sup> Mao was also greatly concerned by the health of school pupils. Immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, he wrote twice to the Minister of Education, Ma Xulun, pressing for the schools to be given the following instructions: 'Health first, studies second'. He returned to that theme on many occasions: 'We must ensure that young people are in good health, study well and work hard'. A balance must be struck between studies on the one hand, and, on the other hand, relaxation, rest and sleep.<sup>21</sup>
3. *The new education system combined education and productive labour.* After the



establishment of the People's Republic of China, education remained for a while divorced from productive labour and practical work, and it also neglected politics to some extent. The 'Directive on educational activities' issued in 1958 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Affairs Council was expressly intended to remedy that situation. It stated that as far as education was concerned, the Party should as a matter of principle put education at the disposal of proletarian politics and combine it with productive labour ... In every school, productive labour must be regarded as a discipline in its own right. The line to follow henceforth was that schools should be run like factories and farms, and factories and agricultural co-operatives should be run like schools. The same document authorized the establishment of schools where studies alternated with work (work-study schools). From then on, work and education went hand in hand, productive labour developed vigorously within education and a wide variety of new types of establishment were introduced, such as agricultural secondary schools.

4. *'You need both legs for walking,' meaning resources should be used to their full potential, and forms of teaching diversified.* The revised draft of the 'National Programme for the development of agriculture from 1956 to 1967' prepared by Mao Zedong himself and adopted in 1957 by the Party's Central Committee, said that the educational establishments must be diversified in the countryside, and that as well as national public education, every effort must be made to provide the masses with education organized by local communities and to authorize private schools. The above-mentioned 1958 'Directive on educational activities' contained more specific and detailed instructions. It stipulated that in order to develop education more rapidly, on a larger scale, better and more cheaply, unity and diversification must be combined, as must generalization and improvement, overall planning and the sharing of responsibilities at the local level. Within the limits of the national objective of consistent teaching, the methods used to run schools must be diversified by developing simultaneously the role of the State and the role of factories, mines, companies and agricultural co-operatives, popular education and technical and vocational education, adult education and children's education, full-time schools and work-study and spare-time schools, teaching in schools and independent study (including correspondence courses and educational radio programmes), free education and fee-paying education.<sup>22</sup> Thanks to the adoption of that principle, education in China made relatively rapid progress.
5. *China must go its own way,* while drawing inspiration from the positive achievements of all nations, and from all countries. Mao Zedong always maintained that it was crucial to establish policy on the basis of one's own strengths and to look for a path of development adapted to the specific situation of a country. He proceeded on that basis throughout his life, whether he was involved in revolution or construction. At the same time, he allowed room for the utilization of foreign experience, but always taking into account the distinctive characteristics of China. In 'On the ten major relationships', he wrote that the strong points of each nation and each country must be studied. Every genuine achievement that had been made in politics, the economy, science, technology, culture, literature, and the arts must be studied, but this must be done discerningly and in a critical frame of mind, taking care not to copy blindly and implement unthinkingly.<sup>23</sup> In a further article he explained that the mistakes that accounted for the backwardness of some countries must also be analyzed, in order to avoid committing them likewise. In the field of knowledge and science the slogan must be: 'Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend'.
6. *It was the responsibility of the Party to guide education.* Mao Zedong not only made a personal commitment to education, he also believed that at every level province, region, district the first secretary of the Party Committee should make a similar commitment. It would be unacceptable for him or her to appear to neglect it. Mao said on numerous occasions that the training of school cadres by the Party must be strengthened in order to

ensure that the schools were well run. In 1957, the Central Committee decided to transfer one thousand high- and medium-ranking cadres from the Party's central political bodies into the universities, secondary schools and some scientific and literary teaching units so as to reinforce the Party's leading role on the education front. Education could be firmly controlled only if it was resolutely guided by Marxism. He also stressed this many times during the stage of the building of socialism.

7. *Educators must be trained before they start work and intellectuals must be encouraged to make common cause with the workers and peasants.* 'Being experts and educators, their first duty is to educate themselves...They must learn from producers—workers and peasants...the intellectuals join forces with the workers and peasants and become their friends, they will be able to assimilate the Marxism they have learnt in books [...] It is not enough to learn Marxism by studying it in books; it is above all through the class struggle, practical work and contact with the worker and peasant masses that one can really make it one's own.'<sup>24</sup>

## Taking stock

Mao Zedong took part in educational work and indeed directed it himself. His educational doctrine was forged in the heat of the Chinese revolution and the construction of the nation, and accordingly bears their stamp. Equally, the doctrine embodies the wisdom of other leaders and the people at large. The Chinese revolution and socialist construction have great achievements to their credit, despite difficulties, errors and complications. The same is true of education. For instance, between 1957 and 1966, the first decade of building socialism in every field, the country's leading authorities accumulated sound experience. This is one of the main features of their action.

However, serious mistakes were also made. The excesses of the 'leftist' deviation were reflected for a while in education by too rapid a pace of development. Intellectuals were criticized too harshly for holding certain scientific points of view. The ten years of 'cultural revolution' caused China to suffer extremely serious reverses and losses. Mao Zedong made erroneous judgements on class contradictions and the class struggle in relation to education. Claiming that bourgeois intellectuals dominated education, he called for no effort to be spared in criticizing and unmasking the so-called 'capitalist-roaders' and other 'prominent reactionaries', and for classes to be stopped in order to make 'revolution'. The result was that education was severely disrupted.

Nevertheless, if we take stock of his life, it is clear that his contribution to the Chinese revolution and the construction of the country far outweighs his mistakes. His merits should be pushed into the limelight and his faults kept in the background. This also applies to education. The educational doctrine of Mao Zedong is a rich and valuable contribution to the history of education in China. It not only led the Chinese people to set out on an original path of socialist education during the stages of new neo-democratic revolution, socialist revolution and construction, but even today it has far-reaching significance for fundamental principles and general philosophy. It is really most important to study this doctrine, not merely in order to make a scientific summary of what it can teach us about the experience of modern China in the field of education and a realistic assessment of Mao Zedong's position in history, but also to pursue and develop his thought in the new historical phase of socialist modernization, while continuing to advance steadfastly towards socialist education, Chinese-style.

## Notes

1. *Quingjun, Zhuo (China)*. Director of China National Institute for Educational Research. Her more recent works are: *Survey of reform in China: Education* (1992), *Moral education and theory and practice* (1992), *Educational reform at junior middle schools*. Her thesis, *Training cum production in China*, was

- issued by the Centre for the study of Education in Developing Countries (CESO) in 1992. She has also contributed to several educational journals.
2. Snow, Edgar, *Red star over China*, p. 155, New York, Grove Press 1968.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Gong Yuzhi, Feng Xianzhi, Shi Zhongjia: *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* (The studies of Mao Zedong), p. 23–4, Beijing, San Lian Press.
  5. Profiles of Confucius and Sun Yatsen are included in this series of ‘100 Thinkers on Education’.
  6. *Cai Yuanpei jiaoyu wenxuan* (Selected texts by Cai Yuanpei on education) Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, p. 162, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1980. A profile of Cai Yuanpei is included in this series of ‘100 Thinkers on Education’.
  7. *Zhongguo xiandai shi ziliao congkan ‘xinmin xuehui ziliao’* (Documents of the New People Institute, collection of documents on the history of modern China), p. 147–50, Renmin chubanshe, 1980.
  8. ‘Hunan zixiu daxue chuanglei xuanyan’ (Manifesto on the occasion of the foundation of the Open University of Hunan), in *Xin shidai* (New Era), Vol. 1, No. 1.
  9. Mao Zedong, ‘Report of an investigation into the peasant movement in Hunan’, *Selected works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, p. 56–7. Beijing, People’s Publishing House, 1969. (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1955. San Francisco, China Books, 1961.
  10. ‘On new democracy’, *Selected works*, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 143, 144–5.
  11. Ibid., p.107.
  12. *Suweiai Zhongguo* (Soviet China), reprinted by the Commission to compile documents relating to the history of modern China, p. 285.
  13. Op. cit., note 8, p. 152–53.
  14. ‘Spread in the base areas the campaign for rent reduction, for production, and for the Army’s support of the government and protection of the people’, *Selected works of Mao Tse-tung*, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 127.
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