CHAPTER 2

THE REQUIREMENTS OF SOCIALIST RECONSTRUCTION: 'MORE EMPHASIS ON THE PRESENT, LESS EMPHASIS ON THE PAST'.

1949-1958
CHAPTER 2

If Kang Youwei and his associates in the Hundred Days Reform had taken the veneration of Confucius to its apogee; the May Fourth Movement saw its nadir. The 'antiquity doubters' moderated to some extent the harsh criticisms of the May Fourth iconoclasm, but they were for all practical purposes, strongly and emotionally anti-Confucian. For them as we have seen, the task was comparatively easier - the ongoing revolutionary upheaval perforce made them take clear cut stands. The environment was not conducive to intellectual subtlety, nor was there much opposition to the view that the old had to give way to the new. Besides, there was no organized institutional structure within which the historians were investigating Chinese history. The war with Japan and the civil war which followed, made it impossible for intellectuals and historians, to exchange ideas and opinions in a genuine academic atmosphere. Considering the situation, the historiographical output was amazing, but they mostly worked on their own and published primarily in current newspapers and journals. Even so, they did manage to usher what may be termed the Chinese renaissance in history whereby Chinese historiography was given a broader base and wider context. This renaissance was largely brought about by comparisons between China and other countries, modernization of the methods of classical studies (a process begun, as we saw earlier at the turn of the century) providing philosophical justifications for empirical history writing and translations of foreign works on a much larger scale than hitherto.

Not all the intellectuals, not even a majority of them, subscribed to or wholly accepted Marxism. Influence of Liberal ideologies was not insignificant either. Besides there were the pragmatists, who traced their intellectual origins to Dewey. Hu Shi was the most eminent and accomplished of this group of intellectuals. Nonetheless, the victory of the CPC in 1949 was welcomed by a large majority of the intellectuals whose attitude towards the political change was rather neatly summed up thus:

"....We intellectuals have gone through three phases in our thinking. At first, most of us supported the government, recognizing its many faults, but hoping it would reform. Then we became increasingly
discouraged with reform prospects, but we saw no feasible alternatives...During this second phase intellectuals were uncertain and bewildered. Then came the present, the third phase. We have become so completely convinced of the hopelessness of the existing government that we feel the sooner it is removed the better. Since the Chinese Communists are obviously the only force capable or making this change, we are now willing to support them as the lesser of the two evils. We ourselves would prefer a middle course, but that is no longer possible.‘

Immediately after Liberation however, no serious or concerted attempts in the matter of interpretation or writing of history were begun. In the first place, nation building and development, focussing on technical skills was of immediate concern. Secondly, before the history of China or its cultural heritage could be evaluated, there was first the problem of disseminating Marxism among the scholars and training a corps of researchers who would undertake a study of history, in accordance with the Marxist methodology. For the Communists, this was no easy task and they were well aware of it. A special directive issued on December 18, 1984 by the Central Plain Bureau of the CPC revealed their preoccupation:

‘...Most of the intellectuals come from families of landlords, rich peasants, and the bourgeois and petty bourgeois classes, and they have long been contaminated by bourgeois education. Though the possibility exists that the majority of them may lean towards the revolution, they generally look down on the workers and peasants and stay away from the masses. Therefore, to enable them ‘to serve the people’ and ‘to identify themselves with the workers and peasants’ ...it is incumbent upon us to carry on propaganda among them and to reform them ideologically.’

Therefore the task of ideological remoulding - the reorientation of the intelligentsia to the Marxist methodology - was taken up very seriously. It is not our purpose to describe the various measures that were taken or the numerous campaigns that were launched to achieve this goal. What matters is that a considerable amount

of time and energy were spent by the intellectuals in the early fifties in formal study of the works of Marx, Lenin and other Communist writers. Professors in Beijing and Tianjin in 1952 used to reportedly put in twelve to fifteen hours a week in political study.\(^3\)

Apart from study, in order to thoroughly break with their past, the intellectuals were also called upon to submit their earlier behaviour and attitudes, to a critical scrutiny and bring out self-criticisms. Mass criticism meetings were also held which usually resulted in confessions of errors such as worshipping the United States, placing research above teaching, individualism, indifference to politics, neglecting political study and clinging to old habits. Finally, in a major attempt at altering traditional attitudes to labor and towards workers and peasants, urban intellectuals were often assigned to work in villages for varying periods. Long-term objectives of such activities notwithstanding, they left very little time for research. One could also possibly question the efficacy of the confessions in the process of remoulding thought, as well as the sincerity of the self-criticisms. The renowned philosopher Feng Youlan for instance, wrote 135 self-criticisms between October 1949 and May 1958. In his 135th one he wrote with unmistakable irony: “After the liberation I criticized my own system but only superficially; in my heart I kept it unchanged.”\(^4\)

Be that as it may, ideological remoulding was the foundation of the CPC’s policy towards the intellectuals. In a session of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultation Conference on 23rd October 1951, Mao Zedong stated,

“Thought reform, especially the thought reform of the intellectuals, is one of the most important pre-requisites for the realization of democratic reform and industrialization.”\(^5\)

The task of reforming the intellectuals was nowhere more intense than in the field of historical studies for, as a Party theoretician remarked, this field plays the most crucial role “...in the advancement of thought as a weapon


\(^4\) Guangming Ribao (Beijing), 24 May 1958. As translated in China News Analysis (Hongkong) (hereafter CNA) No. 241, 15 August 1958, p.2. Prof. Feng in fact lost no opportunity to express his dissent, albeit obliquely, but was as quick in apologizing for his indiscretions. Thus, “in teaching questions not even Chairman Mao can be a guide,” which was promptly followed by a confession of how “terrifying” his ego was.

\(^5\) Cited in Theodore H.E. Chen, n. 1, p. 11.
in class struggle ... and whose development cannot be separated from the class struggle (in contemporary life)."6

So much for the non-Marxists. Eminent Marxist scholars such as Guo Moruo and Jian Bozan could also not devote much time for research. They were appointed to important administrative posts in Universities or academic institutions and hence much of their time was spent in tackling their new responsibilities. During the 1957 Rectification Campaign, this was precisely one of the points of criticism - that eminent scholars, reputed the world over, had been burdened only with duties of a purely administrative nature such as those of Presidents, Deans, Vice-Deans and yet were not in possession of the power that went with such posts. Besides, with their onerous duties they could not possibly teach or take classes.7

Yet another factor which inhibited historical research was the paucity of information. Very few books were published between 1949 and 1953 on Chinese history, culture and philosophy. Specifically on Confucius, only two books were published during this period - in fact, both these books, by Zhao Jibin and Yang Rongguo respectively, had originally been published before 1949.8 This is not to suggest that there was no publication. The strictures that were sought to be imposed on the intellectuals and the changes which were desired in historical evaluations, were not always well planned or fully implemented. Hence, books like The Essential Features of Chinese Culture by Liang Souming, which spoke favourably of traditional Chinese virtues could still be written.9

Mostly, books and other materials tended to be reprints of earlier works - revised and updated - quite often including prefaces which discussed the Marxist methodology that was now to be the basis of historical research. Notable historians like Jian Bozan and Wu Han wrote on the concepts of 'class struggle' and 'role of the masses' as also set out guiding principles in studying history, evaluating historical personages etc. On the whole, the

efforts indicated that historiography in new China was attempting to get up on its feet. Theories were being comprehended and assimilated, concepts were being understood and mastered and in general conditions were not ripe for any conclusive assessments. To aid and facilitate the process of understanding Marxism, a truly amazing number of works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong were printed. It was quite clear that the authorities were keener to see the new ideas taking root than to have a fresh look at the old ones. In this process as well, they looked to the Soviet Union for guidance; indeed the Soviets were viewed as models for emulation. The degree of their reverence and respect is revealed by the fact that over twelve thousand Russian books were translated into Chinese - there was no other language from which so many books were translated.10

By 1956, and more clearly in 1957, the Soviet influence far from being the touchstone of correctness, was actively denounced. It would not be illogical to presume that a certain amount of resentment against the excessive reliance on the Soviet Union, accompanied its very commencement. The History Department of Peking University gave ample proof of its exasperation during the Hundred Flowers period in a poster entitled “Oppose Dogmatism in the Teaching of History.”

“Some dogmatists lack the most elementary decency: even products that have nothing to do with Marxism are imposed on us if they carry the trade mark “USSR”. Some say that the Russo-Swedish war was a just war because it gave Russia an outlet on the Baltic Sea. It was not aggression because this land belonged to Russia in antiquity, besides it was necessary for the historical development of Russia. Nelson is presented as a warmonger and a parasite, whereas Suvorov of Russia is presented as a hero who liberated the peoples of Europe from Napoleon’s tyranny. Let us not forget that the peoples of Europe greeted Napoleon with bread and salt whereas Suvorov reimposed on them the shackles of feudalism. The reason for all peasant wars throughout history are presented to us as the same: land spoliation + tax burden + usury and the main reason of the defeats of the peasant uprising always was the lack of a progressive class and people to lead them, etc. Long live fighting Marxism.”11

The break with the Soviet Union was to follow shortly, but in the early fifties, before the storm of hundred

10. Figures from Renmin Ribao (Beijing), 19 April 1957.
flowers movement broke loose, everything that was acceptable to the Soviet academic establishment was also valid and legitimate in China. Historical debates and ideas in the Soviet Union were very closely followed in China and a very substantial exchange of material took place. The Sino-Soviet split put an end to all that. In 1963, Soviet historians were to complain of the Chinese behaviour, in that there had come about "...a sharp reduction in the number of scholarly works of the C.P.R. sent to the Soviet Union, the almost complete cessation in forwarding local publications and learned university notes and the weakening of scholarly contacts of Chinese historians with Soviet scholars."12

Finally, historical research and serious writing in real terms came about in the mid-fifties when specialized journals on history and philosophy - Lishi Yanjiu (Historical Research) and Zhexue Yanjiu (Philosophical Research) - made their appearance in 1954 and 1955 respectively. In its first issue in 1955, the editors of the latter stated the aim of the journal as "struggle for the triumph of Marxist philosophy". Historians and philosophers now had a forum, not merely for expressing their ideas but also to engage in debates and discussions. In the mid-fifties also came the beginnings of the History Department within the Academy of Sciences of which Guo Moruo was the President. The study and writing of history now also acquired legitimacy, orientation and direction. In addition, 'History' could henceforth serve the purpose of fostering a sense of identity among the Chinese people. This the Communists had been attempting to do ever since the late thirties by taking up the united struggles of the Chinese people in the very recent past. The encouragement to study the history of China had moreover come from Mao Zedong himself.

"Modern China is the product of the total historical development in China. As followers of Marx, we should not renounce our historical past. We should sum up this past - from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen — and inherit this valuable legacy."13

But, Confucius did not come to the fore immediately. Evaluation of historical figures could not precede fundamental and vital historical questions: how was Chinese history to be periodized, what was the role of peasant wars in history, what were the various classes in different periods in Chinese society etc. To tackle these, the

historians as mentioned earlier, had to familiarize themselves with Marxism. Furthermore, knowledge and study of world history was also stressed, since the duties of nationalism and internationalism were equally important. The widely prevalent but extremely false bourgeois idea of “Europe as the centre theory of world history” had to be discredited with a simultaneous build up of a new theory of world history. This goal could be achieved only by stressing that “World history should be a history of the struggle of all the laboring people of the world, and it is known that geographically the centre of world history varies according to ... the class struggle.”

By means of this interpretation, China would gain its rightful place in the vanguard of world class-struggle. A school guide for beginners published in 1957 pointed out that,

“... the Chinese revolution, like the October revolution was of world significance and the summation of the experience of our revolutionary struggles will not only be a great help for our people’s task of construction but moreover will have real significance for the various oppressed peoples in their struggle for independence against the slavery of American imperialism. We must continually increase the research of Asian history, because our country and the various countries of Asia will have increasingly close connections.”

It was by the mid-fifties that a preoccupation and concern with Chinese tradition and its cultural heritage was observed in historical circles. As mentioned earlier, the enforcement of the CPC’s policies was somewhat uneven. Hence books and articles in praise of the cultural heritage came out intermittently. The CPC on its part initiated campaigns against scholars with bourgeois leanings which would serve as a warning to the others not to overstep certain boundaries. In 1955 there was a campaign against Hu Shi in which leading scholars made criticisms. Hu Shi was attacked on many counts. Above all he was attacked as being contemptuous of Chinese culture. One historian pointed out that, “the influence of Hu Shih’s reactionary political, cultural and social views is manifest in our social and historical research work. His ideas lead people to discern only individual phenomena in history.

14. “Departments of Szechwan Normal Institute and Chungshan University Eagerly Discuss the Question of the Center of World History”, SCMP, No. 2531, p.27, citing Guangming Ribao, 7 May 1961.
and society..." 16 The campaign against Hu Shi was of course part of the larger attack on the influence of American bourgeois values among the Chinese intelligentsia which Hu epitomised as also the chief feature in the wider political design to "attack" American imperialism. 17 Very often, this necessity to combat Hu Shi's position, forced the scholars into certain points of view apart from limiting their freedom of discourse. Feng Youlan had the following to say in this connection:

"As an intellectual of the comprador class, Hu Shih consistently served imperialism...Hu Shih's so-called objective history... is a deceitful device of the capitalist historian to dress up his class-mindedness. History is of the past, but historians are people belonging to a distinct, present-day class...Historians of philosophy of the capitalist class serve the purposes of the capitalist class. When we, who are working in the field of philosophy want to reveal historical truth, we have to serve the purposes of the working class. What is good for the working class coincides with the progressive trend in history, that is why the working class is not afraid of having historical truth revealed. Only by revealing historical truth can we serve the purposes of the working class." 18

It is quite clear that at least some of this critique of Hu Shi's work owed its origins to the fact that the CPC was determined to attack Hu Shi's considerable standing as a liberal historian. Even so, it was only the thin end of the wedge. For the most part, the articles, debates and conferences, are voluminous evidence of much lively thinking. Consequently, the campaign against Hu Shi was almost immediately followed by serious discussions on China's history and culture. A section of the more conservative among the historians harboured apprehensions that the lack of attention to the Chinese cultural heritage would gradually lead to its extinction. Thus articles urging the revival of interest in the past were authored. A rather significant one was by Yang Yongqi entitled, "The Critical Assimilation of Our Country's Cultural Heritage is Necessary for Socialist Cultural Reconstruction." Drawing on Lenin and Mao, Yang maintained that it was the duty of Marxism to preserve the cultural heritage - a fact which was negated by petty-bourgeois historians. He also cited the example of the then Soviet attitude towards the Russian past to strengthen his claim. 19

17. Viz. the Resist America Aid Korea Campaign.
19. Zhexue Yanjiu (Beijing), No. 1, 1956, pp. 52-70
But then, 1956 had opened on a very optimistic note for the intellectuals of China. At a Central Committee (CC) Conference between 14 to 20 January 1956, Premier Zhou Enlai delivered a major speech in which he recognized the necessity of providing the intellectuals with considerable leeway in their respective areas of expertise. He did not suggest that they would be free from political re-education or ideological reform but that their due status as masters of science and technology would be recognized. Zhou also dwelt on the necessity of becoming self-reliant and that the arbitrary and mechanical application of the Soviet methods would only erode self confidence that was needed for China’s development.

In effect, what Zhou was saying was that the progress and development of China, depended in a large measure on China’s intellectuals. Therefore to secure their whole hearted cooperation it was necessary to provide them with the right kind of working conditions. And what Zhou was implying was the adoption of such policies towards the intellectuals, which would pave the way for the creation of a technological intelligentsia, a corps of professional elites who would contribute their valuable share in China’s development and who would not be interfered with so long as they were not openly hostile to Marxism and the Chinese Communists.

It is precisely on account of this implication that Zhou’s speech has been considered at some length. For, to go a step further, it would be obvious that their specialized training and knowledge would have created certain privileges for them in the social and economic sphere. In other words, divorced from the masses, this group would eventually bring all efforts at ideological reform back to square one.

Mao Zedong did not differ from Zhou on the need for economic development or for building a contingent of scientists and technicians. Nor did he object to freeing the intellectuals from the tight and often crippling control by the Party bureaucracy. But in his vision, the intellectuals had to play a far more dynamic role - encompassing both economic and political dimensions. The radical socio-economic changes that he had in mind were going to be initiated by the CPC. But their successful implementation would have been impossible without the

20. Text of Zhou Enlai’s speech, "On the Question of Intellectuals" was published in Renmin Ribao on 30 June 1956. Trans in Current Background (Hongkong: American Consulate General) (hereafter, CB) No. 376.
Throughout 1956 a battle raged: what was the proper course of China's socio-economic development? It was temporarily resolved in late 1957 with the implementation of the Maoist Great Leap Policies. Henceforth, the paths of China and the Soviet Union began to diverge as the former gradually abandoned the Soviet model of development in favour of a strategy that would take the peculiarities of the Chinese situation into account. For our purposes, the relevant features of this period are, the growing nationalism and the emerging differences regarding China's developmental course. The former crystallized in the form of an increasing interest in Chinese traditional culture and more positive assessments of the past on the part of an increasing number of historians. The latter represents the beginning of the two line struggle in Chinese politics, which was to greatly influence historiography in the sixties. It eventually led to a climactic confrontation, with immensely far-reaching repercussions in almost every aspect of Chinese society. It also provided an insight into the thinking of the important leaders - particularly as regards the role of the Communist Party in socialist China.

On 2nd May 1956, Mao made a speech to a closed session of the Supreme State Conference. The speech, never made public, has gone down in history, as Mao's famous 'Hundred Flowers' speech and is generally regarded as heralding a period of liberalization in China. In actual fact the process of relaxation of strict ideological control had begun with Zhou Enlai's January 1956 speech. Greater freedom in the cultural sphere, as also for the scholars, was elaborated in further speeches by Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Yang in March 1957 and a little known but crucial fact is that these speeches interestingly also use the phrase, 'let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend'. The first use of this expression is conventionally attributed to Mao Zedong.

In a directive to the Party Organization of the Ministry of Culture on 8th March 1956, while a National Modern Drama Festival was taking place in Peking, Liu Shaoqi stated:

"There should not be any drastic revision of plays. Any harmless play may be staged. Harmful ones may also be staged after minor alterations in certain plays. Some old plays have rich educational significance and should not be touched. (Those ) who are charged with duties to revise plays in drama and opera troupes should be warned against impetuosity..."
Liu also called for the promotion of variety.

"...Our policy is to let hundred flowers bloom, to develop something new from the old. We cannot afford to erase certain things because they are old. The remoulding of a culture requires strenuous efforts. You can't build Rome in one day. 'Let hundred flowers bloom' permits coexistence..."  

Zhou Yang spoke in a similar vein on 14 March 1956 in a Symposium on literature and art dwelling on the necessity of studying progressive culture in capitalist countries along with socialist culture. Besides, a necessary pre-requisite to the blooming of a hundred flowers was uncovering and preserving the national heritage. These speeches were made public in the sixties when the radicals, led by Jiang Qing, accused Liu and his associates for having propagated erroneous and bourgeois ideas and prevented the true blossoming in the field of culture.

The process of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union and the upheaval in Hungary only speeded up the process of relaxation. Mao's 2nd May speech was incorporated in a major policy statement by Lu Dingyi, Director of the Party's Propaganda Department, to an audience of academicians, professionals, people from the cultural field and litterateurs. Lu's speech entitled, 'Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend' became the source of the proposed liberalization - more than had been seen hitherto. The details of Lu's speech need not concern us beyond the fact that the social sciences would be under greater supervision and control as compared to the natural sciences, but the Party line would no longer monopolize the direction and content of research and debate. More importantly, the objective of such a policy was to oppose doctrinaireism, to avoid the mistake of confining the development of a subject to only one school of thought.

It is quite possible that not all the leaders of CPC would have favoured the extent of liberalization that Mao

22. Ibid.
favoured or at any rate the manner in which the control of the Party was sought to be loosened. Presumably, his speech was never printed because a sizable section of the Party objected to the implications of blooming and contending which Mao envisioned. But it is equally possible that developments outside China coupled with China's needs for economic progress had brought about a broad consensus on the need to relax Party control on the intellectuals. Hence, other Party leaders besides Mao would undoubtedly have elaborated on the theme in various fora and on different occasions if the intellectuals had to be confident about airing their views. For instance, Zhou Yang reportedly averred in August 1956 that the slogan 'let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend' was "specifically formulated in the light of the criticism of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress" of the CPSU. Again, on May 13, addressing history students in Peking University, Liu Shaoqi explained the origin of the slogan.

"'Hundred schools of thought did contend as early as during the period of Ch'ung-ch'iu and the Warring States. The slogan 'hundred schools of thought contend' was first advanced by Ch'en Po-ta. Subsequently, Chairman Mao improved on it and put forward the policy of 'Let hundred flowers bloom; let hundred schools of thought contend'. There have been very many things that were not thought of by Chairman Mao. He merely improved on them.'" 26

Such elaborations need not necessarily be interpreted as measures to diminish or downgrade Mao Zedong's role in initiating the process of liberalization. Reportedly, Mao himself had proclaimed the historical antecedents of the slogan. But in the sixties, the radicals built a rather grim picture of Liu's sinister designs in speaking thus. A certain amount of personality clashes and personal rivalry impart dynamism to politics - indeed they are inevitable and necessary. But there are no grounds for concluding that the Mao-Liu rivalry had begun to rear its

23. Liu Shaoqi's lengthy political report at the Eighth Congress, of September 1956 for instance, mentioned blooming and contending only once in connection with the necessity of encouraging the development of science and the arts. But it discussed at great length the strengthening of Party leadership over state organs and supervision over subordinates by superiors. *Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, 3 vols. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 76-77. Besides, in his book *How To Be a Good Communist*, Liu wrote, "At all times and on all questions, a party member should give first consideration to the interests of the Party as a whole, and put them in the forefront.... The supremacy of the Party's interests in the highest principle that must govern the thinking and actions of the members....It is the highest expression of communist morality...." Liu Shao-ch'i, *How To Be a Good Communist* (Peking: People's Publishing House, 1962), rev ed., pp. 24-25.
24. Liu Shaoqi reportedly walked out during the delivery of this speech. See R. MacFarquhar, n. 21, pp. 250-52.
25. Ibid., p.53.
26. Ibid.
head in the mid-fifties and every statement and utterance of the latter is soaked in devious implications.

Then in February 1957, there was another major speech by Mao Zedong: "On the Correct Handling Of Contradictions Among The People." 27 The text of this speech was not published until June, when the liberalization had been stopped. The main thrust of this speech was in specifying the various contradictions existing in Chinese society; how the contradictions between the Communist Party and the people were non-antagonistic in nature and how they can - and should - be resolved by debate and discussion.

Thereafter, a lot of things began to happen - in the field of historical studies they had started somewhat earlier: conferences, debates, discussions, the espousing of totally unorthodox views and finally questioning the validity and legitimacy of the methods of Marxist historiography in Chinese history. The Scientific Planning Commission called on scholars to suggest ideas for a 'Draft of the 1956-57 Plan for Philosophy and Social Science'. To discuss this thoroughly, a conference was convened to which leading professors and research scholars from the Humanities were invited. The tasks which were considered of special importance were:

-Application of Marxism-Leninism to socialist construction
-Research on Chinese history
-Struggle against bourgeois ideology and idealism. 28

In January 1957 a Symposium was organised in Peking University. Attended by prominent historians and scholars this symposium brought up diverse views on the inheritability of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary China. There were some very positive statements in favour of assimilating the values of the ancient culture even if they had sprung from an idealist school of thought. Criticisms were voiced of the extremely dogmatic approach in treating terms such as 'materialism' and 'idealism' insofar as all value judgements stemmed from the question whether a particular thing was idealist or materialist 29

Thus, beginning in 1957 not only was there increase in output and interaction, but this in turn led to increased

27. Text in Mao Tse-tung: Selected Writings, n. 13, pp. 693-725.
29. Helmut Wilhelm, in Albert Feuerwerker, n. 12, p. 147.
research into Chinese history. Views, which would not have been tolerated in the first two or three years of the PRC were freely aired. Criticism of imitating the Soviet Union too mechanically also made an appearance. De-Stalinization had resulted in freer debate in the USSR as well. When the Soviet historians began to question Zhdanov's thesis that the history of philosophy should be viewed in the light of the struggle between idealism and materialism, which had for so long held sway, the Chinese did not lag behind. Ren Jiyu regretted that Zhdanov's argument had unduly influenced the Chinese analysis of the history of their philosophy and criticized himself for having "emphasized only the struggle between materialism and idealism and neglected their interaction and mutual interpretation which has enriched materialism." 30

It was also with the Hundred Flowers phase that historical discussions on Confucius acquired some momentum and autonomy. The freedom to air their views, initially leading to large-scale criticisms of the CPC, resulted for the first time in serious discussions on Confucius. The great merit of this period lies in the positive attitude towards the cultural heritage and despite much criticism and counter-criticism, rather because of it, gave much impetus to historical research. There would be many historians who would argue that the writing of history is by and large a political act and naturally in this view, historical scholarship would be considered the most political of all forms of scholarship. History in the PRC as well, in a large measure served as the handmaiden of politics. With the coming of the Communists, the history societies in existence were dissolved. A new Chinese History Association was established in 1951, under the chairmanship of the famous Marxist scholar Guo Moruo who proceeded to outline the general parameters and programme of historical research. The Study of History would have to turn from idealism to materialism, collective research would take the place of individual research, emphasis would be shifted from ancient to modern history, research would no longer be for pleasure but would 'serve the people', special attention would be given to the histories of national minorities and in the study of world history, the history of Asia would take precedence over the history of Europe and America. Mao had urged Chinese historians to critically sum up and inherit the past - a warning specially important in a strongly tradition oriented society. From time to time, as we shall see, this warning had to be repeated. 31

The specific subject of historiography, before Confucius was taken up, and which necessarily had to precede him, was periodization of Chinese history. The first step in the assessment of any historical figure according to the Marxists, depends on the class to which he belongs and whether he played a progressive role in history or not. This in turn depends on the period to which the figure in question belongs which requires a knowledge of the mode of production at different stages. So far the process is logical and straightforward. Complications begin when a particular figure lived in the phase of transition from one period to another. During such times wrote Marx, "...when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands." 32

Such a one was Confucius.

With the Marxist tools of analysis, it was now possible for the Chinese historians to bring the Chinese past out of its sinocentric cocoon and make it also a part of world history thus bequeathing universal applicability to the Chinese revolution. It would not merely be an autonomous event but a significant model - particularly for the developing countries in the world. It was therefore necessary to prove that Chinese history too, went through all the historical stages, from primitive communism to slave society to the feudal period and thence to capitalism, as Marx had outlined. 33

Periodization therefore was an important matter for the Chinese (although not new as we saw in the last chapter). Throughout the fifties if was one of the main subjects of historiographical writing and debate. Guangming Ribao on 29 October 1956, estimated that in the ten years since the establishment of the PRC, more than two hundred essays had been written about the periodization of ancient Chinese history. 34

32. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (Progress Publishers Moscow, 1968), p.44.
34. CNA, n. 31, p. 2.
The ramifications of the periodization controversies are many - and fascinating - but beyond the scope of the present work. For our purposes we shall select only those writings which were germane to the evaluations of the class stand-point of Confucius and hence the inheritability or otherwise of his legacy. For it must be remembered, that the debates were anything but conclusive, decisive or the final word. In fact, it was their inconclusive nature which led to widely different interpretations of Confucius.

According to the Shi Chi (Historical Records), Confucius was born in 551 B.C. in the State of Lu (which at present is the town of Qufu in the Shandong province). He died in 479 B.C. The question was whether this period was the slave or the feudal era in Chinese history. In 1931, Guo Moruo had drawn up a scheme whereby the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256BC) came in the feudal period. Subsequently, archaeological findings prompted him to revise his scheme to include the Zhou and the Qin Dynasties in the period of slavery. Another scheme of periodization, which was accepted by not a few historians was that the Chinese period of feudalism lasted during the Zhou Dynasty which contradicted Guo's view.

Most historians writing in the fifties saw Confucius as the upholder of the feudal system. But as pointed earlier, since periodization could not be definitely fixed, there was considerable debate and difference of scholarly opinion as to which class Confucius actually belonged. Thus on the one hand, he was variously seen as the champion of the decaying aristocracy, or taken to be a member of the feudal ruling class. On the other hand, historians who believed Confucius to have lived during the period of transition from the slave to the feudal era, when the progressive land-owner class was emerging, averred that Confucius represented these newly arising progressive forces. There were yet others who argued that Confucius emerged from the ranks of the poor and hence was a reformer; still others went to the extent of calling him a revolutionary. And even among those who held that Confucius belonged to the declining aristocrat ruling class, differences surfaced as to the correct interpretation of the exact category that comprised this class - as many as five categories emerging: dafa (gentry), junzi (nobility), lingzhu (lords), nuli zhu (slaveowners) and dizhu (landlords).

Interesting though these points of view are, our concern is with the evaluations of Confucius which followed as a consequence of the variety of views on Confucius' class membership. By and large, evaluations of Confucius followed traditional interpretations which suggested that Confucius upheld the feudal system. To all intents and purposes, Marxist criteria in judging historical figures had not begun to be taken seriously, or at any rate, proponents of the Marxist view had not started to assert themselves. Anyways, the evaluations had not yet taken a controversial turn. For often, analyses with a fundamental contradiction came out: basing themselves on Guo's periodization (the later one) Confucius was still viewed as supporting feudalism. To be sure, this discrepancy did not go unnoticed, especially when it appeared in no less a work than the 'Essentials of Chinese History' which was edited by the Chinese Historical Association. Yang Xiangkui revealed that

“If Kongzi had not been living in a feudal society, then he could not have been an upholder of the feudal system. One can see that the editors of the Essentials of Chinese History have basically accepted that society in the Spring and Autumn period was a feudal one.” 37

Articles praising Confucius, despite his representing the feudal classes began to be published. Among the earliest such examples, was an article in 1953 by Ji Wenfu according to which Confucius was a “thinker who represented the feudal aristocracy”, and yet through his system of private education, Confucius actually worked for the welfare of the common people. 38 Significantly, this article was published in the journal, *Lishi Jiaoxue* (History Teaching) and quite obviously intended to influence thinking in history teaching circles. In 1954, Feng Youlan published “The Study of the Thoughts of Confucius’ in *Xin Jiaoshe* (New Construction). Here it was argued that although Confucius was a member of the aristocracy, he was basically a reformer. By means of his teachings, he tried to improve the situation of the people and therefore rightfully belonged to the newly emerging landlord class which was “just in the initial stage of detaching itself from the ruling class.” 39 The influential historian Lu Zhenyu in his book *Zhongguo zhangle sixiang shi* (A History of Chinese Political Thought)

published in 1955 reasoned that although Confucius stood on the side of the feudal junzi (nobility), he tried to bring about a compromise between the aristocracy and the people through his concept of "zhengming" (rectification of names).

Going far beyond attempts such as these to establish the foundations for positive assessments of Confucius, was Prof. Guo Moruo. The periodization scheme that he had proposed had paved the way for claiming a progressive character for Confucius. Although Guo was to continually refine and advance his analysis and investigation of Chinese history according to Marxist criteria throughout the fifties and sixties, (he even submitted a self-criticism in 1966), he nonetheless continued to retain his rather romantic opinion of Confucius. And Guo's influence among the historians was tremendous. Besides his friendship with Mao placed him in a somewhat enviable position. Hence, his views formed the basis of many works. In 1956 he wrote a book Shi Pipan Shu (Ten Critiques) in which one chapter was "A Critique of Confucius and Mencius." Guo asserted that Confucius was in fact a revolutionary who had actually abetted attempts to overthrow the slave system. Guo even provided examples to show how Confucius offered to aid the rebels of his time, and tried to explain his methodology and standpoint in coming to such a conclusion:

"In criticizing men of the past, I think it should be similar to a judge conducting a trial, detailed attention should be given to the evidence, so that no injustice might be committed. The verdict of a judge is given in accordance with law; mine, in accordance with a principle... (which) is to see whether the interest of the people is given the paramount consideration. Ideas that are in line with this principle are good; otherwise, evil. The reason why I praise Confucius and Mencius rather highly is because, among the various schools, their ideas leaned more towards this principle... to ignore their social backgrounds and discuss only their ideas was the common way of those who studied the pre-Ch' in philosophers in former days, and even the new historians were unable to avoid it. I dislike this method... We must

40. Kam Louie, n. 37, p. 64.
41. On 14 April 1966, at a meeting of the Select Committe of the National's People's Congress, Guo made a self-criticism. "In the past decades, a pen has always been in my hand, writing and translating works amounting to many millions of words. However, in the light of present standards, what I have written, strictly speaking, should be all burned. It has no value, none whatsoever." Remin Ribao, 5 May 1966. Trans. in China Quarterly, No. 27, July-September, 1966, p. 192.
rediscover the basic standpoint or intention ... before we can judge ... ideas.  

By 1956 there was much activity underway in historical circles. Increasing interest was being shown in the question of the relevance of Confucius and his philosophy in the present while the class view and standpoint of Confucius took a back seat. A few articles which echoed the May Fourth denunciations such as Confucius' disdainful attitude towards women and the laboring masses attracted no attention. In a sense, the discussions of the Confucian philosophy followed conventional patterns: the focus was on the concept of Ren (Benevolence). A word of explanation: our purpose is not to go into the philosophical ramifications of ren, as it unfolded in the debates. Rather it is to pick out those interpretations which shed light on the nature of historiography and more particularly those which put forth somewhat interesting justifications for inheriting from Confucius' wisdom.

Secondly, if the foregoing conveys the impression that all was smooth sailing for Confucius, it was not the case. After 1949, one of the earliest historians to argue against the possibility of Confucian ideas having any validity in the contemporary context was Prof. Yang Rongguo about whom there will be more later. Yang's book, Zhongguo gudai sixiang shi (The History of Ancient Chinese Thought) in 1952 was quite critical of Confucius. And among the younger generation of Marxist historians, Yang exercised considerable influence. He believed that ren did not encompass the entire people but referred only to the declining aristocrat class. It had been evolved out of the need for staying the declining of the slaveowning classes and as such was an attempt at checking the march of progress.

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese scholars following Zhdanov's thesis that the history of philosophy was the product of the struggle between the idealist and materialist thinking set out examine Confucius' philosophy in a similar manner. For if it could be shown that materialism was the basis of the wisdom of the great Sage, the case for his relevance would be stronger. But this aspect need not detain us, for the argument by itself is not as significant as the rationale behind proving Confucius to be materialist. Indeed, there were no major debates on

43. Ibid., p.43.
44. The term is almost untranslatable and yet variously translated as love, altruism, kindness, compassion, charity, goodness, human-heartedness, etc. Mencius, the disciple of Confucius used it as 'benevolence' and it is this term which is used most often. On Ren and the ways and problems of translation, see Raymond Dawson, Confucius (Oxford 1981), pp. 37-40.
whether Confucius was a materialist or an idealist - but there were articles galore on how Confucius could be considered essentially a materialist thinker. But this was primarily done by randomly selecting quotations; the arguments were not always based on painstaking research.

The above mentioned arguments are also, naturally, not intended to suggest that the Marxist criteria in evaluating historical figures or in the study of history were sidelined. All that is sought to be established is that despite the plethora of criticisms by many Marxist historians, the countercriticisms, self-criticisms, arguments, disagreements, accusations, refutations and justifications, no issue as yet had become bitterly controversial. Nor were all the younger Marxist historians as violently opposed to Confucius as the May Fourth generation had been, although a certain amount of iconoclasm could very easily have been expected. Older Marxist historians such as Yang Rongguo and Zhao Jibin were far more critical. Besides, for a section of the younger historians, greater danger lay in the far-more reactionary figure of Zhuangzi - the founder of the Daoist philosophy. The escapist and anarchist elements of Daoism needed to be combated with greater energy and urgency than the Confucian ren. This aspect of the fifties connects with a rather interesting parallel in the eighties. The CPC's current policy of allowing greater religious freedom to the people today, has led to a substantial rise in the observance of religious activities and practices among the followers of Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. But, there is no official encouragement to the adherents of Daoism. It is clearly believed that the fundamentals of Daoism, if allowed to be propagated and promoted, would undermine the efforts of the leadership in maintaining their control, law and order and obedience to the government.

But, to return to Confucius, on 14 November 1956, Feng Youlan wrote an article in the philosophical supplement of Guangming Ribao in appreciation of Confucius. This article re-appeared in the English language fortnightly, People's China on January 1, 1957. Feng began by duly appreciating the tremendous role and influence of Confucius.

"From the second century BC to the nineteenth century AD, through two thousand years, the philosophical superstructure of feudalist society was inseperable from K'ung Tzu. He has been the

46. Kam Louie, n. 37, pp. 91-128
dominant personality of Chinese history and had an intimate connection with the authority of the Chinese feudal ruling class."

As a result, Confucius had become almost synonymous with the ideology of feudalism, which aspect had been most severaly attacked during the MFM. "However, attacks on feudalism are not the same as a genuine study of Confucius." Thus Feng sought to criticize the anti-Confucianism of the MFM, which, according to him was not based on serious historical invetigations. It has already been remarked that in the mid-fifties, opinions about Confucius were extremely wide ranging. Feng covered the various interpretations in his article centering around the following concepts: Tien (Heaven), Li (Ceremony or Rites or Propriety)47, and Ren (Benevolence). The Analects, conventionally judged as the most reliable source of the utterances of the Sage48, is in the form of questions from his disciples and Confucius' replies. This form has kept the matter of interpretation very flexible. After setting out the diverse explanations, Feng expressed his admiration for Confucius' wide and deep learning, eagerness for knowledge and his ideas on education. He finally concluded with what may possibly exemplify the sentiment of the fifties:

"The feudalist system which set up his name as a symbol has gone for good; but the name of Confucius himself is, and always will be, respected and cherished by the Chinese people."49

1956 and 1957 was indeed a gloriously heterodox period. Which is not to suggest that there was a total absence of control or direction, but that the strict ideological parameters in the study and analysis of historical figures had not yet made an appearance. Feng Youlan in particular, emerged on the scene as a sort of guardian of traditional culture which he wished to prevent from sinking into total oblivion. And by various means he tried to resist the attempts by the Party to ensure the dominance of the Marxist method in historical studies. At times he came out with scathing criticism. On October 23, 1956, he published an essay in Renmin Ribao. Starting with the admission that the "history of philosophy is the history of development of struggle between Idealism and Materialism", Feng expressed his dissatisfaction with "the current way of speaking according to which before the appearance of Marxism all consideration of society and of history was idealist." To drive home the point he stated

47. For an account of how Li has been translated, see R. Dawson, n. 44, pp. 26-36.
that even in Engels’ work there was no final word on the existence of historical materialism before the appearance of Marxism. He cited the examples of Chinese philosophers who had believed that matter was the determining factor in social evolution and although their materialism was not perfect, it was not to say that they were idealist. He claimed that there was “compenetration” between materialism and idealism through the whole of Chinese history. But the most stinging remarks were reserved for the party historians.

“Our past view of ‘two opposed camps’, idealism and materialism, both developing independently, oversimplified the development. This approach is neither materialist not dialectical.”

Or again,

“During the past years we felt that idealism was entirely meaningless. We judged these philosophers in a biased, superficial way, from the point of view of metaphysical materialism and not that of dialectical materialism.”

On January 8, Guangming Ribao published another essay by Feng Youlan entitled “The Problem of Inheriting the Legacy of Chinese Philosophy.” In a way, this article can be seen as Feng’s attempt to put in a theoretical framework his major preoccupation of the last two decades: the process of development and assimilation of ideas thought history. He firmly believed in the capacity of a socialist society to ‘inherit’ and absorb positively the ideas of the past. The problem lay in determining the criteria that were to be used in understanding the process of adaptation of ideas according to changing circumstances, for inheritance was not “mere accumulation” of earlier concepts but “something that performed the function of critically linking the past heritage with the present and future.”

The central feature of Feng’s thesis was that a distinction could be made between the “abstract” or universal meaning of an idea and its “concrete” or particular meaning. He argued, that by determining only the latter and thereby rejecting the entire idea was unhistorical. But, by analyzing its abstract meaning, the valuable aspects of

the ancient philosophy could be inherited. Not only could one thus determine whether any specific concept was in essence progressive or conservative, but its application in present times could be assessed as well. As mentioned earlier, Feng believed that Confucius had lived at the period of transition from the slave to the feudal system. Hence for Feng, the Confucian philosophy comprised both the elements of aristocratic thinking as also the beliefs of the newly rising land-owning classes. Feng therefore strongly advocated reconsidering the Confucian concepts. Among others, he cited the example of the maxim: "that which you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others". While it was true, he said, that in its "concrete" aspect this maxim had been interpreted - and rightly so - as part of Confucius' intention to contain the class struggle of the time, a broader understanding was essential. In its abstract meaning, this maxim could prove extremely useful as a contemporary social more, insofar as it could influence people in dealing with each other.52

In total contrast to Feng Youlan, Yang Rongguo represented a position which the CPC endorsed as the standard, even orthodox Marxist position on Confucius. He was among the few historians who remained steadfast in his assessment of Confucius which he had formulated in the late forties. He was also among the earliest scholars to examine Chinese history using Marxist guidelines, and he was to prove very influential in the debates on Confucius during the Anti-Confucius Campaign of the seventies. In the fifties he played a somewhat marginal role - his stand on Confucius was among the few which ran counter to the general pro-Confucius mood. For Yang consistently adhered to the belief that the Spring and Autumn period in which Confucius lived was that of the decline of the slaveowners; that Confucius was very definitely a representative of the declining slave-owing aristocracy and as such, was a firm supporter of those values. He spoke out strongly against the Confucian reverence for the ancients which in effect resulted in a total disregard for everything that was new - even if it was good.53

The Confucian concept of ren which had become the basis of a positive assessment of Confucius in the fifties was also criticized by Yang. He pointed out that by distinguishing between the "superior men" and the "mean men", Confucius had no intention of extending ren to the latter and that it applied only to the ruling classes. And

52. Ibid., p. 354.
53. Yang Rongguo, Kong-Mo de sixiang (The Thought of Confucius and Mencius) (Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 1947), Cited in Ibid., p.356.
although Yang was willing to concede that certain aspects of Confucius' philosophy appeared to possess a progressive character, it was important to scrutinize the social context and philosophical content before pronouncing a concept as progressive. Besides, possessing 'progressive' elements in a body of thought was a far cry from that body of thought possessing a progressive character altogether. And in the ultimate analysis, the method of selecting progressive elements and thereby assessing any concept, meant a negation of the class analysis of the Marxist method.

Feng's concept of 'abstract inheritance' was attacked in a lengthy article in *Renmin Ribao* on March 28 and 30, 1957, by Hu Sheng. The basic charges were that Feng had tended to play down class struggle and that despite his differentiation between the concrete and abstract character of ideas, he did not "solve the problem of how to interpret the history of Chinese philosophy." Moreover, Feng's abstract inheritance meant that the entire thought of the philosophers could be inherited by making an abstraction of it hence, their materialist or idealist thinking was inconsequential. This amounted to blurring the opposition between materialists and idealists in the history of Chinese philosophy and sidelining the "Party character of philosophy." Feng Youlan attempted to refute Hu Sheng's charges in "Another Look at the Problem of Inheriting the Legacy of Chinese Philosophy' in the No. 5 issue of *Zhexue Yanjiu* which appeared in October 1957. What he had proposed in January said Feng, was merely a method, which did not presume to judge the class character of the philosophical heritage.

Meanwhile, Confucius continued to be hailed. In February 1957, the first draft of *Outline of Teaching Materials on the History of Chinese Philosophy* was published in *Xin Jianshe*. This Outline was compiled by the Peking University Philosophy Department of Chinese History of the Philosophical Research Bureau. And the Bureau was under the direction of Prof. Feng Youlan. The outline contained a section on Confucius in which the praise and encomiums showered on the Sage far outstripped the criticism. Not only was Confucius seen as having kept pace with the development in history by demanding reform in society and politics, but he was also a great historian, man of letters and an eminent educationalist. His norm of social life was *Li*, which was not

55. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
merely external behaviour but combined with the idea of justice and his concept of ren, which meant sympathy and love of people. In criticism it was said that li, in combination with ren, had been utilized by the feudal ruling classes to pacify class contradictions. 56 The Outline as a whole seemed a rather odd mixture of conventional/traditional interpretations along with some Marxist criteria as also Feng’s own personal preferences.

The favourable environment notwithstanding, some sharp criticism of the Outline came out. Chen Jenwei, in Guangming Ribao on May 1, 1957, criticized li and ren as supportive of the ruling classes and aimed at reversing the wheels of history rather than moving them forward. Confucius was castigated for despising the common people and for using his philosophical concepts to douse the feelings of revolt on the part of the masses. 57

But then it was the season of variety. Hundreds of flowers and hundreds of schools had been exhorted to bloom and contend. In March 1957, Jian Bozan, head of the Department of History at Peking University announced a series of Conferences on History and at the first one gave an introductory talk lauding free exchange of views which, he said was the tradition of Peking University and indeed of China. Fan Wenlan who delivered the first talk however served the reminder that the parameters of historical research were not to be forgotten. He proposed eight guides for the right “non-dogmatic” approach to history: seven were pamphlets by Mao Zedong and one by Lu Dingyi. 58 Jian Bozan brought out a report on these sessions in Guangming Ribao on 24th April, 1957. Exulting almost, on the success of the conferences, Jian enthused about “a new climate”, “a new hope” and how widely divergent opinions were openly aired. Historians belonging to different schools such as Gu Jiegang and Pei Weizhong had expressed an interest in participation. Jian welcomed everyone, including the “idealists” and “scholars from capitalist countries”. 59

Gu Jiegang, when interviewed by a reporter voiced his only ambition which was to study the classic canons, “the heart of ancient culture” without which the history of Chinese political and economic thought cannot be

57. Ibid., p. 4
58. CNA, No. 237, 18 July 1958, p.4
59. Ibid.
understood. Other well known historians questioned the applicability of Marxism to history. Xiang Da, Prof. of History at Peking University called the party theoreticians and historians “amateurish” for they “simply (did) not understand.” Besides, he said that under the ‘hundred flowers policy’ only five flowers were being allowed to bloom: Periodization, Peasant Rebellions, Rise and early growth of Capitalism, Feudal organizations and the formation of the Chinese race, thereby expressing his scorn of the limitations of party direction. The Marxist interpretation of history he concluded, would only “lower its quality.”

And so it went on. In 1958, Ji Wenfu wrote a book, *Qunqiu zhongguo sixiang shihua* (Comments on the History of Thought in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods). For long an admirer of Confucius, he referred to him as “the cock whose crow brightened the sky.” There was also some revival of Confucius’ ideas of the “great commonwealth” (*datong*) and “self cultivation” (*xiu yang*) and the “five human relationships” by Dou Zhongguang in an article in *Guangming Ribao* on 10th April 1957. The arguments were somewhat reminiscent of Kang Youwei’s design for the reinstatement of Confucian concepts. There was even one article which explored the influence of Confucius in Europe in the nineteenth Century. The author Zhu Qianchi wrote how European thinkers had spoken favourably of Confucius’ ideas of democracy - the implication being that Marx could possibly have been indirectly influenced by Confucius. But this article did not generate any response.

If Confucius was not praised directly, then party historians who denounced him were in turn attacked for their opinions. Everything, from the poor quality of the available books to the doctrinaireism and subjectivism of the CPC, to the Soviet influence, was found fault with. But then, the Hundred Flowers policy was brought to an end. Although there was no official announcement, a counter-attack was launched on the rightists in June 1957. In the field of historical studies, debates continued right up to the beginning of 1958. One of older historians, Lei Haizong went to the extent of saying in a *Renmin Ribao* article on 4th October 1957 that in history, “the worst
book before the Liberation was better than any one now used." Socialist history, in his opinion was "not worth a cent", that there had been no "development of Marxism since the death of Engels" and worst of all, "Marx is a thing of the past". Another article by Rong Mengyuan in *Guangming Ribao* on 10th October 1957 was equally devastating. The Party, he said, should leave history to the historians.

Ancient history had truly acquired the proportions of magnificent obsession. Then on 10th March 1958 Chen Boda outlined the new cultural policy in the slogan - *houjin bogu* - "more recent, less ancient". Fan Wenlan explained this slogan as a "necessary condition" for the "leap" in historical studies. The emphasis on ancient history reflected a "Hu Shi mentality" accused Fan, and was indicative of escapism from politics and actuality. The official line was reinforced by Zai Shangshu in *Wenhuibao* on 11 April 1958. The history of China "must be studied from the point of view of the CPC history and the history of the world from that of the Soviet Communist Party." He added that history was a "weapon" to sift out all remnants of capitalism, feudalism and fascism.

Finally in April 1958, a meeting was convened with the purpose of putting the new line into effect - in other words, to discuss ways and means of bringing back historiography within the prescribed limits. Hou Wailu, who was to be discredited during the Cultural Revolution, emphasized that "more modern" was essential "because of its international aspect", because it was progressive and scientific. He called for study of the "ancient history with a socialist aim and from the experience of actual class struggle." Yet another historian, Bai Shouyi spoke of the tendency among the teachers, to concentrate on the ancient because dead people were easier to manage than the living. Moreover, most teachers considered ancient history - particularly the periods of the Sage Kings - more useful in developing national feelings. But Bai Shouyi regretted this tendency for its contrary and deplorable effect on the youth. It was a capitalist attitude which unfortunately seemed to be the general trend among the teachers.

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66. Ibid., p. 5.
67. A report in *Guangming Ribao* on 30 April 1958, attacking the manner in which history courses were being taught gives a fair idea of the situation. In a University in 1957, out of 83 questions discussed, only 14 were about China-and not one about the PRC, (ie, after 1949). Less than one third of the timetable was devoted to modern history. Cited in Ibid., pp. 5-6.
68. Ibid., p. 6.
69. Ibid., pp 6-7.
historians and the teachers—that is, the tendency to immerse themselves in the ancient texts to escape from reality, thereby greatly jeopardizing the development of Marxism. "More modern" concluded Bai Shouyi, is a "socialist necessity". 70

In effect what was being called for was greater indoctrination and an intensified use of the Marxist criteria in study. Only then would the required "leap" in historical studies come about. The discussions on Confucius had amply revealed that bourgeois and idealist views still persisted among the intellectuals. It did not augur well for the young—the future of China—who were under the tutelage of such people.

In 1958 therefore, Feng Youlan was the chief target of criticism. In the no. 1 issue of Zhexue Yanjiu in 1958, Guan Feng charged Feng Youlan with "revisionism" and for ignoring the class character of history and philosophy. He also attacked the other historians who followed Feng in confusing idealism and materialism and in failing to apply the Marxist categories in the study of ancient history. In another article in Guangming Ribao on June 15, Guan Feng called Feng an "anti-Marxist". The attempt by some historians to somehow fit Chinese philosophy and history into the Marxist pattern so as to build a case for its relevance, too was dismissed by Guan as "useless". 71 Obviously, what had been more or less overlooked in the mid-fifties was not going to be tolerated anymore. Historians and philosophers had now to thoroughly master Marxism and apply it scientifically—not in a half-hearted and half-baked fashion, merely to escape criticism.

The only aspect of Confucius on which there was near total unanimity was on the role of Confucius as educator and teacher. That his view on education could very usefully be incorporated into the present thinking was the burden of innumerable articles. While top priority was given to reconstruction and rehabilitation, the CPC leadership put considerable emphasis on reeducating the educated and on the spread of education among the masses. In the context of education therefore, the relationship between Ideology, Politics and Historiography becomes even more apparent. Hence some digression into the relevance and role of Education would be in order. It would also provide the basis for understanding the historiography on Confucius' educational views. In the

70. Reported in Renmin Ribao, 16 May 1958, Ibid., p. 7.
71. CNA, No. 244, 12 September 1958, pp. 1-2.
Common Program of 1949, the pro-tem constitution, Mao Zedong’s concept of New Democracy was officially adopted. ‘On New Democracy’ was written by Mao in January 1940 in which he stated that

"...our aim is to build a new society and a new state for the Chinese nation. That new society and new state will have not only a new politics and a new economy but a new culture. In other words, not only do we want to change a China that is politically oppressed and economically exploited into a China that is politically free and economically prosperous, we also want to change the China which is being kept ignorant and backward under the sway of the old culture into an enlightened and progressive China under the sway of a new culture. In short, we want to build a new China..." 72

This new culture which was envisioned, would provide those conditions in which the development of the ‘new’ would take place. In this task, great faith had been placed in ‘education’. As Mao had put it,

"Our educational policy must enable everyone who gets an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a well-educated worker imbued with socialist consciousness." 73

The aims and content of education in the PRC were defined and formulated in accordance with the political, economic and social goals of the Communist government. The first basic task of education was ideological training so as to inculcate a new concept of knowledge and new attitudes towards labor, property, religion, society, classes and the Party; in other words, the development of the proletarian mentality.

The question now arises: what is the place of ‘history’ in education? Actually, within the framework of formal instruction in educational institutions in China, History is one of the few subjects that is taught continually from primary school to post-graduate institutes. There is virtually no history text which does not point out the necessity of a proper study of history so as to “correctly absorb(ing) the rich historical heritage of our country”. A widely read text, Zhongguo lishi chengshi (General Knowledge in Chinese History) by Wu Han, opens with: “Obviously an important path which we cannot do without is to study history and to absorb correctly the rich historical heritage of our country.” 74

73. "On The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among The People" in Ibid., p. 711.
History is also intimately related to what is generally termed education in political thought. The two fundamental purposes of Communist education are rather pithily summed up in 'red and expert'. Expertness refers to that part of educational achievement which enables the individual to perform professionally and vocationally and is basically technical or functional in connotation. Being red means ideological progressiveness and correctness without which expertness may be misapplied and prove socially detrimental. Redness therefore had to take precedence over expertness. In Mao's view,

"Politics and professions form a unity of opposites, in which politics is predominant and primary, and while we must fight against the tendency to ignore politics, it won't do to confine oneself to politics and have no technical or professional knowledge."

The emphasis on ideological correctness has given the teaching and writing of history a special position in education, for the understanding and acceptance of Marxism-Leninism depends on an understanding of historical materialism which alone provides scientific answers to questions. "Marxism-Leninism" declared Mao, "is a science, and science means honest, solid knowledge; there is no room for playing tricks."

In other words, the making of new socialist citizens and the creation of a new democratic culture are seen to be dependent on the study and reinterpretation of history according to the laws of historical materialism and dialectical materialism. It was in this spirit that the Common Program called for the promotion of "the application of a scientific historical viewpoint to the study and interpretation of history, economics, politics, culture and international affairs..." It was in this spirit that scientific history was proclaimed to be an important weapon of revolution, the success of which is assured when the socialist minded workers understand not only China's today, but also China's yesterday.

Stated more clearly, in political and ideological terms the purpose of historical study in education is "to

76. "Reform Our Study", Mao Tse-tung : Selected Writings n. 13, p. 534.
77. Article 44 of the Common Programme.
78. "Reform Our Study", n. 76, p. 534.
recognize profoundly the objective laws of historical development of societies and to absorb critically the cultural heritage of China as well as the cultural achievements of foreign nations, thereby causing historical science to have positive effects upon social life, affirming the will and confidence of our people on their road to progress and enriching our new culture. 79 And, it is only through the study of history that the virtues of patriotism and internationalism can be inculcated and the cultivation of the Communist ethics can be achieved.

The educational system therefore, by any estimation, was the most logical and obvious means of bringing about an ideological transformation. Yet it was not until the late fifties that the aims and policies of the CPC started to be systematically implemented through China's network of schools, colleges and universities. The early years of the Republic saw only some basic and essential steps being taken, accompanied by a large scale imitation of Soviet methods and ideas. Mao had proclaimed in 1949: "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is our best teacher and we must learn from it." 80

The educational system inherited by the CPC in 1949, was patterned after the American system. 81 This system had been under the control of the Nationalist government, or run by private individuals or by missionary groups. 82 After assuming power, the Communists first took over the former and by 1952 brought all private schools under their control as well. But the overhauling of the entire system could not begin at once. In the first place, the preoccupation with the reconstruction of a war ravaged country, allowed for only structural reforms such as extension of educational facilities to the people, cutting across the traditional barriers and a more centralized system of control. Secondly, with the adoption of the First Five Year Plan (FFYP), greater stress was laid on the development of technical schools at the higher levels, rather than at the primary and middle, and efforts were concentrated more in the larger cities and the industrial areas.

The crucial aspect that must be kept in mind is that the CPC concentrated more on the teachers and professors.

82. Y anjing University for instance, before being taken over by the Ministry of Education in February 1951, had been financed and run by the Americans for 32 years. Ibid., p.73.
In comparative terms, the younger generation was by and large ignored. For them certain rules of behaviour were outlined such as obedience, punctuality, diligence, respect, honesty, politeness and friendliness. The masses as we saw, were sought to be initiated into the new ideology by mass campaigns, rectification campaigns, wall posters and newspapers.

In view of the general scenario and the fact that the new leaders were beginning to realize the problems in the administration of a country as large as China, it could probably be said that the newly established Communist government did all it could. Yet the fact remains that the success of the CPC in revolutionizing the field of education was not exactly spectacular. Till the launching of the Great Leap Forward (GLF), ideological education and other aspects of the Communists' educational policy such as participation in labor, sending people from the cities to the countryside etc, remained a part of the curriculum, but only nominally, so that by and large it failed to transform the educational system into an effective ideological instrument of the new socialist state.

A major preoccupation in this initial phase was the replacement of the American influence by the Soviet influence in terms of educational methods, curriculae and textbooks. "The Communist party of the Soviet Union is our best teacher and we must learn from it" declared Mao in 1949. The extent of this new influence and the reliance placed on it can be gauged by the criticism which surfaced during the 'hundred flowers' period. And in any case, the impressive economic statistics notwithstanding, in the long run the technology intensive Soviet system would prove to be incompatible with the largely agrarian, tradition bound system of China. The rethinking on China's economic strategy and the strain in the Sino-Soviet relationship, led to a change in the educational circles as well. A large number of the intellectuals did not view the wholesale import of Soviet books and the uncompromising rejection of Western science and culture favourably. The growing nationalism and the desire for self-reliance made the Chinese examine their own past to see what could be usefully extracted from it. At first this trend was sought to be justified by citing the Soviet example of the thirties when a similar trend had

83. Rules of Conduct For Primary School Students issued by the Ministry of Education on 13 May 1955. Cited in Ibid., p.73.
85. For figures regarding Soviet assistance and other statistical details such as number of translations etc., see Lofstedt, n. 81, p. 108.
86. "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship", n. 80, p. 108.
been seen in the USSR: after a rather radical beginning, the Soviet educational system was seen to co-opt certain aspects of the traditional Russian system of education. In turning to Confucius in the early fifties therefore, the Chinese could not only cite a precedence, but satisfy their own wishes as well.

Whatever his role and thought with regard to slavery and aristocracy, Confucius' ideas on education were by and large seen as progressive. Even Mao had given due credit to Confucius' contribution to education. This aspect could therefore be praised without being unduly hampered by party criticism. A series of articles in Guangming Ribao in the latter half of 1954 clearly revealed a general admiration. The first article dated June 14 was by Xu Mengying. Confucius, according to this article, was of great relevance, not merely for China but for the world. Xu admitted that as a representative of the slave aristocracy, Confucius had a conservative aspect to his character - but that was as far as he would go in pointing out the defects and drawbacks of Confucius' educational thought - and it was quite obvious (that) it was meant for those who could take exception to a favourable assessment of Confucius. Xu pointed out that there were many progressive elements in Confucius' educational thinking and it was his intention to highlight them for they, the progressive elements, were suitable for adaptation even in Communist China. Confucius had started the practice of private teaching instead of adhering to the customary practice of serving as tutor to the aristocracy, thereby enabling people from all walks of life to receive education, if they possessed the ability and the aptitude, as also the means. In other words, Confucius did not wish that education remain a limited privilege of the elite in society. For Confucius, education was to be primarily directed toward changing the behaviour of the individual. Xu also claimed that Confucius had stated, that as the wealth of a country increased, education should be made available for more and more people. This had an obvious message for contemporary China. Xu believed that Confucian education rested on three basic principles which should form the basis of any educational system: that the teacher should teach each student according to his or her individual ability (and here Xu cited the example of how Confucius gave different answers to different


disciples for the same question); that there should be a periodical review of lessons and that students should have respect and reverence for their teachers.

Such a positive assessment did not go unchallenged. On 28 June, another article was published. 90 The author of this second article, Shen Yi began with an acknowledgement of Confucius' greatness, but he criticized the unabashed encomiums showered by Xu. Shen Yi charged that Xu had "almost turned Confucius into a modern educationist by practically forcing the ancient teaching principles of Confucius into formulas so that they could be fitted onto contemporary progressive educational principles such as the "authority of the teacher," "reviewing lessons," "consolidation of knowledge" and "understanding the individual characteristics of each student." Such interpretations had the potential danger of misleading the people at large into "blindly worshipping Confucius." Moreover, Xu had not explored the Analects deeply enough, for then he would not have considered Confucius' view on education at par with the "progressive pedagogic principles of the present." 91 As for example, the arguments and quotes provided by Xu to prove that the students of Confucius had the deepest respect for him, resulted in depicting Confucius as one who demanded blind worship from his disciples and not the modern idea of 'respect' which Xu was trying to project.

This was followed by a third article by Chu Shusen, "A Few Suggestions on the Study of Confucius' Educational Thought" on 9 August 1954. 92 Like Xu Mengying before him, Chu, who was a teacher in an experimental primary school in Jiangsu, believed that Confucius' ideas on education had relevance in the present and that Shen Yi had misinterpreted Xu's article. Chu set out to clarify what he believed was Xu's purpose. Far from attempting to graft ancient educational practices and precepts in contemporary China, the objective was "selective and critical inheritance" of the past by absorbing those aspects of the Confucian idea system which fitted with modern day socialist policies. He firmly stated that the pedagogic principles of Confucius would prove congenial to the new ethos.

91. As quoted in Kam Louie, n. 37, p. 80.
“Who can deny that Confucius' teaching principles have great practical significance? We cannot, because the times are different, and social systems and educational aims and requirements are different, deny the historical place of those educationalists who historically had propagated culture, thus destroying their educational principles.”93

In a second article, “Comments on the Article ‘Confucius’ Educational Thought’ ” which appeared on 4th October 1954, Chu Shusen attempted to bring out a more balanced evaluation. 94 He first took Xu Mengying to task for not paying attention to the class character of Confucius’ ideas and then pointed out additional positive features such as Confucius’ advocacy of the ‘active pursuit of knowledge’, his use of concrete examples in teaching and his understanding of and insight into human psychology.

The main journal in the field of education was Renmin Jiaoyu (People’s Education). From 1950 to 1957, this journal primarily carried out translations of articles by Russian educators and discussed the major concerns of the new policies in education, but carried nothing on Confucius. During the period of hundred flowers there was a flood of criticism regarding imitation of Soviet methods in education and a realization that China's problems required a more indigenous solution, a solution that would be closer to the soil of the land. In 1957 Mao reportedly expressed his dissatisfaction at a talk with heads of provincial and municipal education departments:

“Is this Ministry of Education a Soviet Ministry of Education, or a Chinese Ministry of Education?”95

In an article in 1957 in Renmin Jiaoyu, the ignorance among Chinese educationalists regarding Confucius’ educational thinking was thus commented upon:

“Now there are some teachers who, when talking about educationalists seem to know a great deal about Dewey and Makarenko (and of course this should be the case), but when it comes to educationalists of our country like Confucius, they cannot say more than a few words about them. We can’t call this a

93. Ibid., in Staiger, n. 89, p. 38.
normal phenomenon.”

Even the Soviet commentators remarked on how by the end of 1956 “the middle and higher institutions of learning departed more and more from extensive reliance on Soviet curricula textbooks used prior to this.”

In 1957 there also appeared the first book about Confucius’ educational ideas since Liberation. It was a compilation of lecture notes by a teacher in the Peking Normal University - Chen Jingpan - and titled “The Educational Thought of Confucius.” It gave a very favourable account of Confucius. According to Chen, the basic content of Confucian education was ren and li. Although these concepts had a class basis, it was primarily because of the nature of the period in which Confucius lived. The concepts of ren and li formed the fundamental subject matter in the education of the junzi (nobility). Chen believed that for Confucius, the junzi were those who loved and cared for the people. For, despite belonging to the aristocratic class, ren added the element of humaneness to their thinking. Apart from this clarification, Chen also attempted to utilize Feng Youlan’s method of concrete and abstract inheritance to surmount the class content of ren and li to prove them relevant to contemporary China.

Feng Youlan did not bring out anything on Confucius’ educational ideas. But he had long been a great admirer of them. He had expressed his veneration of Confucius’ pioneering role in the field of education in his book A History of Chinese Philosophy in volume one. Feng believed that Confucius was “primarily an educationalist” and was “the first man in China to make teaching his profession” and thus popularize culture and education. And although he made his living through his teaching, “this fact should not in any way disparage him, since any...

100. Ibid., p. 48.
sort of existence requires some means of support."  

In fact, Confucius was a great emancipator, for holding that "in teaching there should be no class distinctions", for accepting large number of students and for "taking in everyone who would pay for tuition, without personal questions about them or their families; the giving of equal instruction in each subject and the teaching of how to read every kind of literary treasure." Confucius was also seen as responsible for bringing culture to the large masses of people by originating the use of the Six Disciplines for general teaching.

As seen earlier, although the 'hundred flowers' policy was brought to an end in mid-1957, it was not until the next year that the historical circles were affected. In April 1958, there was a conference of historians in Beijing. In a speech at the conference, Fan Wenlan criticized those historians who try to separate historical and scientific research from politics and those who laid emphasis on the glories of the past. He also denounced the conservative character of works by Confucius and Sima Qian (the compiler of China's first general history, the Shi Chi). There was praise for works by revolutionaries of the people's movements and finally he stated that the Communist Revolution was the culmination of a long revolutionary tradition which it was the duty of the historians to highlight.

During 1958 and 1959, intermittently, a great deal of criticism of Feng Youlan's views took place and his 'abstract' method which had been questioned earlier, was the principal theme of the attacks. Wu Quanchi refused to accept that any idea or value could have a universal meaning - it was totally un-Marxist to claim any such thing - there was no moral idea or concept which did not have a class character. Guan Feng came up with the most systematic and detailed refutation of Feng's ideas which may be summed up thus:

(a) Feng Youlan was unable to distinguish between Idealism and Materialism. He therefore described the ancient philosophical trends according to his own subjective judgement as materialistic and in this manner arbitrarily selected certain ideas and values as having universal value. In other words, it were

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101. Ibid., p.53.
102. Ibid., p.49.
103. Ibid.
not Marxist criteria, but subjective ones which informed his analysis.

(b) Feng separated the universal from the concrete which was why his method was idealistic as opposed to the materialistic. According to the Marxist outlook, the universal is not independent of the concrete.

(c) By thus ignoring the concrete aspect, i.e. the class character, Feng glorified the thinkers of antiquity. Some other charges against Feng, were that he accepted the moral-philosophical categories of the past, irrespective of their class character or the influence of the period in which they were placed, that he chose to go along the path of idealism and refused to change his erroneous method.

The mood was definitely changing and the dominant motif in the new trend was the stress on class character. Feng brought out a self-criticism, but it did not stop the attacks on him. His leading role in history-circles and academics suffered a setback, but he did not vanish from the scene. For, in the next phase, which began at the end of 1959, his works continued to be published and he regularly participated in various conferences and discussions.

After July 1957, no more articles in favour of or against Confucius were published in newspapers and journals. It was only by the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960, that discussions on Confucius gradually resumed. The check to the widespread admiration can be better understood against the backdrop of the economic and political situation. The placatory attitude towards the bourgeois intellectuals and the non-Communists, so as to involve them in the developmental process, which characterized the first half of 1957 was now reversed. The equal emphasis given to 'redness' and 'expertize' gave way to an accentuation of the former and a concomitant downgrading of the latter. In a speech at Chengdu on 22 March 1958, Mao came out strongly against the unproportional respect accorded to senior academic personalities:

"Professors - we have been afraid of them....we were terrified of them. When confronted by people with piles of learning we felt that we were good for nothing. For Marxists to fear bourgeois intellectuals, to fear professors while not fearing imperialism, is strange indeed. I believe this attitude is another example of the slave mentality, a relic from the time of ‘Gratitude for His Majesty’s favours’. We must not tolerate it any longer."  

In the same speech, Mao went on to remind his listeners that

"From ancient times the people who have created new schools of thought have always been young people without great learning. Confucius started at the age of twenty-three; and how much learning did Jesus have? Sakyamuni founded Buddhism at the age of nineteen; his learning was only acquired gradually later on.... The question is whether your direction is right or not." \(^{108}\)

Although it was not until May 1958 that the GLF was launched, by March various trends could be seen forming a pattern, which anticipated drastic changes in the life of the nation. The slavish imitation of the Soviet Union which had brought out vitriolic criticism during the hundred flowers phase, was once again the theme of criticism by many Party leaders. Mao was at his sarcastic best in the Chengdu speech:

"... I couldn't have eggs or chicken soup for three years because an article appeared in the Soviet Union which said that one should 'nt eat them. Later they said that one could eat them. It didn't matter whether the article was correct or not, the Chinese listened all the same and respectfully obeyed. In short, the Soviet Union was tops." \(^{109}\)

Then again,

"The Chinese people had got so used to being slaves that they seemed to want to go on. When Chinese artists painted pictures of me together with Stalin, they always made me a little bit shorter, thus blindly knuckling under to the moral pressure exerted by the Soviet Union at that time." \(^{110}\)

Secondly, a general tightening of Party control in the government, in the PLA and in foreign affairs was also witnessed. \(^{111}\) Thirdly, in the summer of 1958 the communes came into being. That the Commune was to be the basic unit of the nation, was revealed by Chen Boda in a speech at Peking University on the 38th anniversary of the CPC and that it would be a combination of agriculture, industry, commerce, culture and education and the

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108. Ibid., p. 118.
110. Ibid., p. 99.
militia, i.e., the whole people armed. Next, the collective life envisaged by the establishment of the communes, required an enhancement of communist consciousness and it was promoted with great vigour in 1958 and 1959. Material incentives were denounced and voluntary labor was the theme of many a mass campaign.

Finally, all these trends got enmeshed in the field of education. The restructuring of requirements and the rethinking of strategies entailed the adoption of new educational policies. Despite the debates in the mid-fifties, limited though they were, the positive evaluations of Confucian education in no way influenced the changes that were sought in China's schools and colleges - and the kind of educational system that came to be implemented was a far cry from either the Soviet or the traditional models. The fundamental principle of the new system, was combining labor with education. Various other innovations were seen: lectures by workers and peasants, changes in the examination system, different methods of compiling textbooks, etc. During 1957 and 1958, a large number of teachers and professors in the divers schools, colleges and universities, were either removed or placed under supervision for their rightist tendencies. The tempo of academics and research in institutions of higher learning slowed down, as the nation geared for a 'great leap forward'. In the field of history, with the call for 'more recent less ancient' allied with the general promotion of mass culture, the appeal of ancient history, Confucius and the Classics faded somewhat. And thus, the first decade of historiography in Communist China came to an end.

The fifties were in many ways an extremely engrossing and enthralling period. The heady feeling and the euphoria of participating in building their nation anew, motivated people to contribute in whatever manner they could to that process. The various campaigns for reeducation and the upheaval caused by the restructuring of society was a traumatic time for not a few. But as late as 1956, Zhang Wei echoed what was probably a fairly widespread sentiment, when he wrote in Renmin Ribao on January 18:

"I feel honoured and excited as an intellectual in New China. Through education and assistance of the Party I became aware of the great significance of my work...the more I visualize the bright future of

112. Ibid., p. 78.
113. For details on these changes, see Lofstedt, n. 81, pp. 95-104.
socialism, the stronger and more confident I become. Therefore I am willing to contribute all I possess to the Party and to the people in this epoch making period of socialist construction.14

The problems as we saw, were galore and the task was tremendous. The hold of a two thousand year old historiographical tradition had to be cast off and a new historiography had to be installed - with new foundational principles, new subject matter (viz, no longer a history of Emperors and Dynasties) and new conclusions. Experience in these matters was sadly limited and in general, the historians were ill-prepared to begin the task. The majority of those who were equipped to investigate the ancient texts had been schooled in accordance with the old ways and they found themselves at a disadvantage in dealing with the Marxist method. Not unnaturally, their work was often perfunctory, even shallow and at times, superficial. The conclusions were not reasoned or deliberated but usually reached in haste.

Institutions of research and learning saw the admission of large numbers of young people who brought with them vigour and enthusiasm which alone went a long way in combating the unquestioned sway of tradition and old habits. But they were more often than not, unable to refer to all relevant material, for their knowledge of the available literature was sketchy and incomplete. Even so, they accomplished something that was truly commendable: the concepts of history were broadened and its sphere widened to include such events and themes, as had till then been regarded beyond the scope of historiography.

And yet it must be remembered, that it was only the beginning. Even in the uncharted areas, the efforts were at best tentative. Out of sheer force of habit, the older historians tended to focus on traditional topics and utilize the 'old' methods of scholarship. They were also more interested in the earlier periods of Chinese history, while modern and contemporary history was left to the Party historians, or at any rate, left till such time as when definite guidelines on its study could be established.

If there is one feature which clearly characterizes this phase, insofar as the historiography on Confucius is concerned, it is the expression of tremendously wide ranging opinions - from the devoutly pro, to the outright

114. As quoted in Theodore H.E. Chen, n. 1, p. 3
anti-Confucius. Such an atmosphere was to be encountered only once again for a brief period in 1961-62. Amidst the overall historiographical output, the writing on Confucius was comparatively less than on other issues which, coupled with the fact that arguments in favour of inheriting Confucian ideas were allowed to be freely expressed, reveals that Confucianism had ceased to be as contentious and as obsessive an issue as it had been during the May Fourth period. Glowing praise of Confucius and his philosophy was heard, but no one advocated its comeback.

A second important feature of this decade which affected almost every aspect of Chinese society was the shift from a greater to a lesser and finally a complete dispensation, of dependence on the Soviet Union. Allied with the growing nationalism, it encouraged a positive assessment of the past. In glorifying the ancient cultural heritage, there was a tacit recognition that unlike the dominant idea of the May Fourth era, tradition per se was not an obstruction to the process of change. It was only later in the sixties and seventies, that there was a clearer and more vocalized realization of the insidious means by which Confucian values undermined revolutionary fervour. Paradoxically, under the aegis of the CPC, the expected iconoclasm did not surface immediately. While the younger historians did speak out against Confucius, it was not in absolute terms, and the older historians attempted to place the rejection or acceptance of Confucian values, in a more scholarly and research oriented mould.

This brings one to the use of Marxist criteria in the study of history. An analysis of the writings reveals, that in the fifties, barring the Communist historians, who in any case were a handful, the other historians did not take up Marxist analytical categories very seriously. In the first place, they were unfamiliar tools for the majority and secondly, old habits and learning die hard. Thirdly, debates were going on regarding the use of the Marxist method itself - the manner in which historical materialism and class struggle were to be utilized in analyzing Confucius and his legacy had not been systematically formulated. No authoritative parameters were laid down and it was on account of this uncertainty that no controversial debates on Confucius took place. Moreover, the younger Marxist historians did not exude sufficient confidence, mastery and/or authority to influence their senior and rather conservative colleagues. In the sixties, we can see the growing confidence and assurance in handling the principles of Marxism. But in the first decade of the PRC, most historians tended to use it as an appendage. Above all, when problems arose in the interpretations of the past, historians generally fell back on traditional methods.
rather than grapple with new and unfamiliar techniques.

This was primarily the reason why assessments of Confucius continued to proceed along traditional and stereotyped models. And it also explains why despite holding different views as to the class stand of Confucius, the basic features of the Confucian philosophy were appraised in the most positive manner by the historians. Of course this did not mean that Confucius ever regained his unchallenged superiority. What it does mean however is, that he was not put on the dustheap of history.

It was also a period when a curious mixture of Party control and a virtually free exchange of views could be seen. Partly because of a variety of preoccupations, the role of the CPC was markedly restrained and controlled - the connection between history and politics, so explicit in the next ten years, had not yet achieved maturity. Besides in launching the hundred flowers policy, the CPC had itself initiated the process of free expression. A rich diversity of views were aired and against the tremendous transformation that was going on in Chinese society, it is tempting to draw an analogy between the historical period which the historians were discussing - the Qun-qiu period - and the period in which it was being discussed - the fifties. If traditional concepts could be usefully assimilated in one period of change, so could they in another. But then, analogies hardly ever prove anything and tradition was not so knotty or thorny a problem in the fifties.