

刘继明：革命死了，革命万岁

Liu Jiming: The Revolution is Dead, Long Live the Revolution

Translated by Hemant Adlakha

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From the Editor's Desk:

This is the second article in the new six-part series on the theme “CPC’s ‘Two-Line Struggle’”. The first article in the series can be accessed [here](#). We welcome contributions from our readers in the series.



刘继明 (Liu Jiming)
Source: szhgh.com

Editor’s Note:

Liu Jiming is described in China as a people’s writer in the new era, critics call him the pioneer of “new socialist literature.” Liu Jiming, born in 1963, graduated from the Chinese Language Department of Wuhan University. He has served as screenwriter of the Hubei Provincial Opera and Dance Theater, vice chairman of the fifth and sixth Hubei Provincial Writers Association, professional writer, and editor-in-chief of “World” 《Tianxia》 magazine. He is known as a representative writer of “cultural care novels” and “subaltern literature.” His main works include the short and medium-sized novels "Going to Huangcun" 《前往黄村》, “Undersea Village” 《海底村庄》 and “Enlightenment” 《启蒙》, the novels “Rivers and Lakes” 《江河湖》 and

“Human Realm” 《人境》, the long reportage “Dream Dam” 《梦之坝》, and the essay collections “My Passionate Era” 《我的激情时代》 and “Defense and Scream” 《辩护与呐喊》. He has won Qu Yuan Literature and Art Award, Xu Chi Reportage Award, Hubei Literature Award, Shanghai Literature Award, etc. Among them, “Human Realm” was nominated for the Luyao Literary Award, selected into the 40 important novels in the 40 years of reform and opening up and the 2016 “Harvest” (Harvest is a prestigious and very popular literary journal – Editor) novel list, and was shortlisted for the 2016 Chinese Novel Gold List and the Chinese Novel Society's Novel List Novel Ranking, praised by critics as a pioneering work of “new socialist literature.” In contemporary China, Liu Jiming is one of the few intellectuals who writes and speaks from a proletarian standpoint.



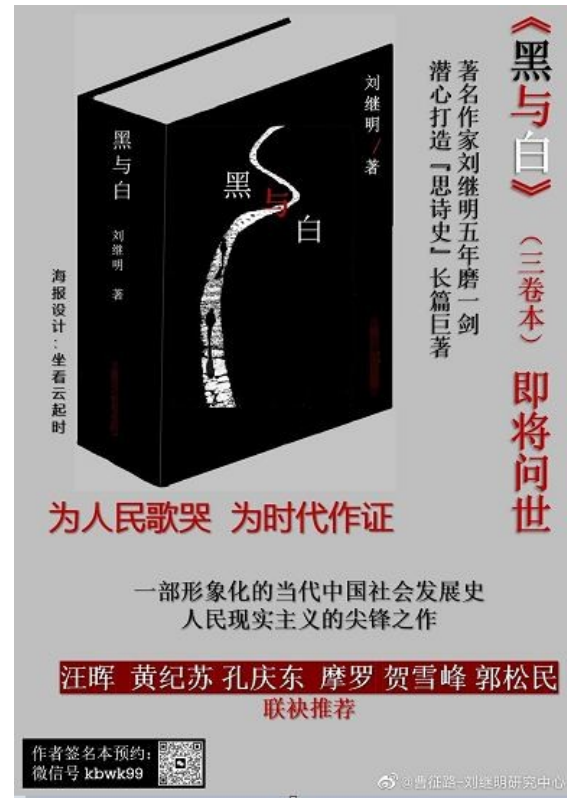
Source: The picture is from the article in Chinese

Gu Lao (Old New Fourth Army soldier Gu Zhenghua – author Liu Jiming's note) was 95 years old and had just been discharged from the hospital. He spoke for nearly an hour and gave us a wonderful report on the international and domestic situation. From Gu Lao, we saw a strong fighting spirit and an indomitable revolutionary spirit. This fighting spirit can probably only be seen in the older generation such as Wei Wei and Gu Lao who experienced the Cultural Revolution and the Mao era.

Gu Lao just said that Wuhan is a city with a glorious revolutionary tradition. From the liberation of Wuhan in 1949 to the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, Gu Lao was an eyewitness. It was Gu Lao who planted the first five-star red flag at the Wuhan Pass. (By the way, a character in my recently completed novel “Black and White” is based on Gu Lao).

During the Cultural Revolution, Wuhan was an important city second only to Shanghai. After the new era, there were two people in Wuhan who were called representatives of the “ultra-left”: Yao Xueying, a famous old writer and author of the long historical novel “Li Zicheng,” and Comrade Li Erzong, an old leader and writer of Hubei Province. Gu Lao once participated in the editing work of

“Zhongliu” 《中流》 magazine edited by Wei Wei, and was also one of its representatives.



Front cover of Liu Jiming’s controversial novel 《黑与白》 (*Black and White*) – Ed.

May 16th is not only the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Wuhan, but also the 57th anniversary of the publication of the “May 16 Notice.” On this day every year, there are various forms of folk commemorative activities in Wuhan. There is probably no doubt that the liberation of Wuhan is part of the revolutionary culture, but there is definitely controversy as to whether the “May 16 Notice” is part of the revolutionary culture. The two historical

resolutions of the CPC Central Committee have characterised the Cultural Revolution as “a revolution without any progressive significance,” but Chairman Mao said that he did two things in his life, one was to establish the new China, and the second was to launch the Cultural Revolution. It can be seen that he believed that the Cultural Revolution was as significant as the establishment of the new China. In this case, it is legitimate and necessary for us to commemorate and study the Cultural Revolution as we did the establishment of the new China.

So, what is the great significance of the Cultural Revolution?

[The **16 May Notification** (五一六通知; Wǔyīliù Tōngzhī) or **Circular of 16 May**, originally titled simply Notification (通知; Tōngzhī), was the initial political declaration of the Cultural Revolution. Initially a secret inner-party document, it was issued at a May 1966 expanded session of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party. The notification ended a political dispute within the CCP stemming from the Beijing Opera play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* by dissolving the top level of the party's cultural apparatus and encouraging mass political movement to oppose rightists within the party. The

result was a political victory for Mao Zedong. The Notification is often viewed as the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and would be declassified and published in *People's Daily* on 17 May 1967. – Ed.]



People's Daily: May 16 Notification
Source: en.wikipedia.org

Two years ago, when I spoke at the academic workshop “Culture and Revolution in the Short Twentieth Century” at Beijing’s Tsinghua University, I said: “In the grand narrative of the Chinese revolution, the Cultural Revolution is a continuation of the 1949 revolution. It can even be said that 1949 is the ‘cause’ of the 1966 revolution, and the 1966 revolution is the ‘result’ of 1949. Without 1949, there would be no 1966. In other words, without 1966, 1949 would have lost its sense of direction and ‘the

great ideal of communism’.” The Cultural Revolution wanted to solve the world’s problems on the “second day” of the revolution, but perhaps because of overexertion, it was like a rocket that ran out of energy before delivering the missile to the predetermined space orbit. This may be one of the main reasons for the failure of the Cultural Revolution. In the eyes of some Western leftists, the Cultural Revolution explored the issue of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is Chairman Mao's major contribution to Marxism-Leninism and the international communist movement, and it is also the essence of Maoism. Therefore, they believe that the Cultural Revolution is both a great revolution and a failed revolution. We cannot deny its failure because of its greatness, nor can we deny its greatness because of its failure. Just as the French Revolution failed, but it cannot be denied that it was the greatest bourgeois revolution in history.

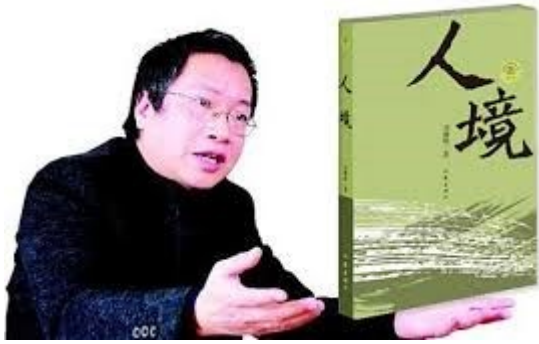
The mainstream now talks about promoting traditional culture and revolutionary culture, which is rather general. According to the Marxist viewpoint, any revolution is not abstract. There are bourgeois revolutions, proletarian revolutions, violent

revolutions, political revolutions, social revolutions, and cultural revolutions. The former refers to the purpose and nature of the revolution, while the latter refers to the form of the revolution. The same is true for traditional culture. Laozi, Confucius, Xunzi, Taoism, Confucianism, and Legalism are traditional culture. Are peasant uprisings such as Chen Sheng, Wu Guang, Li Zicheng, and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom traditional culture? For the ruling group, any revolution is a rebellion and a subversion of the established political and cultural order. In this sense, peasant uprisings should belong to "revolutionary culture." Therefore, the so-called traditional culture is also class-based. There are bourgeois traditional cultures and proletarian traditional cultures. The core of Marxism is revolution, or more precisely, proletarian revolution. Those who do not talk about or even oppose revolution and proletarian revolution are not true Marxists. It was in the face of all kinds of revisionists who advocated class reconciliation and denied class struggle that Marx said, “I am not a Marxist.”

As a theoretical trend, revisionism has been accompanying the international communist movement and the socialist movement since the birth of Marxism,

from Bernstein, Kautsky and the Soviet revisionist group represented by Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev to the “Reform and Opening-up.” In each period, the manifestation of revisionism may be different, but it is always “capitalist roader.” Wei Wei once sharply refuted the so-called “make-up lesson theory” popular in the mainstream intellectual circles of China: “For a period of time, a widely popular revisionist theory is the ‘make-up lesson theory.’ That is to say, socialist countries should make up for capitalist lessons. The argument is that the current socialist countries, such as Russia and China, were originally economically and culturally backward countries, and capitalism was not fully developed. The socialist revolutions in these countries should not have happened, and they were all ‘premature babies’ and ‘deformed babies’ (this has been said by their ancestor Kautsky until now). Therefore, it is indispensable to make up for this lesson as a necessary stage. This is what is called the ‘premature birth theory’ and the ‘make-up lesson theory.’ The widespread circulation of the ‘make-up lesson theory’ in our country is by no means accidental. It is actually just an excuse for those with ‘capitalist love’ to reject socialism and restore capitalism.”

Unfortunately, Wei Wei’s warnings and reminders did not arouse people’s vigilance. Since the beginning of the new century, the “make-up lesson theory” has gradually replaced neoliberalism in the form of nationalism and patriotism and has become the mainstream of the new era. Many left-wing intellectuals have also joined this powerful chorus. These people are called “nationalist leftists” (abbreviated as “civilian leftists”). In addition to “civilian leftists”, there are also some “academic leftists.” The main ideological resources of these people include Western Marxism represented by Althusser and Derrida and new Marxism represented by Wallerstein and Amin. In their view, with the failure of the Cultural Revolution and the setbacks of socialism around the world, the proletarian revolution and class struggle theory of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism has become invalid and can no longer guide new world changes. Therefore, they tried to seek solutions from within the capitalist system. The most representative of them are the “core countries,” “peripheral countries” and “dependency theory” proposed by Samir Amin and others.



《人境》 (*Human Realm*) – Liu Jiming’s representative novel

[“Regardless of whether Liu Jiming’s design path and ideological concepts for future China in *Human Realm* are realistic, his brave and sharp revelation of the decline of rural China and our existential difficulties shows that he is a responsible writer. Maybe, no matter whether we agree or disagree, the moment we wrap up *Human Realm*, we will feel the long-lost shock and fear, right?” – A Chinese literary critic’s view, taken from an article that first appeared in China Writer’s Association website (chinawriter.com.cn) – Ed.]

Amin believes that the “capitalist world system” is the “imperialist stage of capitalism” described by Lenin, and all the existing contemporary social and economic components have been incorporated into the world system. In this world system dominated by the central

developed countries, the relationship between developed and backward countries, from the most microscopic perspective, is the movement and transfer of value, and this transfer is unconscious and unbalanced. In the “centre-periphery” structural system, peripheral countries and regions continuously supply the centre with raw materials based on non-renewable natural resources, cheap labour and primary products produced specifically for the central countries and regions, and the central countries and regions supply expensive precious metals and core technology products to the periphery. Under such an unequal exchange relationship, a large amount of capital is transferred from the periphery to the centre, and the central countries and regions gain more capital accumulation, and are more dominant in the relationship with the periphery, making it easier to control and exploit the peripheral countries and regions. At the same time, the peripheral countries and regions lose the ability and capital for independent development, and are increasingly dominated and dependent in the relationship with the centre. Amin proposed that if the peripheral underdeveloped countries and regions want to achieve independent development and get rid of dependence, they must get

rid of the capitalist world system and the “centre-periphery” structure, which is what Amin calls “decoupling.” He made it clear that there is only one way to achieve “decoupling”, that is, to get out of the “centre-periphery” structural system, carry out socialist revolution, and take the socialist road. Only in this way can we reject the unequal international division of labour and the unequal international exchange system. Amin pointed out that peripheral countries can embark on the socialist road through “transition.” On the one hand, there must be a common socialist goal from a global perspective that is not only measured by the economy. On the other hand, it is necessary not only to develop the public economy, but also to improve the living standards of civilians and develop national science and technology. Combining these two aspects and giving the meaning of national socialism from the perspective of civilians, peripheral countries can smoothly transition to socialism. In addition, Amin also emphasised that it is necessary to adhere to the combination of development strategies with the specific national conditions of the country. This is the key to whether peripheral countries can embark on the socialist road and get rid of dependence and embark on an independent development path.

The so-called “centre” and “periphery” theory has certainly constructed a theoretical model and interpretation of capitalist globalisation, but they are looking for solutions from within the capitalist system. The so-called socialism is actually a kind of state socialism or state capitalism, which is completely different from Marx’s proletarian socialism. The way for Amin and other new Marxists to achieve socialism is not through class struggle and proletarian revolution, but through the so-called “decoupling” and “transition,” which is the same as the old revisionists such as Kautsky. Therefore, it is better to say that it is a new revisionist theory rather than a new Marxist theory.

Neo-Marxism not only occupies the mainstream of the “academic left,” but is also the ideological source of contemporary nationalism and statism. The key is to overemphasise the plunder and oppression of the “core countries” on the “peripheral countries,” while ignoring that this plunder and oppression is essentially a manifestation of the increasingly serious exploitation and oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries, and the increasingly acute contradictions, so they have to “transfer contradictions” to the peripheral countries. It denies the fact that the class contradictions in the “peripheral countries”

are far greater than the national contradictions, and regards the national contradictions as the main contradiction. For many “academic leftists,” Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is just a research object for them, and the “dependency and decoupling theory” of the neo-Marxists is their favourite social transformation plan. In essence, it is just a social reform plan.

The debate on revolution and reform has been going on for a long time within the left. The “academic left” does not admit this. Not only do they not admit it, they are even more afraid of revolution than some liberals. Some of them only treat the Cultural Revolution as a research object similar to a historical relic. They often ignore Chairman Mao’s theories during the Cultural Revolution, such as “revolution is not a crime, rebellion is justified,” “anti-revisionism and prevention of revisionism,” and continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and instead relish talking about some trivial historical details. Such research on the Cultural Revolution almost occupies the mainstream of folk research on the Cultural Revolution. Many people are passionate and indignant when discussing the Cultural Revolution and “defending” the legitimacy of the Cultural Revolution, but once they touch on domestic realities

and international issues, they unknowingly fall into the trap of nationalism, statism and class reconciliation. Such people exist not only among the “academic left,” but also among many so-called “Maoist leftists” or “Cultural Revolution leftists.” To borrow Lu Xun’s words, such people can be given a hat: “empty theorists.”

For a long time, the left has been troubled by this kind of “empty theory” and has been unable to effectively connect with society, so it is at a loss and falls into a state of confrontation and tearing. But the real reason for the continued marginalisation and weakness of the left is not the “disunity” that some people complain about, but the lack of revolutionary subjects. Practice has shown that traditional workers and peasants are no longer able to serve as revolutionary subjects, and intellectuals who are vacillating by nature are even less likely. As a young online commentator said: “The lack of revolutionary subjects is the primary problem facing the current left-wing movement. The history of contemporary leftism is a history of desperately searching for revolutionary subjects but failing to find them. In other words, some people have been waiting for the inevitable ‘awakened working class’ but have never waited, while others have

been unable to wait and have been searching for new revolutionary subjects but have not found them, so the two sides have been tearing each other apart but have not been able to reach a result.”



Hu Xijin



Liu Jiming

[In May 2019, then Global Times editor Hu Xijin wrote an article ‘attacking’ the “Left.” In response, Liu Jiming wrote a strongly-worded counter-attack ‘exposing’ the rightward world outlook of the GT editor. Liu’s scathing commentary, entitled “Refuting Hu Xijin’s ‘Better Left than

Right’ Theory.” The Liu-Hu debate soon became controversial and kicked off a new round of ideological “Left/Right debate” among the Chinese intelligentsia – Ed.]

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the “revolution” will be shelved indefinitely. In any era, as long as the system of exploitation and oppression exists, the driving force and conditions for revolution will not disappear. The old revolutionary subjects have disappeared, but new revolutionary subjects will inevitably emerge in the cruel capital exploitation and class oppression as the new crisis of capitalism breaks out. Just as the struggle practice in history gave birth to the theory of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, new revolutionary subjects and struggle practice will also produce new theorists. For the broad masses of the proletariat, whether in the past, present, or future, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is their doctrine and theoretical weapon for the struggle for freedom and liberation, rather than those “empty theories” that are vague and incomprehensible.

A few days ago, I saw a recruitment advertisement that went viral online: A housekeeping company in Shanghai is recruiting nannies with a monthly salary of 140,000 yuan, and requires “kneeling service like ancient maids.” The young

masters are back, and “exploitation is justified” has even become a consensus among some people. The concepts of “rich” and “poor” that were once eliminated have been revived, dividing society into two levels with strict barriers, and many people think that this is natural and reasonable. 100 years ago, believing in socialism and communism was a manifestation of progress, but now it is regarded as a monster or even “reactionary” by many people. Everything is turned upside down. Society has not only returned to the years before the revolution, but also to the years before the “years before the revolution.” Some people even sighed that it was as if Marx, Lenin and Mao “had never been here”, and the “short twentieth century” revolution that profoundly changed the fate of the oppressed nations and exploited classes and the world’s geopolitical map had never happened.

The famous scholar Dai Jinhua once said: History is a list of victors. Indeed, for the bourgeoisie and its hired writers, this is a beautiful era of triumphant march and celebration, but for the proletariat, it is a “long winter” with no end in sight. The intellectuals who were transformed into the working class in the “first thirty years” have long since kept pace with the times

and taken off their tattered work clothes and put on the robes of the bourgeoisie. Occasionally, some scholars present themselves as leftists, but what they hold high is castrated or “reformed” Marxism, which has nothing to do with Marx himself. In their eyes, real Marxists have become outdated “fundamentalists”, “ultra-leftists” or “pure leftists”.

The “Shanghai Commune” was established in the early days of the Cultural Revolution, but it survived for a very short time. The establishment of the “Shanghai Commune” was obviously a kind of inheritance of the Paris Commune. The Paris Commune was the first great attempt of the proletarian regime in human history, although it only lasted 72 days from its birth to its demise. The so-called “Principles of the Paris Commune” are: first, public officials are elected by universal suffrage; second, the wages of all public officials are equivalent to the wages of skilled workers; third, the people supervise and can dismiss public officials at any time. This was also the political ideal of countless proletarian revolutionary martyrs. The “Shanghai Commune” ended in failure, but it was still a tragic failure, which laid an ominous foreshadowing for the Cultural Revolution.

Yes, the Paris Commune failed, and yes, the Cultural Revolution also failed.

But is the revolution really dead?

Marx said in his “Records of Speeches on the Paris Commune”: “Even if the Commune is overthrown, the struggle is only postponed. The principles of the Commune are eternal and indestructible, and they will again and again manifest themselves before the working class is liberated.”

Therefore, Marx once again said: “The revolution is dead, long live the revolution!”

(Rewritten based on my speech at the symposium commemorating the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Wuhan and the 57th anniversary of the “May 16 Notice”)

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No. 54 Sept 2024	AI Arms Race in Full Swing: Who Will Create a “Digital God” First?	Saranya
No. 53 Sept 2024	Hu Qiaomu and His Melancholy	Hemant Adlakha
No. 52 Aug 2024	Pan Yu: China has Gained First-mover Advantage in the AI Race	Saranya
No. 51 Aug 2024	Japan Defence White Paper has Hidden Agenda	Cherry Hitkari
No. 50 Jul 2024	Zhu Dalu: A Dialogue with AI on New Energy Vehicles	Saranya
No. 49 Jul 2024	Fù Yíng: On Kissinger’s Words of Wisdom on How China-US can Co-Exist	Chhavi Raj
No. 48 Jun 2024	Dé Nà: China’s Wake Up Call on Macron	Hemant Adlakha
No. 47 Jun 2024	Only Socialism can Withstand the AI “Tsunami” Challenge	Saranya
No. 46 May 2024	Zhang Zhikun: Putin Visits China. Whither China-US Relations?	Hemant Adlakha
No. 45 Apr 2024	“Broken Kinship” Trends: Young People Increasingly Dislike Family Gatherings During Holidays	Snigdha Konar

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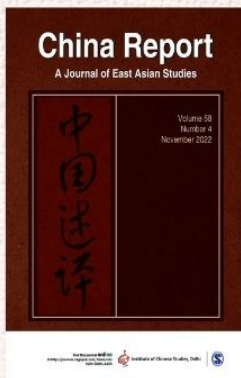


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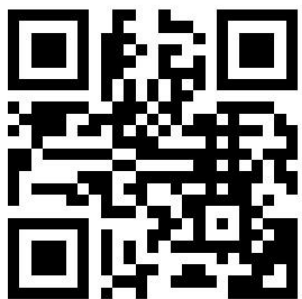
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