Liu, Elliott. 2016. *Maoism and the Chinese Revolution: a critical introduction.* Oakland: PM Press. ISBN 978-1-62963-1-370. Paperback: 14.95 USD. Pages: 144.

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Maoism and the Chinese Revolution is an appreciably concise attempt, from an anarchist perspective, to narrate and critique the experience of the Chinese Revolution under the leadership of Mao Zedong. In the brief introduction, Elliott Liu lays out his argument that Maoism is an 'internal critique of Stalinism that fails to break with Stalinism.' Even though Mao was critical of Soviet society, his critique was limited because he was unable to diagnose the USSR and China as having capitalist social relations. Instead of furthering revolutionary self-activity of workers and peasants, Mao's factions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) constantly tempered them and repressed them, presumably to preserve the leadership's class positions. Thus, Maoist theory and practice both were and are untenable. Liu seeks to conduct an immanent critique of Maoism to take what is good from it while leaving the rest behind.

In the first section of the book, Liu sets the stage for the rise of the CCP, describing the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the formation of the CCP and its near decimation at the hands of the nationalist Kuomintang. The second section examines the period of the People's War (1931-49), critically focusing on Mao's theorizing of the united front, new democratic revolution, guerrilla warfare and his dialectical philosophy. Liu seeks to relate the theory to its practical consequences. The third section examines the early period of the CCP's rule (1949-65) and the contradictions that cut through party, state and society between emancipatory advances toward socialism and timid repression. The fourth section covers the tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution, when hopes were highest for a truly popular approach to socialism, but which were dashed not only by the 'capitalist roaders' in the CCP whom Mao was supposedly combating but, Liu importantly argues, by the limitations and errors of Mao's theory and practice.

The book's conclusion summarizes Liu's main arguments. First, Liu argues that China was 'state capitalist,' because workers did not control the means of production or access the means of subsistence freely. They worked for bosses and for wages, and decisions about the division of surplus were made not by them but by the state. Second, Maoism emerged in contradiction to Soviet theory and practice, but continued to reproduce Stalinist assumptions. The contradiction between continued adherence to state capitalism and the struggle against its negative effects meant, ultimately, suppressing autonomous proletarian movements that emerged in the Cultural Revolution. Stalinism could only lead to the more openly capitalist factions of the CCP winning in the end. Third, Liu critically examines the utility of Maoist concepts such as mass line, people's war, contradiction, and two-line struggle, but concludes that Maoism as a whole must be rejected.

Liu's book is to be lauded for critically describing the history of the Chinese Revolution without falling into detached moralizing. Importantly, Liu criticizes the inadequacy of Mao's

concepts (hence, theory) of class in assessing the struggles in revolutionary China, a critique raised perhaps more ably by Yiching Wu and others (whom Liu cites); that is, instead of seeing that the transformations undertaken in revolutionary China led to the emergence of new class relations, Mao saw the ideas of capitalist roaders as remnants or external intrusions into the party. These could, then, be dealt with through purges of one kind or another. However, such a theoretical view foreclosed not only a more critical assessment of social relations in China, where, indeed, the popular masses were separated from the means of production, but also the practice necessary to truly transform the situation. These are crucial points, and it is necessary for any revolutionary movement to come to terms with the difficulties and failings of China and other societies ruled by communists.

The question is whether contemporary Maoists can acknowledge and incorporate these problems into Maoist theory. Here lies the first difficulty of Liu's endeavour. Although written as an intervention into current debates, with reference to current groups influenced by Maoism, the book barely engages their theory or practice. The author seems to assert a straight line from the Chinese experience to the many varieties of Maoism on offer today. At one point, Liu faults Mao's theory of New Democracy for certain anti-worker practices of Nepalese Maoists after they won elections in 2008, rather than looking at the concrete circumstances of Nepal and the debates and divergences among Nepalese Maoists. Indeed, common sets of concepts can be interpreted in many different ways, even to refer to very different things, given contingencies of historical, theoretical and political struggles. Some Maoist groups, like those associated with the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, seek to assert Maoism as a coherent set of theoretical parameters, while others like the Communist Party of Philippines are more open-ended. Examining the origins of Maoism is a necessary part of any critique of contemporary Maoism, but it is hardly sufficient — certainly not for the immanent critique the author pursues.

This search for the original sin gestures toward the more profound difficulty of the endeavour. In explaining Chinese history, Liu too often subordinates historical complexity and contingency to the inevitability of Stalinism and its bundle of conceptual problems. This shoehorning not only leads to underplaying significant achievements of the Chinese Revolution (e.g., sometimes profound changes in gender relations) because it does not fit the author's framework, but importantly Liu's view of social reality is profoundly idealist. It sees ideas (theory) as being ultimately determinant, rather than material practice, and it gives far too much due to individuals over the various structural forces in which they are embedded. Liu's own narration of the Chinese Revolution points to a different way of looking at politics and theory: precisely that adequate concepts are quite important, but the ideological directives of the revolutionary centre can matter only so much, as they become filtered through the many complicated relations of power that exist in society. Contradictory interests that exist lead to contradictory interpretations, even in the minds of singular persons such as Mao.