

# Democratic Tradition of the Chinese People's Liberation Army

by HO LUNG

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A FUNDAMENTAL criterion for distinguishing a revolutionary army led by the proletariat from all counter-revolutionary armies led by the reactionary ruling classes, as far as internal relations are concerned, is whether there is democracy in the army. It is common knowledge that all armies are instruments of dictatorship. Counter-revolutionary armies of the reactionary ruling classes are instruments of dictatorship over the masses of the people, while the proletarian revolutionary army is an instrument of dictatorship over the counter-revolutionaries. Since they represent the interests of a handful of people, all counter-revolutionary armies of the reactionary ruling classes are hostile to the people, who comprise over 90 per cent of the population. Therefore, they do not dare to practise democracy within their ranks. By contrast, a revolutionary army led by the proletariat is a people's army which safeguards the interests of the workers, peasants and other sections of the working people, that is, of those who make up the over 90 per cent of the population. Therefore — except for exercising dictatorship over the counter-revolutionaries — it establishes equal and democratic relations with the masses of the people; within its own ranks, it can and must work in accordance with democratic centralism. This is to say, it can and must practise democracy under centralized leadership and exercise highly unified and centralized leadership on the basis of democracy.

A fundamental characteristic distinguishing the Chinese People's Liberation Army founded by Comrade Mao Tse-tung from all the old-type armies is that within its ranks this army carries out the mass line and practises democracy under leadership in three principal fields, the political, the economic and the military. It is a great creation of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's in army building, his great contribution both to Marxist-Leninist military theory and to the world pro-

letarian revolution and the national-liberation movement.

Why has the Chinese People's Liberation Army been able to create so many miracles on this planet and write so many miraculous pages in military history? What is the cause and the strength that has enabled it to conquer all difficulties instead of being baffled by them, to vanquish all its enemies instead of being overpowered by them? The most fundamental cause is that our army is a genuine people's army led by the political party of the proletariat and armed with Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's thinking, and that the wars we wage are just wars for the liberation of the people, genuine people's wars conducted by relying on the people's own strength. Taking this as our point of departure, we have broken thoroughly with the old military traditions of all the old-type armies. We have not only firmly set ourselves the aim of wholeheartedly serving the people, established absolute leadership by the Party over the army and introduced revolutionary political work, but we have also completely shattered the obsolete idea that since the army is for military combat and must obey orders, it cannot practise democracy. We have created the first army in history which genuinely practises democracy and belongs to the people.

In the initial stage of the building of our army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung put forward the brilliant idea that "in China the army needs democracy as much as the people do."<sup>1</sup> This idea has been steadily enriched in the course of long practice of army building and of fighting and has developed into a whole set of democratic traditions of a people's army, the content of which is democracy in three main fields — the political, the economic, and the military. In the period of the Third Revolutionary Civil War, Comrade Mao Tse-tung summed up the experience of the movement for democracy in our army. He pointed out: "The policy for political work in our army units is fully to arouse the masses of soldiers, the commanders and all working personnel in order to achieve, through a democratic movement under centralized leadership, three major objectives, namely, a high degree of political unity, an improvement in living conditions and a higher level of military technique and tactics."<sup>2</sup> In line with these instructions of Comrade Mao Tse-tung, we have practised the fullest democracy in the army and applied the mass line by trusting the masses in all cases and relying on them in all matters. This has given us such great strength as no reactionary troops can possess.

Throughout history all troops of the reactionary ruling classes have been instruments of violence for suppressing the people and privileged forces trampling on the people. In the matter of army-civilian relations, the anti-popular class nature of this kind of army is reflected in antagonism between the army and the people; and in the matter of internal relations within the armed forces, it is reflected in antagonism between the officers and the men. These antagonistic relationships make inevitable a policy of oppressing the men and keeping them in ignorance. They determine this kind of army's advocacy of so-called absolute obedience by the lower ranks to the higher ranks, by the soldiers to the officers, without any reasoning why. They determine its inability to practise democracy, its fear of it and its intolerance towards it. It frequently resorts to the brutal methods of beating and berating the men and even executing them to maintain military discipline. Therefore, fundamentally speaking, the antagonism between the army and the people and between the officers and men is universal, without exception, in all reactionary ruling-class armies.

Although a number of measures and systems of a somewhat democratic nature were adopted by certain revolutionary armed forces of the oppressed classes before the army led by the proletariat came into being, yet these measures and systems, restricted as they were by historical conditions and the class limitations of these forces, were inevitably spontaneous, fragmentary and not thorough.

From its very inception Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on establishing a new type of people's armed forces helped the Chinese People's Liberation Army to make the relationship between the army and people fundamentally different from the antagonistic relationship that had existed for thousands of years between the reactionary army and the people. Our army is composed of the sons of the people, it is a servant of the people and it is the people's instrument for achieving their own liberation. It serves the people heart and soul, lovingly cherishes even the most trifling thing that belongs to the masses, and does not take anything from them however insignificant it may be. It does not, because it carries a gun, oppress the people and does not, because it has performed outstanding military exploits, claim to be the people's benefactor. This is why our army receives the wholehearted support and help of the people wherever it goes. This supreme unity between the army and the people forms a steel wall of defence that no force can breach.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on establishing a new type of people's armed forces has helped the Chinese People's Liberation Army to eliminate completely the antagonistic relationship between officers and men and between superiors and subordinates which plagued all the old-type armies, and to create in the army a vigorous and lively political situation in which there is both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, and both unity of will and personal ease of mind.

Doing things and solving problems by the method of democracy under centralized leadership has become a glorious and deep-rooted tradition and a system; it has become a widespread habit in the daily life of our army, of our soldiers and officers at all levels. Democracy is practised in work and training and on the battlefield, in the companies [the basic combat units in the army — *Ed.*], the army headquarters and the military schools. In all matters, from the formulation of policies and combat plans to routine work, criticism and commendations, as a rule, there is ample deliberation and discussion before a decision or action is taken. It can be stated that there is democracy everywhere, at all times and at all levels in our army. This greatly enhances the consciousness of the masses and gives their initiative fuller play. Everyone feels he is master in the house. Therefore, in our army "everybody consciously attends to things and everything is attended to," and "everything that is good is sure to be praised and everything bad is sure to be exposed." All our armymen observe discipline and obey orders consciously and voluntarily; they have truly become a highly centralized combat collective. This explains why our army has become invincible and all-conquering, a fully united army in which everybody uses his brains and contributes his energy, fearing no hardship, dauntless before death, and daring and courageous in fighting the enemy.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on army building did not come to be implemented easily and smoothly. Inevitably, so unprecedented an event as the founding of a proletarian revolutionary army in China came up against bourgeois thinking on military affairs and the resistance of conventional notions and habits of every kind. Indeed, from the very first day of the founding of our army, people infected with the habits of the old type of army and those clinging to bourgeois thinking on military affairs have stubbornly opposed Comrade Mao Tse-tung's line on army building. While opposing the strengthening of absolute Party leadership over the army, they have used one reason or another, one pretext or another, for opposing the movement for democracy and resisting the mass line. Clearly, the system of democracy and the democratic tradition, characteristic of a revolutionary army of the proletariat, cannot possibly be established, and still less be consolidated and developed, unless this influence of bourgeois thinking on military affairs is again and again knocked down and the resistance of conventional notions and habits overcome. Whether to uphold democracy and the mass line or not — this has always been an important aspect of our struggle to implement Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on army building and to oppose bourgeois thinking on the question, a struggle between two lines on army building. The system of democracy and the democratic tradition of the Chinese People's Liberation Army have been affirmed, consolidated, and developed step by step and perfected in the course of continuous struggle against bourgeois ideas on military affairs.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army has accumulated a rich store of experience and scored great achievements in practising democracy and carrying forward

the mass line for 38 years. To rely on the people, on the soldiers, on democracy and on the mass line — this is the essence of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's great thinking on people's war and a people's army, this is the priceless tradition by which our army, over the past decades, grew from small beginnings into a mighty force, and, fighting against odds, defeated one powerful enemy after another and won victory after victory. The summing up of our basic experience in this field so as to continue and carry forward this priceless tradition still better will make us invincible.

The most essential elements, the most basic experience, in the democratic tradition of our army, a tradition which has been developed and perfected in the course of the 38-year history, can be summed up in the following eight points:

**I. Whether democracy should be practised in the army is by no means a question of method but of standpoint and basic attitude; in the final analysis, it is a question of whether one respects the masses, trusts them and relies on them.**

As early as 1938 when Comrade Mao Tse-tung summed up the experience of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and the Eighth Route Army in this respect, he pointed out: "Many people think that it is wrong methods that make for strained relations between officers and men and between the army and the people, but I always tell them that it is a question of basic attitude (or basic principle) of having respect for the soldiers and the people. It is from this attitude that the various policies, methods and forms ensue. If we depart from this attitude, then the policies, methods and forms will certainly be wrong, and the relations between officers and men and between the army and the people are bound to be unsatisfactory. Our three major principles for the army's political work are, first, unity between officers and men; second, unity between the army and the people; and third, the disintegration of the enemy forces. To apply these principles effectively, we must start with this basic attitude of respect for the soldiers and the people, and of respect for the human dignity of prisoners of war once they have laid down their arms."<sup>3</sup>

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's instructions on this point are still very much alive for us today. He once again emphasized this idea in his instructions on the five qualifications for successors to the proletarian revolution. He taught us that anyone without a firm belief in the masses and without a good democratic style of work is unqualified to be a successor to the proletarian revolution. In fact, the line of demarcation between a proletarian revolutionary and a bourgeois revolutionary is whether one treats the masses of the people with respect, trusts them and relies on them.

This is a matter of basic attitude primarily because it is a question of how to understand and what attitude to have towards the role of the masses in history. Marxism-Leninism always regards the masses as

the makers of history, the motive force in creating world history. At the time of the founding of the First International, Marx and Engels put forward the clear slogan: "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself."<sup>4</sup> The same point is also well put in *The Internationale*: "No saviours from on high deliver, no trust have we in prince or peer . . . and to all give a happier lot, each at his forge must do his duty. . . ."

Applying this idea to revolutionary war, Comrade Mao Tse-tung clearly pointed out: "For the revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them,"<sup>5</sup> "the army and the people are the foundation of victory."<sup>6</sup> The history of the decades of war fought by the People's Liberation Army under the personal leadership and command of Comrade Mao Tse-tung is one of people's war, of revolutionary war by the masses. Basically, the army's political work lies in educating and mobilizing armed masses. Once a revolutionary is alienated from the broad masses of the people and the rank-and-file soldiers, he is bound to become isolated and to be defeated in struggle, even if he be a man with three heads and six arms. Clearly, if anyone puts himself above the masses, regards himself as the hero, the overlord, and views the masses of the people and the rank-and-file soldiers as puppets, as the "rabble," he inevitably cuts himself off from the masses, has contempt for them, and cannot possibly treat them as equals, and consequently fears democracy and is unwilling to put it into effect.

This is a matter of basic attitude also because it is a question of how to understand and how to approach the source of knowledge. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has always maintained that the masses are the doers and, without exception, all knowledge comes from the masses, from their activities in class struggle, in the struggle for production, and in scientific experiment. "It has to be understood that the masses are the real heroes, while we ourselves are often childish and ignorant, and unless this point is understood even the most rudimentary knowledge cannot be acquired."<sup>7</sup> Fighting a battle is the same. The broad masses of soldiers and commanders at the basic levels are direct participants in the front-line battles and have real knowledge of part of the actual situation; therefore, they are usually able to conceive the problems that may arise in each specific battle in a way that conforms more closely to reality, and it is easier for them to devise practical ways and means of solving these problems. The leading organs and cadres are only processing plants; their task is to go deeply into the actual situation, gather the opinions and experience of the masses, process and work on them and then take them back to the masses, popularize and carry them through among the masses. This is the mass line. In this way, work can be done well and battles fought well. This is a truth we have again and again proved in the wars over the past decades. Obviously, anyone who does not understand and does not want to see this point, anyone who does not believe in the wis-

dom and capability of the masses and regards himself "the number one authority in the world," will never have a democratic style of work.

This is a matter of basic attitude because it is a question of the class feeling with which one approaches the masses. Comrade Mao Tse-tung always teaches us that a revolutionary cadre must be full of warmth towards the masses of the people and the soldiers, regard them as closest comrades-in-arms, make friends with them, know them intimately and love them from the bottom of his heart, if he is to be really integrated with the masses, speak their language and win their confidence. Our army, from the commanders to the men, is knit together closely and democracy is invigorated and extended precisely because of the identity of class feeling. As for enemy troops who have laid down their arms, they must be regarded as class brothers who were oppressed and deceived if the Party's policy towards captives is to be faithfully carried out and the work of winning them over and educating them is to be done well. Obviously, those who lack proletarian ideas and feelings find it impossible to treat the soldiers, the people and the enemy troops who have laid down their arms with genuine respect for their human dignity. And that being so, a democratic style of work is indeed out of the question.

**II. The "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention,"<sup>8</sup> which base the strict discipline of the people's army on its democratic relations with the people, are a powerful weapon for promoting internal unity in the army and the unity of the army and the people and for disintegrating the enemy forces.**

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has always taught us that the Chinese People's Liberation Army is powerful because all its members are self-disciplined, are united and fight together not in the private interests of a few individuals or a small clique, but for the liberation of the masses of the people, for national liberation and for the liberation of mankind. Standing firmly on the side of the people, its sole aim is to serve them wholeheartedly.

In the earliest days of the Red Army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung personally formulated the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention." These rules embody the very purpose of founding the proletarian revolutionary army in tackling concrete problems encountered most frequently in the internal relations within the army itself and in the relations between it and the people. The most common "trifles" are dealt with as matters of political principle. In this way, warlord influences of the old type of army, such as bullying people and maltreating captives, were completely eliminated from the Red Army, and a revolutionary democratic tradition of unity between the army and the people and unity between officers and men, and the correct policy of winning over officers and men of the enemy troops and treating captives with leniency, were firmly established in the people's army.

With the carrying out of the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention," in the course of daily contact with the army and through their own experience the people completely changed their old conception of an army. The change was from fearing the troops to loving them, from regarding soldiers as "most terrible people" to regarding them as "most beloved people," from fearing or refusing to serve in the army to competing and taking the lead in joining it, from the idea that "good men never become soldiers" to the idea that "good men must become soldiers." In the past decades our army has proved in practice that by earnestly carrying out the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention," it can maintain the true nature of a people's army at all times and in all its actions, and can at all times be invincible.

By carrying out the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention," we have gained the best results in disintegrating enemy troops and reforming captives. Our army's lenient policy towards captives and the democratic life within our army are in striking contrast to all reactionary armies and in themselves provide most convincing living evidence. When junior officers and rank-and-file members of any reactionary army come in contact with this reality, the lying anti-communist propaganda they have been stuffed with is recognized for what it is and class consciousness is quickly aroused in most of the ordinary soldiers of working people's origin. The influence of our correct policy and democracy and our education of the captives made millions of Kuomintang soldiers turn their guns against Chiang Kai-shek, and resulted in many combat heroes coming forward from among those soldiers liberated during the revolutionary civil wars. These also induced large groups of enemy troops to lay down their arms, so that officers and men of the enemy forces, trained by the imperialists and reactionaries, changed into forces opposing their policies of aggression and war; and this happened during the War of Resistance Against Japan, during the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, and during our counter-attack in self-defence along the Sino-Indian border.

The "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention" consist of only 61 Chinese characters and mostly deal with the most ordinary and common things, such as speaking politely and paying fairly for what you buy. Of course, to people filled with the notions of the old army all this is meaningless, and those whose heads are crammed full of foreign doctrines think what is the use of such "country bumpkin" talk? They do not understand that in truth these very common rules shine with the brilliance of creative Marxism-Leninism and, in concrete terms, embody the essential idea in the building of a proletarian revolutionary army. Some people regard these 61 Chinese characters as very simple. How easy it is to carry out these rules, they think. But in fact they fail to understand that these rules cannot be carried out at all unless there is the spirit of wholehearted service to the people and a thoroughly revolutionary world outlook. No bourgeois army, no army which

does not really take Marxism-Leninism as its guide, will ever be able to carry them out.

**III. The prerequisite and the basis of all democratic life and the movement for democracy are the strengthening of political and ideological education, the raising of proletarian consciousness and the practice of widespread political democracy.**

The democratic movement in our army has always started from the establishment of equal political status and a democratic relationship between officers and men. This is to be seen in the fact that there is only division of responsibility between the officers and men, with no distinction in the matter of respect for the human dignity of all. All are class brothers who have come to work for the revolution and who regard wholehearted service to the people as their sole aim. In the interests of the revolution, everybody has the right to learn, to investigate, and to carry out the Party's policies and lines, the right to make positive proposals in accordance with them, and the right to combat any thinking or action which run counter to them. In the interests of the people, officers and men may supervise and criticize one another. Officers have obligations to think harder, to devise more ways and to shoulder more responsibility, but have no privileges of any kind. They are duty-bound to welcome proper criticism from the soldiers and have absolutely no right to reject it. Naturally, they are not allowed to suppress criticism or take revenge on account of it. This is the only way to tap the masses' creative ability and readiness to accept responsibility to the maximum, so that everyone can boldly and aptly pose problems, express opinions and criticize shortcomings. They can carefully and lovingly supervise the leading organizations and leading members. This is the only way to heighten the enthusiasm of the broad masses of commanders and soldiers and strengthen the army's combat ability.

The raising of the proletarian political consciousness of the officers and men is the ideological basis for exercising democracy in the three main fields. As early as 1929, in the resolution "On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party," written for the Ninth Party Congress of the Fourth Army of the Red Army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung stressed the need to intensify the political training of both officers and men, to raise their political level through education, to bring democracy into full play and to organize collective life correctly in accordance with democratic centralism, in order to oppose and correct all unfavourable tendencies. In summing up the experience of the new type of ideological education movement in the army during the period of the Third Revolutionary Civil War, he pointed out: "The correct unfolding of the movement for pouring out grievances (the wrongs done to the labouring people by the old society and by the reactionaries) and the three check-ups (on class origin, performance of duty and

will to fight) greatly heightened the political consciousness of commanders and fighters throughout the army in the fight for the emancipation of the exploited working masses, for nationwide land reform and for the destruction of the common enemy of the people, the Chiang Kai-shek bandit gang. It also greatly strengthened the firm unity of all commanders and fighters under the leadership of the Communist Party. On this basis, the army achieved greater purity in its ranks, strengthened discipline, unfolded a mass movement for training, and further developed its political, economic and military democracy in a completely well-led and orderly way."<sup>9</sup> Democracy in the three main fields must be and can only be established on the basis of political and ideological education, with class education as the core, and on the basis of political democracy. This is most clearly illustrated in the above-quoted passage.

Again and again experience has proved that democracy as a whole cannot be practised in a healthy manner if it deviates from the basis of class education and political democracy. Just consider, if there were no common political goal, no equal political status and no common class feeling between officers and men, how could economic democracy and military democracy be carried out? How could soldiers take part in managing the mess and superintending expenditures? How could officers and men, in military training, coach one another and evaluate each other's teaching and study? As for having democratic discussion of combat plans during battle, letting everybody air problems and find solutions, and evaluating the commander's skill and tactics after a battle, such things would be even more out of the question.

Political democracy in our army is determined by its class character. There are no class antagonisms in the ranks of our army, the officers and men being class brothers. But the reactionary class character of all counter-revolutionary armies makes it impossible for them to have genuine political democracy, and even more impossible for them to employ the revolutionary political work and the strategy and tactics which only proletarian troops can use. Just consider, did not Chiang Kai-shek long ago make a serious study of our ten military principles? Did he not give orders for our campaign of emulation of meritorious service to be adopted? Has he not, since last year, studied and "popularized" our method of teaching troops devised by Kuo Hsing-fu [a company commander — *Ed.*] Have not the U.S. imperialists long studied our tactics of guerrilla warfare? Has not the group of U.S. "military advisers" in south Viet Nam repeatedly advocated that efforts should be made to learn from our "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention"? But has all this been of any help to them?

Military matters cannot be isolated from politics. Proletarian military matters can arise only out of proletarian politics. However fully we disclose our methods and refrain from keeping them secret, however

fully Chiang Kai-shek and his U.S. masters study our material, they can never understand the essence, and still less can they employ these methods among their troops. This is determined by the reactionary class character of their troops. Though their intention here is to find ingenious ways of raising the morale and fighting strength of their soldiers, they are bound to fail pitifully over and over again and repeatedly make a laughing stock of themselves.

**IV. Economic democracy, attention to the well-being of the soldiers and the sharing of weal and woe by officers and men embody the political principle of the unity of officers and men in daily life, and form the starting point for uniting the masses and bringing their initiative into play.**

In all the old-type armies, the soldiers are not only politically oppressed but economically exploited. It was a common thing, an open secret, that part of the soldiers' pay in those armies was pocketed and the soldiers "bled white." From the earliest stages in the building of our army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung built a system which ensured unity between officers and men and abolished the practice of bullying and beating. At the same time, he introduced economic democracy, namely, the practice of having accounts open to inspection by all and of soldiers handling mess arrangements. He has always attached great importance to improving the life of the soldiers, always emphasized the importance of officers and men sharing the bitter and the sweet, and always opposed bureaucratic tendencies to ignore the soldiers' welfare. As early as 1928, Comrade Mao Tse-tung emphasized how important economic democracy, integrated with political democracy, was for the Red Army, which at that time was still in its infancy and engaged in arduous fighting. He wrote: "Apart from the role played by the Party, the reason why the Red Army has been able to carry on in spite of such poor material conditions and such frequent engagements is its practice of democracy."<sup>10</sup> Over the decades, this tradition has played a tremendous role in strengthening unity, in encouraging the initiative of the masses and in raising the combat effectiveness of the army.

Those tainted with warlord and bureaucratic habits of the old-type army are reluctant to undertake what they disdainfully regard as "trifles," such as economic democracy. In their view, having the accounts open to inspection by all and running the mess better are trivialities. They simply do not know that only by attending to the needs of the masses can they unite and lead them. This has been explained by Comrade Mao Tse-tung on more than one occasion. He said, "Do we want to win the support of the masses? Do we want them to devote their strength to the front? If so, we must be with them, arouse their enthusiasm and initiative, be concerned with their well-being, work earnestly and sincerely in their interests. . . ."<sup>11</sup> If we do so, "the masses will surely support us and regard

the revolution as their most glorious banner, as their very life."<sup>12</sup> It is in compliance with Comrade Mao Tse-tung's instructions that the tradition of officers and men eating, living, working, drilling and relaxing together has been maintained all through the protracted revolutionary wars and the period of peaceful construction following the triumph of the revolution. This has ensured selfless striving for the common goal on the part of the officers and men, who are bound together by class feeling and class brotherhood.

The importance of practising economic democracy and paying attention to the life of the masses also lies in the fact that, more often than not, the soldiers come to understand concretely the nature of the revolutionary army, and the revolutionary principles such as who is the revolution for, and whose interests the army is fighting for, in very concrete and practical ways, i.e., through those "trifles of everyday life" which directly involve their vital interests. In a soldier's eyes, a leading cadre is just a chatterer about revolution and a bureaucrat bossing the masses, however skilful he may be in argument, if he leads a privileged life and does not care about the well-being of the masses. If such a bureaucrat is in command of men in action, he will surely come a cropper.

**V. Military democracy is an important measure for raising the tactical and technical level, for winning victories and for bringing forward men of ability. The officers teach the men, the men teach the men, and the men teach the officers, and all difficulties are brought up at "Chuke Liang meetings" where ways and means are suggested for overcoming them; this is the basic method of carrying out military democracy.**

Our experience has long proved that a revolutionary army can practise not only political and economic democracy but also military democracy. It can apply military democracy in fighting as well as in training. Such military democracy was practised as early as the period of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. There was mobilization for the fighting before a battle and meetings afterwards to analyse the battle and sum up experience. This was indeed military democracy in practice. Military democracy was one of the factors, and an extremely important one, in the young Red Army's rapid development of high combat effectiveness and in the mature development of large numbers of fine military commanders who combined intelligence and courage, out of soldiers of peasant origin, "country bumpkins" who never attended a military academy.

The military democracy practised in the Red Army period was developed in the War of Resistance Against Japan. During the Third Revolutionary Civil War, it leapt forward to a new stage, and a complete set of

\* Chuke Liang, 181-234 A.D., the famous Chinese statesman and strategist whose name became a synonym among the Chinese people for "a wise man." A "Chuke Liang meeting" in the People's Liberation Army is one in which the soldiers pool their wisdom to solve difficult problems.



methods of applying military democracy both in training and in fighting came into existence. In training, the officers and men instructed each other, to the benefit of both the teachers and the students, and evaluations were made of both teaching and studying. They were organized into mutual-aid groups for training in which veterans helped new recruits, the stronger helped the weaker and each overcame his own weaknesses by acquiring the strong points of others. They taught and learnt from one another and pledged themselves to teach well and study diligently. In fighting, so long as conditions permitted, the officers and men were encouraged to discuss the fighting tasks and plans and offer their ideas, and to devise ways and means of solving technical and tactical problems; after a battle, they came together to "evaluate the battle," that is, to discuss bravery, technique, tactics, discipline and command, and to sum up their experience in actual warfare. They made progress after each battle. In this way, all the difficulties encountered in training and fighting were easily solved once the masses were encouraged to carry out full military democracy. During the whole period of the Third Revolutionary Civil War, military democracy played a very great role in raising the army's combat effectiveness and ensuring that even with such inferior equipment as "millet plus rifles," it could defeat the Chiang Kai-shek troops equipped by the U.S. imperialists with aircraft and artillery.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung made a timely summation of the additional experience in perfecting military democracy. He said, "With regard to military democracy, in periods of training there must be mutual instruction as between officers and soldiers and among the soldiers themselves; and in periods of fighting the companies at the front must hold big and small meetings of various kinds. Under the direction of the company leadership, the masses of soldiers should be roused to discuss how to attack and capture enemy positions and how to fulfil other combat tasks. When the fighting lasts several days, several such meetings should be held."<sup>13</sup> By practising such military democracy, it is possible to concentrate the wisdom of the masses, heighten the morale of the soldiers, overcome difficulties and defeat the enemy.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's instructions stimulated a more extensive and conscious development of military democracy throughout the army. The greater the number of battles fought, the more resourceful the army grew, the cleverer the soldiers and the more capable the officers became. Many foreigners, and even some Chinese, were never able to understand how the People's Liberation Army could knock out tanks with hand-grenades, defeat warships with wooden junks and blow up fortified city walls and reinforced concrete strongholds without artillery. To them, problems of this sort seemed enigmas impossible of solution. In reality, apart from its high political consciousness and its bravery, the army was able to create all these miracles mainly by relying on military democracy whereby

"everyone contributes his ideas and offers his ways." That was our "secret."

## **VI. The object of democracy in the army is to consolidate discipline and strengthen combat effectiveness. The key to its correct development is the bold arousing of the masses and the strengthening of centralized leadership.**

Far from weakening discipline and combat effectiveness, democracy in the army aims at consolidating and strengthening them. The units that correctly apply democracy under leadership in the three main fields in fact attain this result. Experience proves that there are no grounds for anxiety that the practice of democracy, especially democracy in military affairs, will weaken discipline, impede the work of the command, affect the prestige of the officers, cause delays and lead to the missing of good combat opportunities.

War is a life-and-death struggle between ourselves and the enemy. Above all, it demands concerted action, strict discipline, authoritative command and prompt decision at the right moment. In a word, it calls for a high degree of centralization. Since it calls for high centralization, how can democracy be widely practised? Indeed, to the bourgeois militarists this is utterly incomprehensible. It is completely impossible in a reactionary army, but completely possible in our army. The practice of military democracy in a revolutionary army does not contradict all these requirements of battle; on the contrary, it strengthens them.

Experience shows that the more democracy is brought into play, the greater is the mutual understanding and trust between the higher and the lower levels and between officers and men, thus eliminating apprehensions and misgivings. Those commanders who give correct leadership and promptly rectify mistakes enjoy greater prestige and issue orders with greater confidence, and the lower officers and the soldiers observe discipline, carry out orders and obey commands with greater consciousness of what they are doing. At the same time, the more battle plans are discussed democratically and amended, with each man clearly understanding his place and role during the whole operation, the more initiative the soldiers show in fighting and the more they strengthen their unity and co-ordinate their actions in battle of their own volition. The effect of democratic discussion on military affairs before battle is that the fighters are to a due extent acquainted with the plan of combat. In case the commander and his appointed deputy are killed or wounded in succession, the command will not be interrupted. Members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League who come forward and take up the command have the assurance of possessing a sense of political responsibility and a knowledge of the concrete measures. Does this not provide a clear answer to the question of whether democracy impedes or strengthens centralization?

The point can also be clearly illustrated from our daily life and work. When preparing or carrying out a task, our officers and men say, "Let's have a talk about it," "Let's chew it over" or "Let's collect opinions." When there are differences of view they say, "Let's lay the different opinions on the table," or "Let's discuss." And as to those who hold wrong opinions they propose, "Let's help them get things straight" or "Let's try and win them over by persuasion." Again, after completing a job, they "make some comments," "check-up" and "sum up." All in all, this does not cause any trouble, waste any time or increase the differences but on the contrary makes for better understanding, strengthens unity, crystallizes people's will and unifies action at all levels, so that every task is fulfilled better.

It is wrong to be endlessly worried, timid and hesitant about democracy, it is wrong to be afraid of arousing the masses fully, and it is wrong to hamper democracy by various prohibitions. It is wrong if democracy is lacking in the daily life and work of the army in ordinary times, if no attention is given to other people's opinions, or if democracy is reduced to a formal procedure, while in actual fact one's own words alone are decisive. But it is likewise wrong to assume that when democracy is developed, the responsibilities of the cadres are lighter and that they can do everything simply in accordance with other people's ideas, with themselves trailing behind the masses and abandoning necessary leadership and centralism. It should be said that this is not democracy but an utter distortion of democracy. Nothing could be done well that way and battles would be badly fought. It would only encourage unhealthy tendencies and thwart the true initiative of the masses.

How then can one give correct leadership to developing democracy in the three fields?

Basing himself on the experience of the Red Army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung supplied us with a clear-cut answer as early as 1929. He pointed out that to practise democracy under centralized leadership, "the leading bodies of the Party must give a correct line of guidance and find solutions when problems arise, in order to establish themselves as centres of leadership."<sup>14</sup> "The higher bodies must be familiar with the life of the masses and with the situation in the lower bodies so as to have an objective basis for correct guidance."<sup>15</sup>

Obviously it is wrong, when we advocate democracy, to think that the leaders have no responsibilities, may not have their own opinions, can drift with the stream, make no analysis of the correctness or incorrectness of the opinions of the masses, and fail to distinguish between suggestions that can be put into practice and those which for the moment cannot, and that they can get along simply by trailing behind the masses. Such ideas and actions would be entirely wrong. To practise democracy under leadership, the leaders must conduct serious investigations and studies and gain an understanding of the situation so that they can offer correct opinions and practical solutions when problems arise. Therefore, if the movement for democracy is to

unfold correctly, the leading organs and leading cadres must not only have a firm belief in the masses and a correct democratic attitude but must be highly principled and skilled in giving leadership. It cannot be otherwise.

Though there has been great progress in both the form and content of the army's democracy in the three fields during the past few decades, the basic experience and methods in practising democracy under leadership remain the same as those outlined by Comrade Mao Tse-tung. Experience shows that democracy is sure to develop in a healthy fashion when this is followed, and when one first conducts serious investigations and studies oneself and understands the situation, and then leads the masses to pay serious attention to investigation and study so that they clearly understand the actual situation. In such circumstances, criticism and self-criticism, and bringing difficult problems to the surface and finding ways of solving them, will get to the heart of things and achieve the best results.

#### **VII. The fundamental guarantee of consistently practising democracy and following the mass line in the army is adherence to the system of division of responsibility among the leaders under the unified collective leadership of the Party committee.**

From the very outset of building the army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung worked hard to establish the army Party committee system, and to improve and consolidate it. And in the years of practice that followed, he steadily perfected this system and gradually developed it into the system of division of responsibility among the leaders under the unified collective leadership of the Party committee. All questions of major importance must be decided by discussion in the Party committee, except in an emergency when a leader has to make a quick decision. In discussion, there must be full democracy, with differing opinions debated and efforts made to see that decisions are taken on the basis of agreed ideas. Experience shows that this system can bring all positive factors into play, concentrate the experience and wisdom of the masses, prevent any individual from monopolizing all activity and taking decisions on important problems all by himself, and avoid narrowness and one-sidedness in the handling of problems. At the same time, the leader concerned can play his role to the full, make prompt decisions on his own in the process of exercising his powers as a leader, and fulfil his tasks independently under the unified collective leadership of the Party committee. This is the most essential and the best system of leadership, and has stood the test of time.

The army's history over the decades proves that whenever any unit undermined or weakened the Party committee system, it inevitably developed a trend of warlordism characterized by individual arbitrariness, and undermined inner-Party democracy in the army and the Party's leadership over the army, disintegrated the unity and solidarity of the unit, and weakened its fighting capacity. During the period when the line of "Left" opportunism predominated for the third time,



this time represented by Wang Ming, the Party committee system in the Red Army was abolished, with grave adverse effects on its combat activities and on army building. After the Party committee system was restored in the form of the military and political committees during the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan, and especially after it was completely restored and improved at all levels in the army during the period of the Third Revolutionary Civil War, the unity of the whole army under the leadership of the Party was greatly strengthened, democracy within the army was greatly invigorated and the movements for democracy and the new type of ideological education in the army were conducted in a guided, orderly way. This added tremendously to the combat effectiveness of the army and ensured final victory in the war.

Historical experience shows that the Party's leadership over the army should mean unified collective leadership by the Party committees at all levels and never individual arbitrariness by any Party member or leader. The establishment of the Party committee system under unified, central leadership at all levels in the army, the practice within the Party committee of the system of division of responsibility among the leaders under unified collective leadership—this is the fundamental system whereby the military command is placed under the leadership of the Party. At the same time, democracy in the army can be satisfactorily practised only when the leaders first of all develop a good, democratic style of work under this system. Therefore, adherence to the system of division of responsibility among the leaders under the unified collective leadership of the Party committees has become a basic guarantee of consistently practising democracy and following the mass line in the army, and preventing any warlord trends characterized by individual arbitrariness.

**VIII. Democracy in the three fields which was necessary under "millet plus rifles" conditions is still needed, and needed all the more, and is entirely feasible, under conditions of modern equipment and modern war.**

Democracy in the three fields came into being during the "millet plus rifles" period of our army. This provided those who held bourgeois views on military affairs with a "reason" for arguing that democracy in the three fields and the mass line were simply makeshifts or "indigenous methods" that had to be adopted in view of the inferior equipment of our army and the lack of military training of the officers. To their mind, these "indigenous methods" were very inferior and unscientific. They were utterly useless when modern equipment was adopted, regular training was initiated and modern warfare was prosecuted; accordingly, only those commanders and technical experts who had undergone strict professional training were to be depended on. For a time a few persons who stuck to bourgeois views on military affairs came to the fore again and created trouble in the new historical period following the founding of the People's Republic of China. In

the name of building a modern, regular army, they advocated the abolition of the Party committee system in the army, which in reality meant abolishing the Party's leadership over the army, weakening political work and negating the democratic tradition and mass line of our army. This represented a vain attempt to push the People's Liberation Army on to the bourgeois road of army building. The question of whether to preserve the democratic tradition and mass line of our army and bring them into full play is an essential part of the struggle in the new historical period between the two different military lines.

The facts of the past 15 years have entirely shattered their absurd arguments. The Korean war can be taken as the biggest modern war since World War II. The Chinese People's Volunteers together with the heroic Korean People's Army defeated the U.S. forces of aggression, even though the latter had naval, air and artillery superiority. This was not because our military equipment and military technique were more modern at that time than those of the United States. The main reasons for our victory were the justness of our war, the all-out support of the Korean and Chinese peoples, our correct strategy, the high political consciousness and courage of our officers and men, and, an extremely important factor, the healthy development of our democratic tradition and the mass line. The world-famous tunnel fortifications, known as the underground Great Wall, and the tunnel offensive and defensive tactics, the indestructible transport line which was never interrupted despite continuous enemy bombing, the mass movement for bringing down enemy planes which turned U.S. "air superiority" into "air anxiety," and the sniping operations that caused the U.S. troops uneasiness on the 38th Parallel—were not all these the creation of the masses, the cadres and fighters, arising from the widespread practice of democracy in which everybody put forward his ideas?

To say that modern equipment is too scientific and too complicated for the masses of soldiers to understand and therefore no democracy is possible—this kind of assertion is an absolute swindle; if not compacted of superstition and ignorance, it is deliberately intended to frighten people. The technical equipment of an air force and navy is modern enough. The research, experiment and manufacture connected with atom bombs, guided missiles and other new weapons of the most advanced type can be said to be highly modern. Yet how did our young air force and navy rapidly master such modern techniques? How were our young pilots from worker and peasant families able to bring down U.S. ace pilots? And in recent years how were our air defence units able again and again to bring down U.S.-Chiang Kai-shek reconnaissance planes of all types? Is it not to a very large extent due to the democratic movement in which everybody offers his ideas and methods, due to the priceless tradition of the integration of the leaders and the masses? How was our national defence industry, breaking all bourgeois rules and overcoming all difficulties imposed by the modern revisionists, able

successfully to explode two atom bombs designed and manufactured in China in so very short a period? What is the reason? Is it not to a very large extent due to the democratic movement in which everybody offers his ideas and methods, due to the priceless tradition of the mass line, the pooling of the efforts of the leaders, experts and workers?

Experience has shown that the more modernized technical equipment becomes, the more that modern equipment is used in war and the more we have to deal with an enemy using modern equipment, the less can we afford to weaken the democratic tradition and the mass line in our methods of work. On the contrary, they have to be upheld and developed all the more. The reason is very simple. Man invents the weapons, man manufactures the weapons, man uses the weapons, and man destroys the weapons. Without man, all modern technical equipment is not only so much deadwood; it could never be produced. The conscious activity of man cannot be replaced by any technical equipment, however advanced. Man is always the primary factor. Within the human factor, the wisdom and experience of the individual leader and technical expert is always very limited and incomplete. Therefore, modern technical equipment can be used most fully, and extremely complicated forms of modern warfare can be carried out with the utmost confidence and success only by fully practising democracy, bringing the collective wisdom of the masses into full play and rallying the initiative and creativeness of the masses under the collective leadership of the Party committee.

In this respect, the imperialists and reactionaries are still our best teachers by negative example. They thought highly of the bourgeois conception that appeared in our army building work at one time after the victory of our revolution and were very happy about it. They believed that in this way, though the People's Liberation Army would become stronger in technical equipment, its revolutionary tradition — such as leadership by the Party, political work and the mass line, centred on democracy in the three main fields — would be weakened and even discarded; this revolutionary force would therefore change its nature and become a "professional army" such as that of the bourgeoisie and would become easier to deal with and possible to defeat. However, the imperialists and reactionaries rejoiced too soon. The facts soon turned their hopes to despair.

In the new historical period since the victory of the revolution, and especially in recent years, under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party, Chairman Mao Tse-tung, the Military Council and Comrade Lin Piao, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has not only persisted in but has further developed its revolutionary tradition which was initiated by Comrade Mao Tse-tung and which includes democracy in the three main fields. This has struck great fear into the imperialists, the reactionaries and the modern revisionists of the Khrushchov brand and aroused their enmity. They

furiously slander our people's movement for learning from the Liberation Army. They say it is intended to wipe out democracy and force the people to submit without complaint. They say it is meant to ask the Chinese people to further sacrifice their personal interests. They say it is meant to impose military organization and methods on the factories and the communes and turn the whole of China into a barrack, etc., etc. Why do they slander and attack us so fiercely in this matter? It is because they sense that our persistence in and development of this tradition is to their great disadvantage. We have shattered their delusions that as time goes by, as our economy develops and with the improvement of our equipment, we will some day discard our old traditions bit by bit and gradually become estranged from the masses.

This is not at all surprising. Their reactionary class stand determines their reluctance and failure to understand the following: the essence of what the Chinese people are learning from the Liberation Army is precisely to learn to persist in the "four firsts" and the "three-eight" style of work,\* and at the same time to persist in and develop the democratic tradition of our Party.

As Comrade Mao Tse-tung long ago pointed out, "In China war is the main form of struggle and the army is the main form of organization."<sup>16</sup> Hence, the Marxist-Leninist line of the Chinese Communist Party, represented by Comrade Mao Tse-tung, and all the fine traditions of the Party were usually implemented first in the army. This is precisely the characteristic of the Chinese revolution and arises from the historical conditions of the protracted revolutionary war. So it was with the spread of our Party's democratic style of work among the masses. The whole Liberation Army was a school of democracy throughout the decades of war, a sower of democratic thinking and a democratic style of work. During the difficult years of struggle against reaction at home and abroad, wherever the Liberation Army went, there revolutionary bases were established and democratic thinking and a democratic style of work spread; the people learnt to hold meetings, conduct elections, hold discussions, practise criticism and employ other democratic means, how to exercise democratic

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\* The "four firsts" are as follows: Giving first place to man in the correct handling of the relationship between man and weapons; giving first place to political work in the correct handling of the relationship between political and other work; giving first place to ideological work in the correct handling of the relationship between ideological and routine tasks in political work; and in ideological work, giving first place to living ideas in the correct handling of the relationship between ideas in books and living ideas. With regard to the "three-eight" working style, "three" refers to the three mottoes: "Keep firmly to the correct political orientation," "maintain an industrious and simple style of work," and "be flexible in strategy and tactics"; "eight" refers to eight characters which mean unity, alertness, earnestness and activity.

rights and reach unanimity and undertake unified action on the basis of democracy. To this day, the Chinese people still warmly refer to a good cadre whose style of work is very democratic and who is at one with the masses as "our old Red Armyman" or "the old *ba lu* [Eighth Route Army]." This is an apt illustration.

Leadership by the Party which is armed with Marxism-Leninism, with Mao Tse-tung's thinking, and wholehearted defence of the highest interests of the overwhelming majority of the people—these are the prerequisites for all the systems and fine traditions of our army. All the tasks of the army are carried out through firm reliance on the masses. Our people learn from the army and our army learns from the people and from the work of the local authorities. The army and the people are as one, and the army units and local authorities are in accord. How can this be understood by the imperialists, reactionaries and revisionists, who are alienated from and hostile to the people making up more than 90 per cent of the population? They do not want to and can never understand it. To them, absolute obedience and no democracy are common characteristics of all armies, bourgeois or proletarian alike; thus, according to them, for the Chinese people to learn from the Liberation Army naturally means abolishing democracy and imposing military control over the people. Such is their pitiful and absurd reasoning. Their slanders and attacks can achieve no more than to expose their complete ignorance of and utter hatred for all revolutionary causes. They cannot do us the least harm; on the contrary, these attacks and slanders serve us as the best teachers by negative example and prove that what we are doing is right. Once again this demonstrates the truth that it is not your modern technique that the imperialists and the reactionaries truly fear. The modern technique that you have they also have, even more and better. That is not what they are afraid of. What they really fear is precisely the unique proletarian political consciousness of our commanders and fighters, the mass line that brings into fullest play this political consciousness and the initiative and creativeness resulting from this consciousness, and our democratic tradition. Is this not perfectly clear?

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's theory and practice concerning the need without exception for democracy in the army, the need without exception for the mass line in military work, and the theory and practice concerning the orderly and well-led development of democracy—political, economic and military—in the army constitute a new development of the Marxist-Leninist principle that the masses are the creators of history. It was born out of practice during China's protracted revolutionary war. It was first carried out in the course of war and within the army. At the same time, it is applicable to the revolutionary cause of the people in general. In learning from the oil workers of Taching, from the peasants of Tachai and from the Liberation Army, in the movement for comparing with the more advanced, learning from and overtaking them and helping the less

advanced, the Chinese people are concretely applying the democratic traditions of our army to the three revolutionary movements of class struggle, the struggle for production, and scientific experimentation, and they are widely developing the movement for democracy in four fields, namely, democracy in politics, in production, in finance and in military affairs. They, too, are making many new creations, with tremendous effect on raising political consciousness, promoting production and developing science. All this fully demonstrates that the democratic tradition of our army initiated by Comrade Mao Tse-tung is a priceless revolutionary tradition, an unbreakable truth of universal application that works wherever it is applied.

Relying on this priceless revolutionary tradition, under the brilliant leadership of our Party and Comrade Mao Tse-tung our army and the masses of the people have won great victories in successive revolutionary wars, in socialist revolution and in socialist construction by carrying out the principles, lines and policies Comrade Mao Tse-tung and the Party Central Committee have laid down. In the future, too, by continuing to rely on this priceless revolutionary tradition, applying it and carrying it forward on all fronts throughout the country, our people surely will all the faster reach the great goal of building China into a powerful socialist country, with modern agriculture, modern industry, modern national defence and modern science and technology. Our People's Liberation Army should continue to hold aloft the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thinking, continue to persist in and develop the democratic tradition of our army and learn with modesty all the new achievements and experiences of the local organizations in this respect, and strive to raise the combat strength of our army and accomplish with distinction the great tasks assigned to us by history.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "The Struggle in the Chingkang Mountains," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, English Edition, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1964, p.83.

<sup>2</sup> "The Democratic Movement in the Army," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. IV, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1961, p.191.

<sup>3</sup> "On Protracted War," *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1963, pp.260-61.

<sup>4</sup> "Marx and Engels to A. Bebel, W. Liebknecht, W. Bracke and Others" ("Circular Letter"), *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1958, p.485.

<sup>5</sup> "Be Concerned With the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1964, p.147.

<sup>6</sup> "On Protracted War," *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1963, p.257.

<sup>7</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Preface and Postscript to "Rural Surveys"*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1962, p.3.

<sup>8</sup>The three main rules of discipline are as follows: Obey orders in all your actions; do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses; and turn in everything captured. The eight points for attention are as follows: Speak politely; pay fairly for what you buy; return everything you borrow; pay for anything you damage; do not hit or swear at people; do not damage crops; do not take liberties with women; and do not ill-treat captives.

<sup>9</sup>"On the Great Victory in the Northwest and on the New Type of Ideological Education Movement in the Liberation Army," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. IV, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1961, pp.214-15.

<sup>10</sup>"The Struggle in the Ching kang Mountains," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1964, p.83.

<sup>11</sup>"Be Concerned With the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1964, p.149.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, pp.149-50.

<sup>13</sup>"The Democratic Movement in the Army," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. IV, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1961, p.191.

<sup>14</sup>"On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1964, p.109.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>"Problems of War and Strategy," *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1963, p.269.