Philosophy 575: Mao Zedong as a Philosopher

Syllabus

Topic:
This course will consider Mao Zedong’s philosophical works and the philosophical controversies in which he played a role. We will read some of his works of political philosophy, but our main emphasis will be on his views and controversies about to epistemology, dialectics and materialism in the ‘30s, 50’s and 60’s. We will of course discuss the political context and consequences of these philosophical disputes and positions.

Instructor Data:
Tom Weston, Office in Room AL-442, Phone 619-594-6218. Office Hours: 1-2 MWF and by appointment.
Email: tweston@mail.sdsu.edu,
Weston’s Personal web page: http://tomweston.net
Web page for some class readings: http://marxistphilosophy.org/mao

Course Requirements:
1) Two one-hour midterm exams, essay form, count 20% each. Study questions will be provided before each exam.
2) A critical exposition paper of 2000-2500 words. Instructor will give suggested topics and detailed instructions after the first exam is returned. First drafts are mandatory and will be due late in the semester. Final draft is due at end of finals week. Counts 20%.
3) Comprehensive final examination, questions available in advance, essay form. Counts 35%.
4) Short quizzes on the assigned reading. Count 5%.

Books to buy:
2) Arif Dirlik, et. al., Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong’s Thought, Humanities Press, 1997, paperback
4) Various articles available online (and perhaps at Cal Copy)

Tentative Outline:
1) Overview of Mao’s life and works, major events of the Chinese revolution 1911-1989.
2) Basic Marxist ideas: Selections from Communist Manifesto, Gotha Program Critique, German Ideology, Preface to Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.
3) Mao’s Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan
4) Selections on Soviet philosophy, Li Da and Ai Siqi
5) Mao’s “On Practice”
6) “Non-Antagonistic Contradiction” in Soviet Philosophy
7) Mao’s “On Contradiction”
8) Mao’s “On New Democracy”
9) Mao’s “On Protracted War” excerpt
10) Mao’s “Ten Great Relationships”
11) “Non-Antagonistic Contradiction” in 1956-7, including Mao’s “Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People”
12) Mao on dialectics and atomic physics in November 1957 meeting in Moscow
13) Peoples’ Communes, Supply System, and Communism in 1958, including articles by Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao
14) Lushan conference and productive forces determinism
17) The debate about “one divides into two” and “two combine into one”: Mao vs. Yang Xianzhen. Mao’s “Chat on Philosophy,” 1964-5.
18) Cultural Revolution, “Paris Commune” organization, critique of productive forces determinism
19) Mao’s death and destruction of Maoism: Deng Xiaoping Thought: “Seeking truth from facts,” and productive forces determinism.
20) Conclusions.

We will include discussion of Western and Soviet views on Mao, and some material in Mao’s relation to traditional Chinese philosophy.