

# From Political Practice Discourse to Cultural Interpretation Strategy: An Example of Fredric Jameson's Aesthetic Application of Mao Zedong's Thoughts<sup>1</sup>

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When Western left-wing movement suffered setbacks in reality, its practical experience transformed into a method of text interpretation. However, rare people would ask, how could political practice revive in discourse practice? This article aims to analyze its transition through the example of Fredric Jameson's aesthetic application of Mao Zedong's thoughts. The influence is manifested in three ways: First, the influence of theory—variation through the journey of the text; second, the influence of practice—transformation through the extraction of the context; third, the application of Maoism—to reserve the signifier but convert the signified. In Jameson's view, Mao Zedong's thoughts and practice became the focus of theorists and an idealized "otherness".

*Keywords:* Fredric Jameson, Mao Zedong, the political unconsciousness

For Western left-wing thinkers, "May Storm" in 1968 is a frustrating but promising event: On the one hand, this failure crippled their power of action; on the other hand, it heralded the flourishing of theory. This phenomenon was predicted in *Negative Dialectics* published in 1966, in which Theodor W. Adorno wrote, "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed."<sup>2</sup> He indicates that the philosophy leading to political practice would turn obsolete if achieved, but to live on the unachieved if interrupted. Adorno's remarks have become the consensus of Western Marxism. Perry Anderson, Terry Eagleton and other thinkers<sup>3</sup> believe that after the failure in reality, left-wing political practice revived as an ideology in discourse practice. However, rare people would ask, how could political practice revive in discourse practice? And how was it adapted, transformed and applied? This article aims to analyze its transition through the example of Fredric Jameson's aesthetic application of Mao Zedong's thoughts.

In Fredric Jameson's works, there are countless remarks on Mao Zedong's thoughts and political practice, which stemmed from his deep-rooted admiration for Mao Zedong<sup>4</sup> according to Xie Shaobo. We can find his

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<sup>2</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. Trans by E.B. Ashton, Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2004, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Perry Anderson believes that "The breakdown of political unity between the Marxist theory and the practice of the masses has caused the necessary link between the two to irresistibly turn toward the other axis. Owing to the poles of a revolutionary class movement, the entire Western Marxist tradition continues to be directed toward contemporary bourgeois culture. "Terry Eagleton also recognized that" political failure led to cultural success."

<sup>4</sup> Xie Shaobo, *Resistant Cultural Politics*, Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1999, P.104.

admiration for Mao Zedong mostly in his book *the Syntax of History*, “a First World 60s owed much to Third-Worldism in terms of politico cultural models, as in a symbolic Maoism”<sup>5</sup>, among which Mao Zedong’s politico cultural system “provides a new type of political blueprint ... gets rid of the traditional hierarchy”<sup>6</sup>. According to Fredric Jameson, Maoism and other anti-hegemonists in the 60s could be considered as leading figures who “broke the slavish stereotypes of the exploited working class”<sup>7</sup>, among which, Mao Zedong is undoubtedly the most outstanding figure for his theory, “particularly in Mao Zedong’s essay ‘On Contradiction’, in which the complexity of various antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions and the following theory of overdetermination are clearly mapped out.”<sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson believes that “Maoism” is “the best-constructed and most revolutionary great ideology in the 60s”<sup>9</sup>. In the article “Marxism and Historicism”, Fredric Jameson interprets the theory of “cultural revolution” by taking Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution. He holds that Cultural Revolution is an event of “the structural coexistence of production modes that restrain each other”<sup>10</sup>, and considers Louis Althusser’s revolutionary theories as a combination of Saussure linguistics, Mao Zedong dialectics and Lacan psychoanalysis in his essay “the Imaginary and Symbolic Sphere of Lacan”. Besides, we can see Fredric Jameson’s focus on Mao Zedong in his interviews. For example, in his interview with Wang Fengzhen, He believes Mao’s era is an extraordinary breakthrough in Chinese history<sup>11</sup>; in his interview with Li Zehou and Liu Kang, he argues that “Mao Zedong has constructed a very promising vision for the whole society”<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, Fredric Jameson’s *the Political Unconsciousness* echoes with Mao Zedong, which Xie Shaobo believes “a combination of Mao Zedong and Sigmund Freud”<sup>13</sup>. We may interpret Mao Zedong’s impact on Fredric Jameson as the following: As “May Storm” interrupted left-wing thinkers’ revolutionary passion, they had to think about the failed revolution and their unreleased passion. Under such a circumstance, Mao Zedong’s theory and practice which is heterogeneous with the Western ideological trend has gradually attracted attention and become the focus of theorists and meanwhile, an idealized reference. Here we can see Mao Zedong’s influence on Fredric Jameson. The influence is manifested in three ways: First, the influence of theory—variation through the journey of the text; second, the influence of practice—transformation through the extraction of the context; third, the application of Mao’s thoughts—to reserve the signifier but convert the signified.

### **One: Traveling theory: “On Contradiction”—“Overdetermination”—“Cognitive Mapping”**

Edward W. Said holds that “Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp.180.

<sup>6</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s”, in Sohnya Sayres, et al. *The 60s Without Apology*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp.182.

<sup>7</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp.191.

<sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp.188.

<sup>9</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp.188.

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson “Marxism and Historicism”, in *New Literary History*. vol. XI, No.1, Autumn 1979, pp.69.

<sup>11</sup> Fredric Jameson: “The Imaginary and Symbolic Sphere of Lacan”, *Collective Works of Fredric Jameson, Vol 3*, edited by Wang Fengzhen, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004, pp.420.

<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson: “Interview: Jameson, Li Zehou and Liukang”, *Collective Works of Fredric Jameson, Vol 3*, edited by Wang Fengzhen, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004, pp.354.

<sup>13</sup> Xie Shaobo, *Resistant Cultural Politics*. Trans by Chen Yong’guo & Wang Min’an, Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1999, p.105.

to person, from situation to situation, and from one period to another.”<sup>14</sup> Maoism once traveled from China to America, and finally came to the theories of Fredric Jameson. The journey is recorded in a form of text: from Mao Zedong’s “On Contradiction” to Louis Althusser’s “Overdetermination”, and to Fredric Jameson’s “Cognitive Mapping”. As a medium between Maoism and Jameson’s Theory and a representative figure of French left-wing intellectuals, Louis Althusser was significantly impacted by “On Contradiction” in the 1960s. This article aims to discuss its impact from the following two perspectives:

One: Spiritual affinity. Perry Anderson once said, “His sympathies for China were thinly veiled”<sup>15</sup>. Louis Althusser believes that there is similarity between the contexts of his times with that of Mao Zedong’s era. In the 1960s, faced with the upcoming crisis, he tried to break through the Stalinist dogmatism and provide Marxist theories with a more solid theoretical basis. He believes that “On Contradiction” is a product of Mao Zedong’s opposition to Stalinist dogmatism, and that “overdetermination” is also a theoretical weapon to criticize Stalin’s “economic determinism”. Both theories echo with each other spiritually and emotionally.

Two: Theoretical enlightenment. Louis Althusser specifically discusses “On Contradiction” in the chapters “Contradiction and Overdetermination” and “On the Materialist Dialectic” of *Pour Marx*. It’s obvious that Mao Zedong’s theories that the universality and unevenness of contradictions directly influence Louis Althusser’s theory of “overdetermination”. Althusser wrote in the chapters above: “Mao only refers to the ‘simple process’ as a reminder, and gives no example of it. But throughout his analysis we never deal with anything but complex processes in which a structure with multiple and uneven determinations intervenes primitively, not secondarily.”<sup>16</sup> Through “symptomatic reading”, Louis Althusser interprets the phenomenon that Mao Zedong eschews “simple process” as the “complexity” of contradiction: “According to Mao, a simple process contains only one pair of opposites, while a complex process contains more”; for ‘there are many contradictions in the course of development of any major thing.’<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Althusser put forward “overdetermination of contradiction”: “The unity they constitute in this ‘fusion’ into a revolutionary rupture, is constituted by their own essence and effectivity, by what they are, and according to the specific modalities of their action. In constituting this unity, they reconstitute and complete their basic animating unity, but at the same time they also bring out its nature : the ‘contradiction’ is inseparable from the total structure of the society in which it is based on, inseparable from its formal conditions of existence, and even from the instances it governs; it is radically affected by them, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various levels and instances of the social formation it animates; it might be called overdetermined in its principle.”<sup>18</sup>

It can be seen that Louis Althusser was inspired by Maoism to redevelop Marx’s theory. He believes that Marx’s society is a “complex structured whole” with three important characteristics, which all echo viewpoints in “On Contradiction”. One: The structure of whole. Contradictions cannot exist independently but can only be defined in the whole. The interdependence among different contradictions constitutes a “complex structured whole”. This theory is correspondent with the theory of identity in “On Contradiction”: “The fact is that no

<sup>14</sup> Edward. W. Said: “Traveling Theory”, *Collective Works of Edward. W. Said*. Trans by Xie Shaobo & Han Gang, Beijing: China Social Science Press, pp138

<sup>15</sup> Perry Anderson: *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Trans by Gao Kuo & Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp. 53.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Pierre Althusser, *For Marx*. Trans by Ben Brewster, London: The Penguin Press, 1969, pp.195.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Pierre Althusser, *For Marx*. Trans by Ben Brewster, London: The Penguin Press, 1969, pp. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Pierre Althusser, *For Marx*. Trans by Ben Brewster, London: The Penguin Press, 1969, pp. 100-101.

contradictory aspect can exist in isolation.”<sup>19</sup> “All contradictory things are interconnected; not only do they coexist in a single entity in given conditions, but in other given conditions, they also transform themselves into each other. This is the full meaning of the identity of opposites.”<sup>20</sup> Two: The structural causality. It is a structure in which all contradictions are interrelated. The structure no longer seeks differences or interrelations rather than similarity. It is a manifestation of identity that contradictions coexist despite their differences. “In any contradiction the development of the contradictory aspects is uneven.”<sup>21</sup> Three: the complex structured whole which makes of this situation in fact a ‘variation’ of the—‘invariant’<sup>22</sup>. This corresponds to the principal contradictions and non-principal contradictions, according to “On Contradiction”, “There are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determines or influences the existence and development of the other contradictions.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, “There are still two points in the problem of the particularity of contradiction which must be singled out for analysis, namely, the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction.”<sup>24</sup> There are many similarities between “overdetermination” and “On Contradiction”. We could not find the basic concepts of the principal contradiction and the non-principal contradiction, the principal aspect and non-principal aspect of a contradiction, the antagonistic contradiction and non-antagonistic contradiction, and the law of the unevenness of contradiction in Hegel.”<sup>25</sup> That means “On Contradiction” has provided an unprecedented thinking mode. In light of Hegel, the existence and development of everything is determined by a single contradiction, while Karl Marx created a structure of non-Hegelian dialectics<sup>26</sup>, that is, it is “overdetermination” that discovered structural causality on the basis of traditional transformation of political economy.

Fredric Jameson appraises “On Contradiction” as “one of the classic works of structural Marxism”<sup>27</sup>, which came after Althusser’s “overdetermination”. Jameson was influenced by Althusser’s “complex structured whole”<sup>28</sup> and put forward his methodology of cultural interpretation — “Cognitive Mapping”. Even Jameson himself admitted that it was nearly a theoretical combination of Kevin Lynch (an American city designer) and

<sup>19</sup> Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, *Selective Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp.328

<sup>20</sup> Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, *Selective Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp. 330

<sup>21</sup> Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, *Selective Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp. 322

<sup>22</sup> Over determination designates the following essential quality of contradiction: the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure in dominance of the complex whole. This is not a univocal “situation”. It is not just its situation ‘*in principle*’ (the one it occupies in the hierarchy of instances in relation to the determinant instance: in society, the economy) nor just its situation “*in fact*” (whether, in the phase under consideration, it is dominant or subordinate) but *the relation of this situation in fact to this situation in principle*, that is, the very relation which makes of this situation in fact a “*variation*” of the —“*invariant*” —structure, in dominance, of the totality. Louis Pierre Althusser, *For Marx*. Trans by Ben Brewster, London: The Penguin Press, 1969, pp.209.

<sup>23</sup> Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, *Selective Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp.320

<sup>24</sup> Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, *Selective Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp.320

<sup>25</sup> Louis Pierre Althusser. *Politics and History*. London: New Left, 1972, pp.94.

<sup>26</sup> “To be clear, this means that *basic structures of the Hegelian dialectic* such as negation, the negation of the negation, the identity of opposites, ‘supersession’, the transformation of quantity into quality, contradiction, etc., *have for Marx (insofar as he takes them over, and he takes over by no means all of them) a structuredifferent from the structure they have for Hegel.*” Louis Pierre Althusser, *For Marx*. Trans by Ben Brewster, London: The Penguin Press, 1969, pp.93.

<sup>27</sup> Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernism or Cultural Theories*. Trans by Tang Xiaobing, Beijing: Peking University Press, 1997, pp.70

<sup>28</sup> Another term of Althusser’s “overdetermination” is “composite overdetermined structural totality”, which seeks to examine society as a whole. Refer to Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernism or Cultural Theories*. Trans by Tang Xiaobing, Beijing: Peking University Press, 1997, pp.87

Louis Althusser.<sup>29</sup> The term “cognitive mapping” is originated from *The Image of the City* by Kevin Lynch, holding that the city is a mixture of many independent and relevant elements. If these elements can be identified, accurate and complete will be people’s memory, identification, presentation, description, evaluation and prediction of the physical environment. Conversely, they tend to lose direction to imagine the city completely. Fredric Jameson further developed this theory by claiming that “the mental map of urban space discussed by Lynch could be generalized into a mental map of society and the world which was remained in our minds in distorted forms.”<sup>30</sup> Jameson remained the original Lynch’s theory and elevated it to postmodern hyperspace cognition. Though his theory based on “overdetermination” echoing with “On Contradiction”, their similarity is faintly presented.<sup>31</sup> This article continues to discuss the impact of “overdetermination” on “cognitive mapping” from the two aspects that the influence of “On Contradiction” on “overdetermination”.

One: Spiritual affinity. We have discussed Althusser’s political purpose and cultural political mission of his “overdetermination” and “On Contradiction”. In this way, cognitive mapping is another resistant “political art”. Fredric Jameson believes that “to get rid of the spatial confusion and to develop a postmodernism with political effects, we must shoulder a cultural political mission to find and project a “global cognitive mapping” at a proper time.”<sup>32</sup> “Cognitive mapping is a form of postmodern political practice, which can resist late capitalist ideology’s erosion of human cognition, reposition individuals and the community, and help the mass regain their ability to fight and act.”<sup>33</sup>

Two: theoretical acceptance. Lynch’s “cognitive mapping” is a description of the psychological experience of urban imagination, discussing the technical issues of cartography. Fredric Jameson accepts “overdetermination”, holding that “cognitive mapping” constitutes a “spiritual map” of postmodern hyperspace cognition and contains two levels of meaning: The first is “totality”. Postmodernist society is a unity composed of elements with different origins, meanings and levels. Therefore, the approach of “totality” is significant especially in a pluralistic and fragmented postmodern society, and according to Jameson, is an ultimate state of “absence” beyond individual’s consciousness in a distorted or symbolic way.<sup>34</sup> The second is “difference”. The emphasis on “totality” coexists with that on differences and individuals. Cognitive mapping is the perception and construction of reality on the basis of individual experience<sup>35</sup>; meanwhile, it transcends the “reality” of individual experience with a comprehensive understanding of the whole world. In “cognitive mapping”, “totality” and “difference” are parallel to each other, according to Jameson, “The concept of totality contains

<sup>29</sup> Fredric Jameson: “Cognitive Mapping”, *Collective Works of Fredric Jameson, Vol 1*, edited by Wang Fengzhen, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004, pp.301.

<sup>30</sup> Fredric Jameson: “Cognitive Mapping”, *Collective Works of Fredric Jameson, Vol 1*, edited by Wang Fengzhen, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004, pp.302.

<sup>31</sup> Althusser’s theory of the dialectical relation between truth and imagination of “ideology” also has a great influence on “cognitive mapping”. This article does not discuss this topic because it has little to do with Mao Zedong’s thoughts.

<sup>32</sup> Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Trans by Chen Qingqiao etc. Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1997, pp.515

<sup>33</sup> For developing cognitive mapping aesthetics, we must create a new kind of political art that attempts to make a breakthrough in gaining a new paradigm that recreates this still-existing phenomenon in this space ... We may be able to regain our position as individuals and collectively. Refer to Fredric Jameson: *Pleasure: Culture and Politics*, Trans by Wang Fengzhen, Guilin: Lijiang Publishing House, 1997, pp.212.

<sup>34</sup> Fredric Jameson: “Cognitive Mapping”, *Collective Works of Fredric Jameson, Vol 1*, edited by Wang Fengzhen, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004, pp.297.

<sup>35</sup> Cognitive mapping enables individual subjects to be reoccurred in a given situation and expresses the external, broad, strictly non-representable (unintelligible) urban structures in a given context “ Refer to Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Trans by Chen Qingqiao etc. Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1997, pp. 515

the need of methods and different “symptomatic analyses” on the rupture or gap within cultural texts with a façade of unity. It is possible to attach importance to the both without major divergence.”<sup>36</sup> Analyses above have shown the similarity between Jameson and Althusser.

From “On Contradiction” to “overdetermination”, and to “cognitive mapping”, “whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation.”<sup>37</sup> Mao Zedong’s theory of complex and pluralist contradiction, unevenness and principal and non-principal contradiction turns into “totality”, “difference” and “dominance” of social structure and “cognitive mapping” emphasizes the “totality” to preserve the “totality” of “difference. “On Contradiction” is not merely a theoretical analysis, but a strongly practical text to guide social revolutions in China. While transforming from a theory guiding practice to a theoretical Marxist social structure, and to a cultural strategy in the postmodern context, the original concepts and theories completely differ from the original ones but regained its vitality.

### **Two: An Extraction of Historical Context: From the Cultural Revolution to “Cultural Revolution”**

Fredric Jameson assimilated and applied Maoism during its journey. However, Jameson is more obsessed with Mao Zedong’s political practice of the Cultural Revolution (most Western left-wing theorists have shown their obsession with the Cultural Revolution). The process that Fredric Jameson saw the Cultural Revolution is not simply “to see”, but to “see” what he wanted to “see”. He neglected what is not included within his theoretical structure, extracted the Cultural Revolution from its historical context and converted political practice into discourse practice by adapting original theories to cultural interpretation. Fredric Jameson’s adaption of the Cultural Revolution could be studied in the following two approaches: one is deducted theory; the other is the idealization from the view of “otherness”.

One: deducted theory. We should notice that deducted theory is different from traveling theory. Traveling theory is a spontaneous process, while deducted theory is a reversed one, where a concept should be first accepted and then theoretically deduced to justify itself. The theory of “cultural revolution” falls into the latter classification. When Mao Zedong initiated the Cultural Revolution, there was no such theory. Western theorists first accepted the practice of the Culture Revolution and then sought for its theoretical basis. The process of theoretical deduction should start from “On Contradiction”, in which Mao Zedong put forward the law of unevenness of contradiction: “In any contradiction the development of the contradictory aspects is uneven. Sometimes they seem to be in equilibrium, which is however only temporary and relative, while unevenness is basic.”<sup>38</sup> According to Louis Althusser, Mao’s theory was interpreted as the reason for revolution: Due to their unevenness, the displacement and condensation of contradictions render themselves in an irritating state of non-confrontation, confrontation or explosion. “So, in Marxist theory, to say that contradiction is a motive force is to say that it implies a real struggle, real confrontations, precisely located within the structure of the complex whole; it is to say that the locus of confrontation may vary according to the relation of the

<sup>36</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, pp.41.

<sup>37</sup> Edward. W. Said: “Traveling Theory”, *Collective Works of Edward. W. Said*. Trans by Xie Shaobo & Han Gang, Beijing: China Social Science Press, pp138

<sup>38</sup> Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, *Selective Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, pp.322

contradictions in the structure in dominance in any given situation; it is to say that the condensation of the struggle in a strategic locus is inseparable from the displacement of the dominant among these contradictions; that the organic phenomena of condensation and displacement are the very existence of the 'identity of opposites' until they produce the globally visible form of the mutation or qualitative leap that sanctions the revolutionary situation when the whole is recrystallized."<sup>39</sup> In this sense, we have found the theoretical basis of Althusser's social revolution in "On Contradiction".

The theory of revolution was further explained by Jameson, who believes that Althusser restored the kernel position of "mode of production" in Marxism. It seems to Jameson as the most dynamic concept in the Marxist tradition. It does not refer to a single mode of production, but a synchronic structure formed by different modes of production<sup>40</sup>. Meanwhile, Fredric Jameson was enlightened by Louis Althusser's theory of causality, in which Althusser believes that culture can be independent from economy and directly affect the mode of production and emphasizing that culture is semi-self-disciplined. Fredric Jameson combined culture with the mode of production and emphasized its importance. Hence he shifted his focus of interpretation from the mode of production on material meaning to that on cultural meaning. At the time of "different modes of production become obviously antagonistic and their contradictions have become the core of political, social and historical life"<sup>41</sup>, the "cultural revolution" according to Fredric Jameson is supposed to come. He believes that "cultural revolution" as a dynamic theory would break the old and herald the new, saying that "the cultural revolution, as a uniform category of new historical research, seems the only framework that can reorganize humanities in a materialistic way."<sup>42</sup> In this sense, not only the "cultural revolution" has evolved the mode of production, but constructed new ideologies, social systems and values, to which Fredric Jameson attaches the most importance. It can be seen that Fredric Jameson has already converted Louis Althusser's theory of social revolution into a theory of "cultural revolution" (the theoretical basis of postmodernist Marxist ideological analysis and historical interpretation) and considered the "cultural revolution" more dynamic and valuable. Therefore, he has theoretically found the rationality and significance of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution.

Two: the idealization from the view of "otherness". The Cultural Revolution is an "otherness" from the Western perspective. Both Louis Althusser and Fredric Jameson have no intention to understand the Cultural Revolution back to China's context but to reflect themselves, to set a reference of their subjectivity and to verify the correctness of its theory. Althusser opposes "economic determinism" but attaches great importance to ideology, holding that ideology can determine everything. In this sense, he highly appreciates the theory of confrontation and liberation of the Cultural Revolution which was derived from the cultural field. Althusser once said: "If we look back at the past forty years, I think the only left-wing criticism that can be found towards "Stalin's bias... lies in the struggle, the route, the principle of practice and criticism of the form in Chinese revolution. That is a silent critique by which, through its actions, through the political and ideological struggles from the Long March to the Cultural Revolution. It is a critique from afar, from the backstage."<sup>43</sup> Louis

<sup>39</sup> Louis Pierre Althusser, *For Marx*. Trans by Ben Brewster, London: The Penguin Press, 1969, pp.215-216.

<sup>40</sup> "Synchronicity is the 'concept' of the mode of production: the historical moments in which several modes of production coexist are not synchronic in this sense, but are open to history in a dialectical way." Refer to Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, pp. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, pp.81.

<sup>42</sup> Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Trans by Chen Qingqiao etc. Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1997, pp. 189

<sup>43</sup> Louis Althusser, *Collection of Self Criticism*, Trans by Du Zhangzhi & Shen Qiyu, Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing, 1990, pp. 109.

Althusser misunderstood the Cultural Revolution through his “symptomatic reading”, considering political practice as a kind of discourse practice full of imagination and creativity, and even an anti-authoritative ideological revolution of culture which criticized Stalin’s mistakes in its unique way. It can be seen that Althusser has extracted the Cultural Revolution from reality and imagined it as an ideal revolution against hegemony and striving for liberation in an ideological meaning.

So as Fredric Jameson who also extracted the Cultural Revolution from its historical context but to idealize it as a resistance and liberation. Rather than under Louis Althusser’s influence, Fredric Jameson’s extraction epitomized Western Marxists’ viewpoints. In *The Syntax of History*, Jameson wrote lengthy paragraphs on the Cultural Revolution, holding that the theory of the Cultural Revolution in China was “the best-constructed and most revolutionary ideological system in the 1960s.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, he defended: “The experience of Maoism and the Chinese cultural revolutions were Stalinized and the Cultural Revolution has been rewritten as another Gurgaon camp in the Eastern. Undoubtedly, all these criticism is aimed at the vilification of the 60s in a complete way.”<sup>45</sup> Fredric Jameson regards the Cultural Revolution, a radical practice as a perfect deduction of the radical theory of “cultural revolution”. Considering the Cultural Revolution as an example of “cultural revolutions”, Jameson imparted certain qualities of “cultural revolution” to the Cultural Revolution.

The first quality is the power of liberation. Jameson believes that “in the 1960s people had a same feeling that everything was possible and everything could be achieved. It was a time of universal liberation and a moment of global energization, where Mao Zedong is the most salient figure. He shouted, ‘Our country is like an atomic bomb. Once the nuclear fission takes place, the world will be earthshakingly aroused.’ This scene presents us that after the fall of the ancient feudal rural structure, the Cultural Revolution has eradicated the original stereotypes and witnessed the birth of a real democratic society. The fission of atoms, the release of molecular energy, or the liberation of the ‘material signifier’ constitutes an appalling spectacle. At the critical moment of the Cultural Revolution, the establishment of Shanghai Commune effectively prevented the collapse of the Party’s institutions and reversed the direction of the collective experiment.”<sup>46</sup> Fredric Jameson fervently praises the Cultural Revolution and believes that it has eradicated the spiritual shackles left in the feudal rural structure, achieved popular democracy, broken the modern mythology of the Western and revolted against the hegemony of capitalism. He saw its irresistible power which could stem a raging tide. “The Cultural Revolution is a contradiction of Mao Zedong’s fantasies of building a new society against a remaining ideology, a traditional knowledge structure, an increasingly serious non-radicalization, bureaucratization in the party and government, socialist possession of mode of production, and people’s strong desire for freedom, democracy and modernization.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, Jameson only saw the slogan of liberating the masses and realizing democracy in the primary stage of the Cultural Revolution and demonstrated his theory of interpretation by choosing advantageous parts of “cultural revolution”, however, he neglected the gap between the slogan and practice and

<sup>44</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 188.

<sup>45</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 188-189.

<sup>46</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2: The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 207-208.

<sup>47</sup> Xie Shaobo, *Resistant Cultural Politics*. Trans by Chen Yong’guo & Wang Min’an, Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1999, pp. 104-109.

avoided discussing the concentration of power and violence during the Cultural Revolution.

The second quality is the effect of anti-hegemony. Jameson believes that the impetus of the revolutionary storm in the 60s is not the Western but in the third world. The anti-imperialist and anti-colonial liberation movements and the Cultural Revolution in Asia, Africa and Africa promoted the anti-system, anti-hegemony and anti-war movements of the Western left-wing intellectuals. Compared with other countries, the Cultural Revolution in China has exerted more significance and further influence. It is not only a nationwide political practice, but has a systematic cultural theory devoted to cultural and ideological transformation. It also contributes to the creation of literature and art and endows the oppressed class the right to revolt and the courage to conduct a revolution. All of these provide the Western left-wing forces an ideal mode of politics and culture. Fredric Jameson holds that “cultural revolutions collectively re-educated the oppressed class or of the working class lacking revolutionary consciousness. As a strategy, cultural revolutions seek to break the slavish stereotype of all the exploited working classes in human history.”<sup>48</sup> To Western radical left-wing theorists, the revolting spirit of the Red Guards echoes with their overflow rebellious attitude of anti-hegemony and resonates with their idealism of changing the world. Hearsay about the Cultural Revolution was exaggerated by Western left-wing intellectuals as inspiration and examples for rebellion against cultural politics in the 1960s. “It was an upheaval era when students rebelled and set up organizations like the Red Guards in many countries. Their goal was to occupy the campus and to associate with the society. In May 1968 in Paris, many of the student leaders boasted themselves as Maoist believers. In a short time, various foreign versions of *Quotations from Chairman MaoZedong* were popular around the globe. Even the religious circles had no choice but to scrutinize atheism. The printing of *Quotations from the Chairman of Christ* in the Western world has shown the profound impact of the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>49</sup>

The third quality is the innovation of culture. Fredric Jameson argues that Mao Zedong’s view that “the history of human can hitherto be reduced into the history of cultural revolutions” could be the advice to the age as “A Manifesto of Postmodern Cultural Criticism”.<sup>50</sup> We could see that Jameson has skillfully substituted a method of cultural interpretation for the political practice of the Cultural Revolution. He replaced the traditional historical revolution with “cultural revolution” to form an interdependent, interactive and “synchronic” interpretation, avoiding the theory of “linear” history. Meanwhile, he replaced the revolution of material mode of production with the “cultural revolution” and tried to replace the theory of traditional Marxism with that of cultural interpretation, in which way he could extend the mode of production to the field of ideology and culture as the main symbol of cultural interpretation. The “cultural revolution” is considered as a process of cultural reproduction in which cultural producer shoulders the responsibility of rewriting the politic missions of culture, history and society with the quality of being independent without depending on its economic base. He elevated the value of the “cultural revolution” again in *the Political Unconsciousness*, holding that cultural studies must be “politically advanced” so as to clarify and dig into the “cultural revolution” behind complex social phenomena and to rediscover the omnipresent political unconsciousness hidden in the text. Such an approach of interpretation has a “new and ultimate vision”. In this vision, the class conflict in the “Cultural Revolution” is interpreted as a confrontation between the cultural strategy of the text narrative and the

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<sup>48</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, vol. 2: *The Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 178.

<sup>49</sup> Guo Jian: “Jameson and the Cultural Revolution”, *Panorama Monthly*, Vol 5, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Guo Jian: “Jameson and the Cultural Revolution”, *Panorama Monthly*, Vol 5, 1999.

mainstream cultural system. In other words, the ideology of the ruling class would adopt various strategies in culture to legalize its own position, while the opposite culture or ideology usually wander outside the dominant value system in a hidden or disguised strategy and what is worse, an underlying opposition of ideology between the classes. Therefore, the text went deeper than its literal content to rewrite and reform the ideological potential text. It is totally different from the context of the Cultural Revolution and class conflict in China. Here it is clear to see Fredric Jameson's fallacy of converting political practice of the Cultural Revolution into the interpretation of the "cultural revolution".

### **Three: The Application of Maoism: Utopia and the Political Unconsciousness**

Despite the total different Maoism through travelling theory and the extraction of context, we must admit that it has experienced a pragmatic shift based on theories and the fact. Relatively speaking, the third way of application is somehow imaginative. We'll take "Utopia" and the "political unconsciousness", two key words to both Mao Zedong and Fredric Jameson, as an example, to elaborate how Maoism is applied.

Take "Utopia" as the first example, Mao Zedong's utopia is a unity of the proletariat around the world and an enclave beyond the hegemony of capitalism, while Jameson's utopia aimed to replace class conflict with a cultural one, an enclave beyond the hegemony of capitalism in the sense of cultural interpretation and a strategy of cultural politics against hegemony. The two seem to be in spiritually affinity, thus Xie Shaobo says that it is "utopian anxiety" that brought them together<sup>51</sup>, but in fact the two are totally different.

Mao Zedong's Utopia emphasizes identity and puts it into practice. For example, in the period of the Cultural Revolution, for the military, the army was a unity to act as demanded; for the economy, steelmaking was carried out on a large scale to achieve industrial and agricultural cooperation; in people's daily life, the people's commune and collective dining halls were established to guarantee the unity for dieting, and clothing and daily necessities was distributed exactly the same; and for the cultural circle, they aimed to set "an army of culture".<sup>52</sup> The emergence of "writing models" and writing groups are the further application of the guidance to replace personal cultural creation with collective cultural creation so as to avoid true cultural creation. Such a utopia is a collectivism which eliminated the difference of individuals.

However, Fredric Jameson's utopia emphasizes difference within the boundary of cultural interpretation. His theory was based on Theodor W. Adorno's non-identity: a reflection of Hegel's dialectics, to reject positive dialectics with negative dialectics, and he believes that Hegel's dialectics are based on absolute identity, so it presupposes a false purpose for social development and is a product of subjectivism. Fredric Jameson is influenced by Adorno, and he believes that the real totality is manifested in the form of non-identity. A dialectical, open-minded and future-oriented totality should reflect on identity with non-identity. Instead of being a subjective assumptions and false depictions of the blueprint for the future, it explores more than one possibility of exploring the future in the realistic combination of the subject and the object. Utopian impulses can only arise when non-identity exists. The fragmentation, differentiation and pluralism of postmodernism have undermined people's social memory and historical consciousness. Utopia serves as the collective identity. Therefore, any form of collective life in any society is calling for the emergence of utopianism. After all, it is a form of collectivism which encourages individualism and differences.

<sup>51</sup> Xie Shaobo, *Resistant Cultural Politics*. Trans by Chen Yong'guo & Wang Min'an, Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1999, p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> Mao Zedong: "Speech at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art", Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1975, pp. 28.

Mao Zedong's utopia is the affirmation of ideology. Mao Zedong, the founder of New China, is also the creator and absolute defender of ideology. His ideological utopia is what expressed in Chinese poems, "spring breeze lights up the vitality across the whole nation and the people live in harmony and happiness" and "however vast the land is and however hard the work is, with collective mind and action nothing is unconquerable."<sup>53</sup> He called on all the people in the country to "muster their energies, strive for the upper reaches and build socialism more efficiently and economically. To keep up the development with the United States with the cultural policy: "Literature and art are meant to serve the workers, farmers and soldiers, and the socialist service"<sup>54</sup>, and "literature art subordinate to politics."<sup>55</sup> With the combination of the blueprint provided by the government and the effect of cultural promotion, a new China with endless vitality and a promising future was created.

Fredric Jameson's utopianism emphasizes the denial of reality and is set at the opposite of official ideology. He believes that in the capitalist society, the denial and surpass of capitalist society can only be achieved when the desire and impulse of utopia are maintained. Utopia is not to propose a beautiful future that every individual desires and does not necessarily have social effects. However, as a non-existent one, utopia "may be able to serve as a reference for those are not conceptually distinguishable from reality but coincide with reality."<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the value of utopia lies in the fact that it provides a viable and different possibility for a society to surpass capitalism. In contrast to Mao Zedong's Utopia, in Fredric Jameson's Utopia, literature and art are independent, self-disciplined and able to revolt. The theoretical view of Theodore W. Adorno's artistic aesthetic belief of utopia is applied to carry the hope of alienating capitalism in the artistic aestheticism. Art is supposed to be independent of reality, so art aesthetics can stay independent from materialism and be self-disciplined and independent. Therefore, aesthetic art can surpass reality and serve as a critical reference for society to contain the power for resistance and denying.

Now we will analyze the "political unconscious". Mao Zedong's believes "literature and art serves for politics"<sup>57</sup> while Jameson believes that "everything is political"<sup>58</sup> Mao Zedong's literature is the practice of politics seems to be similar to Jameson's political unconsciousness: "Well-trained readers will capture Mao's echoes in this monumental work. The concept of political unconsciousness is similar to Mao's mediation of personal and political relations"<sup>59</sup>, but in fact the two are divergent.

Mao Zedong's "literature and art serves for politics" has political authority. Mao Zedong emphasizes that "political standards are the highest priority, followed by artistic standards"<sup>60</sup> and "literature and art are subordinate to politics."<sup>61</sup> He addressed this as the highest authority in the party, so with the regime gaining legitimacy, this principle has increasingly become the golden rule for literary and artistic creations in new China. By the time of the Cultural Revolution, literary and artistic activities could only issue voices that were

<sup>53</sup> Mao Zedong: Farewell to the God of Plague, *People's Daily*, Oct.3th, 1958

<sup>54</sup> "The summary of a forum on literary and art Comrade Lin Biao commissioned comrade Jiang Qing to hold ", *The Red Flag*, 1967, Vol 9, pp. 15.

<sup>55</sup> Mao Zedong: "Speech at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art", Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Fredric Jameson: "Utopia and Real Existence", *Collective Works of Fredric James*, Vol 3, edited by Wang Fengzhen, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004, pp. 370.

<sup>57</sup> Mao Zedong: "Speech at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art", Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1975, pp28

<sup>58</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Xie Shaobo, *Resistant Cultural Politics*. Trans by Chen Yong'guo & Wang Min'an, Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1999, p. 105.

<sup>60</sup> Mao Zedong: "Speech at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art", Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1975, pp. 32.

<sup>61</sup> Mao Zedong: "Speech at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art", Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1975, p. 27.

politically correct. With its authority, it means that this will be referred as a political practice. Literary and artistic creation should not only become a barometer of politics, but also be a “powerful weapon for uniting the people, educating the people, and cracking down on and destroying the enemy.”<sup>62</sup>

What Fredric Jameson underlines in his remarks “literature is related to politics” refers to a vision of textual interpretation. Regarding society, history and politics as the ultimate vision of all readings and interpretations, he argues that textual interpretation should get rid of the shackles of language and form, but to explore the untold part of the narrative gaps and the ignored political unconsciousness beyond textual ideology. Only in this context, Fredric Jameson lets out one of his most famous sayings, “Everything is social and historical, but in fact, everything is ‘political’.”<sup>63</sup> However, due to the limitation of narrative to reoccur history, text interpretation must be open to various relations beyond the text so as to break its limitation of itself and of ideology and build a connection of narrative discourse practice with society, history and politics. Therefore, the latter could become the underlying text of the original one and achieve Fredric Jameson’s powerful reconstruction of the text, “which is no longer a single piece of “text” or works in a narrow sense, but a great discourse of the mass and the class.”<sup>64</sup> “Cultural text is actually an allegorical mode of the whole society.”<sup>65</sup> What Jameson emphasizes is personized writing which is not fragmented, single and fragile, but deeply influenced by the society, history and political unconsciousness. Of course, there is a paradox between “literature is political” and “literature serves for politics”. Here we can conclude that Fredric Jameson’s application of Maoism means to reserve the signifier but convert the signified, that is, to reserve literal meanings of “utopia” and “literature for politics” but change its deep meanings.

Through traveling theory, extraction from context and application of the meanings, Mao Zedong’s discourse on political practice has been changed into a cultural strategy and gained its new vitality in Jameson’s postmodern textual interpretation. We must admit the precious theoretical reproduction that Chinese theories and practice experience’s being exported and assimilated and enlightened the Western world in a new era. Conversely, we should not directly understand or counter-prove China’s culture and practice through the China’s experience idealized by Western theorists, because they are divergent from the original experience.

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<sup>62</sup> Mao Zedong: “Speech at the Yan’an Forum of Literature and Art”, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1975, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 18.

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