AI SSU-CH'I'S PHILOSOPHY*

Part Two: Dialectical Materialism

I. PHILOSOPHY: ITS NATURE, SCOPE AND PURPOSE:
   PARTISANSHIP AND METHODOLOGY

The Soviets dominated Chinese Communism both ideologically and organizationally during the first decade of its existence in the 1920's. During the 30's and 40's, the Chinese Communists followed independent policies for their own survival; in the 1950's they did the same for their own grandiose national development; and, finally, in the 1960's they did it in order to challenge Soviet leadership in the international Communist movement. Nevertheless, Chinese Communists have remained captives of Soviet philosophy in that they have not been able to get out of the rigid dogmatism of the fundamental postulates and structures of dialectical materialism as formulated by the Soviets. The analysis of Ai Ssu-ch'i's philosophical writings throughout his life provides ample evidence to substantiate this assertion. His philosophical career was parallel to, though shorter than, the political career of Mao Tse-tung who provided the imprimatur and official approval for the philosophy of Ai.

To be sure, there has recently been much bitter contention as to the orthodox interpretation of Marxism-Leninism (of which the philosophical foundation is dialectical materialism) between the Chinese and the Soviets, but their controversy is concerned with the interpretation and assessment of the situations and with the making of policies in order to maintain and develop their respective power and authority positions rather than with the basic tenets and structure of their common philosophy.

A. The Nature of Philosophy

Philosophy is conceived, above all, as a correct method of knowing the world and as true knowledge of it. This conception is emphatically stressed: it is a valid method of knowledge and a correct set of assertions about the reality of the world. As such, philosophy deals with epistemological as well as ontological problems. In his first 'Acta Apostolica', or Philosophy
for the Masses [4] in the 1930’s, Ai Ssu-ch’i defined philosophy in this way:

We may say that philosophical thought is the fundamental thought of men; or [we] may say that it is men’s fundamental understanding of and attitude toward the world – this is the quintessence of philosophy.

In How to Study Philosophy [19], written at about the same time as PhM, Ai equated philosophy with ‘world-outlook’, a term newly translated from Soviet philosophy and lavishly used by Leftist writers (cf. HSPh, p. 4). However, he somewhat confused matters when he came to define the term world-outlook on another occasion, acting as if world-outlook were the species, and philosophy the genus. Ai wrote:

World-outlook is the basic opinion that one holds about the world.... Since it is a basic opinion, it becomes our basic standpoint in knowing things... [and] evidence for research. Philosophy is our basic standpoint and basic methodology in knowing; therefore, world-outlook is a part of philosophy.8

These instances indicate the use of philosophy sometimes interchangeably with world-outlook (thus enlarging the latter to include both methodology and ontological assertions) and other times as a whole which includes the part (world-outlook: assertions about reality).

Despite this minor confusion, Ai had not failed to see the ‘dialectical’ relationship between the two component parts of philosophy; in other words, Ai did see the dynamic inter-relationship between the assertions and the method. Thus, he was correct in concluding that any valid methodology of learning must be derived from a previously correct knowledge of the facts. As he put it in The Methodology of Thinking [35]:

In determining method, you must have assured knowledge. You must know the properties of things.... The more clearly you know them, the more correct the method you can obtain therefrom.... The knowledge of things is the foundation of [formulating] methodology.

In turn, correct knowledge, or valid assertions about reality serve as a method to further our knowledge. As he explained:

From philosophical studies we discover the correct world outlook; the world outlook may be used, in turn, as a method for knowing reality. [Consequently], we may reach a correct knowledge. (HSPh, p. 10)

Thus conceived, philosophy becomes an infinite back and forth process between knowledge (assertions about reality) and method (previous knowl-