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Red and Expert

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In 1957, leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began calling on students and intellectuals to become ‘both red and expert’ (*you hong you zhuan* or *hong yu zhuan*)—that is, to combine revolutionary politics with technical expertise. By 1958, the slogan had ramified, taking on new kinds of significance for other social groups. Its influence was due to the definition of two crucial relationships: the political relationship between intellectuals and the socialist state, and the epistemological relationship between knowledge and the revolutionary society. The first of these has been of particular concern to liberal critics of authoritarianism, who recognise the call to be ‘red and expert’ as an effort, first and foremost, to discipline and control intellectuals. The second has excited radical critics of technocracy, who share the Maoist perspective that science and politics are inseparable, and who often also appreciate Maoist efforts to engage in inclusive and class-conscious forms of knowledge production (see Aminda Smith’s essay in the present volume). Both politically and epistemologically, the ‘red and expert’ concept continues to speak to enduring questions in the history of science, society, and the state—in China and around the globe.

Intellectuals and the State

The ‘red and expert’ slogan emerged in 1957 during the early months of the Anti-rightist Campaign, an especially wrenching episode in the tortured history of the CCP’s relationship with China’s intellectuals. As with the Rectification Campaign (1942–44) of the Yan’an era (see Mertha’s essay in the present volume), and following on the heels of the massive national criticism campaign against the literary figure Hu Feng in 1955, the Anti-rightist Campaign facilitated Party authority over the political expression of intellectuals. Those labelled ‘rightists’ were publicly criticised and often imprisoned

or 'sent down' to the countryside for reeducation, removing them from academic and political influence for years or even decades. This was the political context within which the 'red and expert' slogan gained meaning.¹

Already in 1957, and repeatedly for the next two decades, Party leaders took pains to emphasise that for intellectuals the 'red' half of the 'red and expert' equation boiled down to loyalty to the CCP and the proletariat it represented. In a December 1957 article, the *People's Daily* specified that the call to be both red and expert by no means entailed an expectation that 'every expert would at the same time be a political activist or political theorist,' because this would be 'very difficult' and a requirement 'only a small number of people could achieve.'² Rather, the question of whether one was red would be 'resolved with respect to whom one serves.' The article quoted Liu Shaoqi as explaining: 'China's staff members and various types of experts must all commit to transforming themselves to wholeheartedly serve the workers and peasants, and to serve socialism, placing the benefit of the individual within, and not above, the collective benefit of the masses. This is what being a red expert means.' A few months later, Mao himself underscored the significance of loyalty: 'Red is politics; expert is one's job. To be only expert and not red is to be a white expert If we are to overtake Britain in 15 years, then we must mould millions upon millions of intellectuals whose loyalty is to the proletariat.'³

In fact, during the Anti-rightist Campaign and subsequent Great Leap Forward, demonstrating such loyalty frequently involved intensive political reeducation and work alongside the masses in manual labour. In 1961, science policy leader Nie Rongzhen spearheaded the 'Fourteen Articles on Scientific Work,' a policy document which dialled back the standard: loyalty to the Party and placing one's expertise in the service of socialism were again deemed sufficient to earn the label 'red and expert.' In 1978, following the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping reaffirmed this position.⁴ Both of these cases involved 'moderate' political leaders resetting expectations after intense periods of attacks on 'bourgeois' intellectualism. Defining redness as political loyalty thus represented a kind of minimum expectation that CCP leaders across the spectrum shared; we may also say that defining it as *merely* political loyalty represented a perspective on the relationship between intellectuals and the state held especially by 'moderate' (or technocratic) Party leaders like Liu Shaoqi, Nie Rongzhen, and Deng Xiaoping.

The highly charged and dangerous politics surrounding intellectuals during the Mao era was grounded in a tension between intellectuals who held cultural capital and cadres who held political capital. These two groups gradually came to overlap as children of intellectual families gained access to channels of Party membership, and children of Party cadres gained access to elite schools. By the time Deng Xiaoping rose to power in 1978, a new, more powerful, and stable class had emerged that wielded both forms of power.⁵ In one sense, the underlying contradiction between red and expert would seem to have been largely resolved; the decisive blow to dissident intellectual voices of June Fourth 1989 contributed still further to this resolution.

Nonetheless, the 'red and expert' slogan has continued to trickle through official discourse during the post-Mao era, and recently resurfaced in a way that provoked significant public discussion. In May 2017, Education Minister Chen Baosheng gave a speech on undergraduate education in which he proclaimed the need to cultivate

'reliable successors' to further the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics. These graduates would be 'both red and expert,' possessing 'both integrity and talent,' and boasting a 'well-rounded development.'⁶ The phrase 'red and expert' attracted special attention, with some netizens using discussion boards to declare their 'disgust' and point ominously to what one called the 'imprint of the Cultural Revolution.'⁷

A report in the US-based online newspaper *The Diplomat* picked up on the buzz and elaborated on the concerns that Chen's rhetoric signalled a return to Mao-era policies on education and intellectuals.⁸ Taking the other side of the issue, an article by Lin Aiyue on the left-patriotic Chinese website *Chawang* considered it 'unsurprising' that 'rightist public intellectuals' should be up in arms over Chen's statement, and further emphasised that the Minister's evocation of 'red and expert' surely reflected policy decisions from far above and was a welcome direction. Lin traced the origins of the 'red and expert' slogan to Mao in 1957 and noted the widespread support for the concept among other leaders, including Deng Xiaoping. However, reflecting the highly nationalistic perspective of *Chawang* and many—though by no means all—other leftists in China today, Lin narrowly interpreted 'red' to mean 'deeply loving the nation-state and its people' (*guojia minzu*).⁹ This takes the emphasis on loyalty advanced by moderates like Nie Rongzhen and Deng Xiaoping in a new direction: loyalty to the Party is now tied more to the interests of an ethnically defined nation-state than to a class-based national or even global proletariat (see Bulag's essay in the present volume). The use of a Mao-era slogan to buttress such nationalism and state power certainly deserves attention and criticism. However, this is not the only legacy 'red and expert' carries.

Knowledge and Society

The repeated calls to understand 'red and expert' as fundamentally about political loyalty is in some sense evidence that the slogan also stands for something else. During the Mao era at least, 'red and expert' was one of a set of concepts related to the nature of knowledge itself, intended to change what people were supposed to know, how knowledge was supposed to be produced, and who might be deemed an expert. This was the side of 'red and expert' that leftists around the world found inspiring. Fundamentally anti-technocratic, it declared all knowledge—including that of the natural world—to be political; in a class society, this meant that knowledge has class character. Such a proposition attacked intellectual elitism and thus could still result in attacks on intellectuals themselves. However, when the emphasis is on epistemology, the threat posed by intellectual elitism is not that of a class poised to translate cultural capital into political capital, but rather that of a concept of knowledge divorced from the experiences and perspectives of labouring people. What is required is thus not—or at least not merely—loyalty to the Party-state, but rather a sincere commitment to recognising and engaging the value of knowledge possessed by labourers.

The epistemological aspect of 'red and expert' is found in the influential 'Sixty Points on Working Methods,' drafted by Mao on 31 January 1958: 'There is no question that politics and the economy must be unified, and that politics and technology must be unified. It has always, and will always, be so. This, precisely, is the meaning of red and expert.'¹⁰ An article appearing in the *People's Daily* two weeks later—'Plant Experimental Fields: The Road of Red and Expert'—offered one of many concrete examples.¹¹

The article opened by describing a scene in which two local officials ‘wearing shoes and socks’ stood at the side of a rice paddy ostensibly ‘inspecting production.’ A commune member loudly scolded them: ‘Quit strutting around like lords! You’re going to wreck the embankment!’ The *People’s Daily* declared the scolding justified and applauded the eventual outcome in which one of the local officials ceased standing on the side waving his hands and giving orders, and began working with the peasants and technicians to plant ‘experimental fields.’ The article called on all cadres similarly to shed their ‘aloof and remote’ attitudes and plunge deep into the grassroots—to ‘integrate intimately with the labouring masses and technological experts, and diligently study necessary industry and technological knowledge, in order to become proletarian experts in their fields.’ In this way China would be able to establish a mighty contingent of ‘red and expert’ cadres.

To be ‘red’ was thus not merely to be ‘loyal,’ but to be proletarian in consciousness. More broadly, to be ‘red and expert’ was not only to be both loyal and skilled, but rather to develop knowledge through a process of engagement with both peasants and technological experts. It was an ideal to be achieved not just by intellectuals, but by political cadres—and by the labouring masses themselves. Indeed, beginning in 1958 some communes began establishing ‘red and expert universities,’ where peasants could learn to become ‘technicians possessing socialist consciousness; scientific knowledge in the areas of agriculture, forestry, and irrigation; and the ability to participate in labour.’¹² Two years later, Chinese Academy of Sciences Vice-president Zhang Jingfu gave a speech proclaiming the need for ‘all people to do science,’ turning science into a ‘mass movement’ and ‘cultivating a red and expert, mighty, proletarian scientific and technological contingent.’¹³

It is easier to appreciate the epistemological challenge presented by ‘red and expert’ if we place it in the broader context of related slogans and programmes of Maoist science, including the unity of practice and theory; the joining of peasant/native (*tu*) and elite/foreign (*yang*); the principle of ‘walking on two legs,’ i.e. employing existing, indigenous methods, while also developing new, modernised methods; the effort to transcend the barrier between mental and manual labour; and the formation of ‘three-in-one’ scientific experiment groups combining cadres, labourers, and technicians.¹⁴ Several of these concepts emerged prior to 1949, but they came to new prominence along with ‘red and expert’ during the Great Leap Forward and continued to develop over the next two decades. The common theme undergirding all of them was the harnessing of different forms of knowledge to produce a revolutionary programme of science and technology.

In some cases, the goal of such programmes appeared to be dissolving contradictions by weakening the difference between elite and popular forms of knowledge—for example by requiring intellectuals to engage in manual labour and learn from peasants and workers, while simultaneously encouraging peasants and workers to engage in the arts and sciences. The ‘red and expert’ paradigm similarly envisioned individuals who would combine previously separate characteristics to become living embodiments of the ‘all-round communist’ ideal.

Other programmes, however, organised people who represented different perspectives and types of experience to work together in the production of revolutionary scientific knowledge. In agriculture, ‘scientific experiment groups’ were formed on a ‘three-in-

one' (*san jiehe*) basis, integrating the practical, experiential knowledge of old peasants with the political knowledge of revolutionary cadres and the technical knowledge of educated youth (and/or agricultural technicians, where available). The three-in-one model did not promise to produce individuals who transcended divisions between mental and manual labour, or between technical and political knowledge. Rather, it preserved specific epistemological identities for different social groups and attempted to create a mechanism where each could contribute to a collaborative project of knowledge production.

The broad epistemological implications of 'red and expert,' understood as a representative slogan within Maoist science, encountered widespread enthusiasm among leftists and left-leaning intellectuals around the world, who saw in China a living example of a politically conscious and socially revolutionary scientific practice. For example, the 'Knowledge and Power' course, offered by Deakin University in Australia, included a book by historian of science David Wade Chambers entitled *Red and Expert: A Case Study of Chinese Science in the Cultural Revolution*.¹⁵ Bringing together a range of primary and secondary sources, Chambers presented the 'red and expert' paradigm, and Mao-era science more generally, as an example from which Westerners could and should learn. Among the questions Chambers saw Mao-era science addressing were: 'What is the nature of expertise?' 'What role can the interested amateur (or non-professional) play in the actual practice of science?' 'What constitutes an appropriate education for scientists and engineers?' and 'Will politics always continue to influence scientific judgements?'¹⁶

Though the slogan 'red and expert' in current discourse is undoubtedly dominated by the Party-loyalty definition discussed in the previous section, the more radical, epistemological implications are also sometimes evoked. Examples are collected and circulated on leftist websites—both those critical of the state, like *Red China*, and those supportive of the state, like *Chawang*.¹⁷ In one recently circulated article, literature scholar Yan Zuolei portrays the significance of 'red and expert' precisely as the joint efforts to 'make labourers into intellectuals and intellectuals into labourers' in order to create 'new people, both red and expert'.¹⁸ Similarly, Peng Guangcan, a professor of philosophy at Guangxi University's School of Public Management, praises Mao-era factory movements for allowing 'cadres to participate in labour, and workers to participate in management,' and bringing cadres, technicians, and workers together in 'three-in-one' combinations: he sees this as a model for Chinese industry today and consistent with the teachings of influential Harvard University management scholar and systems scientist Peter Senge.¹⁹ The anti-elitist, anti-technocratic challenge of Mao-era radical epistemology lives also in some ongoing rural development projects: the 'participatory action research' approach adopted from the West was itself shaped by Maoist theories of knowledge.²⁰ For example, in terms strikingly reminiscent of Maoist epistemology, the Participatory Plant Breeding Project run by an interdisciplinary group of scholars and scientists explicitly rejects 'top-down' methods divorced from rural realities and peasant knowledge, and instead brings peasants and researchers together in mutually respectful collaboration.²¹ Although the political and economic contexts have changed dramatically, we may still imagine these researchers—like that cadre featured in the 1958 *People's Daily* article—stepping down from the field embankments to 'integrate intimately with the labouring masses.'

Long-lasting Political and Epistemological Questions

The principle of 'red and expert' emerged from the anti-elitist politics of the Mao era and served two closely related but nonetheless distinct political projects. Emerging within the specific historical conditions of the Anti-rightist Campaign, it without question worked to rein in intellectuals and prevent them from using their cultural capital to wield political power. However, it quickly became integrated into the broader Maoist epistemological universe, which sought to transform scientific knowledge and practice along revolutionary lines. Today, 'red and expert' is sometimes invoked to promote loyalty to the Party-state among an increasingly wealthy professional class and in ever more nationalistic terms. But it also survives in ongoing efforts to highlight the inseparability of science and politics, and on the basis of that understanding, to forge scientific knowledge and practice that respects the contributions and priorities of labouring people.

In closing, I would suggest that our assessment of the 'red and expert' concept hinges on such highly charged questions as the legitimacy of the state in representing the people, the value of intellectual freedom, and the neutrality or objectivity of scientific knowledge. Just as David Wade Chambers predicted more than three decades ago, the political and epistemological questions raised by the 'red and expert' concept have far outlasted its glory days in the Mao era.

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